

**De-/Re-Constructing the Ideological Terrain of Social Justice in Education**

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# **De-/Re-Constructing the Ideological Terrain of Social Justice in Education**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2021

The need to redress antiblackness, colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and other intersecting, systemic oppressions in education, US society, and globally remains urgent and dire. Yet, the extent to which these oppressions are recognized and how they are conceptualized in educational spaces greatly varies. My dissertation analyzes how ideology and epistemology inform different understandings and engagements with social justice and equity in educational contexts and what the practical implications of these differences are.

The first two papers present case studies of two ongoing debates in educational policy. In the New York City public schools (NYC DOE), the debate centers around the historically contentious issue of admission screens and whether they promote segregation or educational opportunity. The second case focuses on the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) and the current debate over a proposal to remove all school police officers from the district. In both studies, I use historical analysis and critical discourse analysis to highlight ideological contestations that exist between the different stakeholder groups, particularly around shared language. In the NYC DOE, the groups had different assumptions about meritocracy, opportunity, and equity which corresponded with different policies, social theories, and visions for the future. In PPS, stakeholders engaged in divergent ideas of safety and discipline. In both cases, different understandings and engagements with systemic oppression are key to stakeholders' divergent ideological meanings.

To better understand the connections between individual sensemaking and systems of power that undergird ideology, the third theoretical paper outlines philosopher Kristie Dotson's (2014) account of epistemic oppression. I argue that epistemic oppression and its related concepts can help teachers and teacher educators understand how dominant ways of knowing (i.e., epistemologies) and their constructions of reality often normalize oppression. I also discuss practices of epistemic resistance (Medina, 2012) and epistemic reflexivity (Dotson, 2011), which provide a means to learn new epistemologies and resist epistemic oppression both inside and outside of the classroom. I emphasize that resisting and dismantling the dominant epistemologies (and ideologies) is not only difficult cognitive work, but deeply relational work that requires change through ongoing solidarity and collective action.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The need to redress antiblackness, colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and other intersecting, systemic oppressions in education, US society, and globally remains urgent and dire. The nationwide protests and uprisings against anti-Black violence and police brutality following the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, Tony McDade, and so many other Black people, were unprecedented in number and size (Buchanan et al., 2020). These protests have bolstered the Black Lives Matter movement and other, related social movements like police and prison abolition (8toAbolition, 2020; Kaba, 2020). Some important local changes have been won such as: outlawing no-knock warrants in Louisville and other U.S. cities and states (Duvall & Costello, 2021), reducing police budgets by over \$840 million, and increasing community investment by at least \$160 million (Interrupting Criminalization, 2021). Still, the call and struggle for systemic and radical change continues as state violence and systemic oppression continue mostly unabated. In fact, the pandemic continues to exacerbate systemic oppressions, disproportionately affecting low-income households and Black, Latinx, and indigenous households (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021; Tai et al., 2021), as well as increasing anti-Asian violence (Jeung et al., 2021).

These movements for social justice also intersect with education. For example, over 25 cities cancelled their contracts with local police departments operating in schools (Interrupting Criminalization, 2021). Campaigns across the US for Counselors not Cops build off demands made by the rank-and-file movement in the Chicago Teachers Union and United Teachers Los Angeles who “bargain for the common good” by using their power to secure community-generated

demands like more school nurses and librarians, reduced class sizes, and increased wrap-around services for students and families (Belsha, 2019).

Still, the dominant discourse in education, while often acknowledging systemic oppression, remains mostly concerned about school openings, getting back to “normal,” and combatting students’ “learning loss” during the pandemic (K.-Y. Taylor, 2021). Rather than reckoning with the overlapping systemic oppressions that have been exacerbated during the pandemic, the dominant education discourse continues a two-decade long crusade to improve students’ achievement scores on standardized tests and close the “achievement gap.” As a vast literature of critiques demonstrates, the assumptions and outcomes of federal policies like No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act, are actually reinforcing and justifying current raced, classed, and ableist inequities because they fail to address underlying systemic oppression like historical disinvestment, white supremacy, and colonialism (e.g., Aggarwal, 2016; Au, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2008; Horsford, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

In this dissertation, I analyze ongoing social and political issues in education to understand the ways that policies and practices can disrupt and/or reify dominant discourses and systems of oppression. While a focus on social justice and equity has become prominent in educational research, policy, and practice, these terms are used in contrasting, and often competing, ways. In all three papers, differing concepts of social justice and equity are analyzed and their practical implications discussed. To be clear, dissent and a dissonance of ideas is not in and of itself problematic, and is often important for critically revising positions and policies to make social movements better aligned with liberatory aims (Medina, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2018). However, a nominal or surface-level engagement with social justice and equity presents the danger of calls for systemic change being “diluted, trivialized, or co-opted” (Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 445).

I argue throughout all three papers that ideology and epistemology are helpful lenses for understanding the salient theoretical differences and practical implications of different ideas of oppression, equity, and justice. In the first two papers, I engage in historical and qualitative analyses to identify differences between stakeholders' ideas of "opportunity" and "safety" and how those ideas are informed by different ideological and epistemological assumptions, particularly about race and racism. In addition, sociopolitical analyses must account for the complex multilevel structure of the educational system. This includes attending to "both social structures and how individuals act in concert with them to perpetuate and reinvent processes" (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 464). Within these multilevel analyses, I assume that macro-, meso-, and micro-levels are co-constituted, rather than being top-down or nested (Nasir et al., 2016). This means that people are influencing structures at the same time that structures are influencing people, which creates opportunities for stakeholders to exert agency and collectively resist to oppressive systems (Gilmore, 2007; Medina, 2012). Each of these themes are outlined further below.

### **1.1 Conceptualizing Social Justice (Projects)**

In education, social justice continues to gain prevalence in research and practice. So much so that Tuck & Yang (2018) proclaim that social justice "*is the field*" of education (p. 5, emphasis in original). At the same time, social justice is a contested concept and its multiple meanings are not always compatible or commensurable. Teachers and researchers construct and participate in different *social justice projects* where "the specificity of the work of praxis" and its interconnected worldviews, strategies, motives, practices and habits can differ (ibid., p. 7). The existence of multiple justice projects can be generative, but it also means justice projects can have "competing

investments” or differing visions, and that they can be antagonistic despite both working towards social justice (ibid., p. 6). On the one hand, such diverse visions of justice and liberation are needed given the place-specific and culture-specific needs of different groups. At the same time, some of these competing investments are actually reinvestments and reproductions of the status quo oppressive system, though they have a façade of social justice and equity (Apple, 1982; Horsford et al., 2019; Lipman, 2011; Mayorga & Picower, 2018; Sleeter, 2017).

As a result, this dissertation seeks to understand how different stakeholders and non-traditional policy actors have intervened and disrupted this cycle of reproducing oppression and co-opting social justice projects. The first two papers analyze current policy debates within the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) and the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). In NYC, the debate is related to admission screens, and whether/how they perpetuate segregation and systemic racism. Three active stakeholder groups all claim to be appalled by the high level of racial and socioeconomic segregation and want better opportunities for Black and Latinx students. However, they propose different social justice projects--in this case, policies and campaigns--that reveal different ideological commitments and visions for the future. A key contestation between the groups’ policies are whether the current system of stratifying students into a hierarchy of schools can be done in a “fair” way or if such meritocratic practices are inherently racist, classist, and unjust. In PPS, stakeholders are debating a different policy, the presence of police in schools, but the contestation similarly hinges on whether the system of policing itself is viewed as racist and ableist, or if only a few practices or officers are seen as in need of reform.

In the third paper, I consider the context of teacher education and the various social justice projects that can occur in teaching and teacher education programs. A commitment to social justice and social justice teacher education (SJTE) programs are becoming ubiquitous in

schools of education, but they also remain contested concepts and spaces. Social justice also faces the threat of being sloganized in ways that reproduce oppressive systems and structures rather than disrupt them (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Zeichner & Flessner, 2009). While ideology is viewed as playing an important role in whether and how teachers come to understand social (in)justice in education and the dynamics between systems, structures, and individuals (Kumashiro, 2009; Philip et al., 2019; Picower, 2021), there is limited research on the micro-processes on how this (un)learning occurs among teachers (Philip, 2011). I present philosopher Kristie Dotson's (2014) account of epistemic oppression and argue that it may support teacher educators in understanding how and why pre-service teachers may refuse or struggle to implement anti-oppressive and culturally responsive teaching. In addition, I explain how Doston (2011) and Medina's (2012) practices of epistemic reflexivity and epistemic resistance, respectively, are stances and practices (teacher) educators should iteratively develop to resist oppression, both individually and collectively.

## **1.2 Ideology and Epistemology in Education Policy and Practice**

Underlying all social, political, and economic issues, including education, often lurk implicit assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and what is good and valuable. In day-to-day interactions and policy debates, these assumptions often fly under the radar and remain unquestioned (Kumashiro, 2009). Both ideology and epistemology are concepts that help unpack and de-/re-construct these assumptions. *Ideologies* are the mental frameworks that different social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works (Hall, 1996, p. 29). Given that all people need to make sense of the world around them I do

not use ideology as a pejorative term. Instead, ideology is a means for explaining how individuals and groups can conceptualize, legitimize, and enact varied visions of justice, including different (and contradictory) understandings of concepts like educational opportunity, meritocracy, safety, and systemic oppression. Ideologies are always contested, never static or entirely deterministic, so analyzing ideology requires grappling with both its stability and dynamism (Philip, 2011). Ideologies are “durable” and “stable” in the sense that they can persist across time and translate to different contexts. At the same time, ideologies are also “fragmentary, disjointed, and episodic” because they are rarely fully articulated, often contradictory, and have the ability to transform (Hall, 1996, p. 42). As a result, it is helpful to imagine ideology as “not operat[ing] through single ideas; they articulate (i.e., connect) elements such as concepts, representations, images, assumptions, and episodic memories” (Philip, 2011, p. 186). I analyze ideologies and try to make their assumptions explicit in order to reveal what is being contested and who/what is being (de)valued among different social justice projects.

In the first two case study papers, I use critical discourse analysis and historical analysis to unpack and deconstruct the arguments and ideological assumptions in different stakeholder groups’ policy texts (in the NYC DOE case study) and public hearing testimonies (in the PPS case study). In both cases, a key ideological tension between groups and their policies is whether/how the current system and proposed reforms are capable of eliminating oppression and injustice. In both contexts, the groups whose demands seek systemic overhauls are often positioned as radical and their demands as impossible. In NYC, the demands of the youth activist groups (e.g., removing all admission screens) are often not seriously taken up or debated by the NYC DOE or the traditional political advocacy groups despite being student-led and having well-organized and well-researched campaigns. Similarly, those who supported the school police in the PPS public

hearing did not take up any of the extensive evidence on the racial disproportionality and harms caused by school policing that the remove speakers presented. Instead, supporters of the school police used language like “absurd” and “ignorant” to describe the call to remove all SPOs from PPS. In this way, the arguments of the systemic change groups were generally ignored and/or dismissed rather than being seriously considered and debated by opposing groups across both case studies.

I argue that the outright dismissal of these groups’ policies is grounded in “common sense” ideologies of what is/is not possible. As Kumashiro (2009) explains, “perspectives that challenge common sense, are *already* dismissed as irrelevant, inconsequential, and inappropriate” (p. xxxv). Despite this challenge, the youth activist groups in NYC and the Remove police group in PPS continue to advocate and work towards a new “common sense” about what kinds of policies and environments equitable and just schools require. In NYC, this requires (in part) dismantling the ideology of meritocracy in order to construct a non-hierarchical and egalitarian ethic for distributing resources and placing students in schools. In PPS, this requires (in part) deconstructing carceral logics of punishment and their anti-Black roots in order to reimagine more humane and healing ways to address harm.

The third paper examines how this process of (un)learning ideologies might occur in teacher education and the practice of teaching. To do so, I draw on philosophy texts from the epistemic injustice literature in social epistemology. Similar to ideology, social epistemology, particularly from Black, feminist, indigenous, and other critical traditions, focuses on how individual sensemaking about reality is connected to systems of power. These alternative knowledge traditions challenge what is taken as “common sense” within dominant theories of knowledge and ways of knowing. For instance, the idea that education and teaching are/should be

a “neutral” and “apolitical” endeavor promotes status quo ideologies and practices by deeming them “neutral” and “apolitical.” However, schools are inherently political in the sense that they teach students (implicit) lessons about how to interpret the world and engage with others. As Hess & McAvoy (2015) explain, “we are being political when we are democratically making decisions about questions that ask, “How should we live together”?” (p. 4).

SJTE programs recognize schools and teaching as political spaces and political acts, and thus face the challenge of helping pre-service teachers recognize and navigate the often invisible terrain of dominant ideologies (e.g., white supremacy, racial capitalism, ableism, colonialism) and learn alternative, more liberatory forms of sensemaking and teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Domínguez, 2020; Kumashiro, 2009; Mayorga & Picower, 2018; Philip, 2019; Picower, 2021). I highlight the epistemological difficulties of such a task using Dotson’s (2014) description of three types of epistemic oppression and the different types of changes that are required to minimally address them. Dotson’s account both explains some of the persistent challenges discussed in SJTE research and provides practical strategies for both unlearning dominant and oppressive epistemologies and learning alternative liberatory ways of being and knowing.

### **1.3 Multilevel Analysis and Collective Action in Education**

The multilevel nature of the educational system means that addressing issues of social justice and equity requires analyses of “both social structures and how individuals act in concert with them to perpetuate and reinvent processes” (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 464). In their review of the sociopolitical context of education, Nasir and colleagues (2016) distinguish three levels of the educational system: (1) macro-level social, political, and economic trends, (2) districts, schools,

and the working lives of teachers, and (3) the practices of teachers and the learning opportunities of students (p. 350). They argue that these three levels co-constitute each other rather than being nested or top-down in nature. Understanding the mutually influencing nature of the multiple layers of political and social context is important because, “Without attention to the ways that multiple levels interact, yielding particular ideologies, conditions, and practice, then inequality will persist despite reform” (ibid.).

Across the three dissertation papers, I engage in different types of multilevel analysis. The NYC DOE and PPS case studies focus on the macro- and meso-level contexts related to district-level policy debates. In the macro-context I attend to both the broader national context that are motivating the policy debates and local historical analyses of policies and community organizing that precede and inform the current context and policy demands. For the meso-level, I analyze different stakeholder groups, their policy texts and arguments, and the current district context. As Nasir and colleagues (2016) emphasize, I approach these levels as co-constituted and informing one another rather than as distinct or nested entities. In the third paper on epistemic oppression, Dotson’s (2014) three types of epistemic oppression highlight connections between the cognitive-affective functioning of individuals (the micro-level) and the dominant political, social, economic, and political systems (the macro-level). In applying these concepts to teacher education, I also attend to the meso-level institutions of teacher education and K-12 schools. To understand what epistemic oppression is, when and how it occurs, and how to resist it in teaching requires teachers and teacher educators to engage in an ongoing analysis across all three levels of the educational system. Since (epistemic) oppression occurs across multiple levels, epistemic resistance must also attend to the interplay between oppressive educational structures and systems and our cognitive-affective thinking and actions as individuals that sustain them (Medina, 20212).

In order to disrupt systems of oppression, multilevel analysis cannot only be a practice of individuals. Instead, multilevel analysis must also be done collectively to support solidarity and social action. In the learning sciences, there have been moves towards studying social movements as complex learning environments (e.g., Curnow et al., 2019; Pham & Philip, 2020). In this work, spaces of collective action are studied as dynamic learning spaces where people work together to “critique, re-imagine, strategize, design, and re-make” in order to transform values and power relations (Curnow & Jurow, 2021, p. 14). The NYC DOE and PPS papers highlight two cases of collective action for district-level policy changes and the (lack of) multilevel analysis that different groups leverage in their policy positions and campaigns. While these papers do not study the policy debates as learning contexts per se, they do provide some insights for how groups engaging in collective social action can leverage multilevel analysis to resist and reframe dominant discourses and ideologies.

I also highlight the opportunities and challenges for collective social action in teaching and teacher education in the third paper. While some teachers participate in collective social action through teacher activist groups (Niesz, 2018), union organizing (Pham & Philip, 2020), and other types of inquiry/action groups (Martinez et al., 2016), processes of politicization are not well studied or understood (Curnow et al., 2019). Curnow and colleagues (2019) argue that *politicization* is “a sociocultural learning process” and “not merely a process of conceptual development or cognitive change, but simultaneous development of concepts, practices, epistemologies, and identities” (p. 717). I posit that Dotson’s (2014) account of epistemic oppression, along with the practices of epistemic reflexivity (Dotson, 2011) and epistemic resistance (Medina, 2012) provide ways for teacher educators to conceptualize and observe changes in pre-service teachers’ politicization, particularly its epistemological dimensions.

Teacher education programs could also consider developing additional field components and fostering community collaborations that would allow pre-service teachers to collaborate and learn with students and colleagues in contexts outside of the traditional classroom, such as on community action projects (e.g., Philip, 2019). These contexts present learning opportunities for teachers and teacher educators to collectively theorize place-specific forms of epistemic oppression and plan epistemic resistance to work towards more just educational systems.

**2.0 PAPER 1: ORGANIZING FOR THE GRASSROOTS AND THE GRASSTOPS?  
COMPETING POLICIES, DISCOURSE, AND VISIONS FOR EQUITY IN THE NEW  
YORK CITY SCHOOLS**

emily howe & Tuhfa Begum

**2.1 Abstract**

While admissions to New York City’s “elite” public schools are historically contentious, they have become a particularly heated policy debate during the de Blasio administration. While there is a general consensus that the high level of racial and socioeconomic segregation within these schools is concerning and/or not equitable, different stakeholder groups disagree over exactly what the problem is and how it should be addressed. To pinpoint these differences and understand their practical implications, we reviewed policy texts from six organizations that represent three different stances. Using critical policy and critical discourse analyses, we argue that each group engages different ideologies of meritocracy, which leads to different understandings of opportunity, equity, and systemic oppression. These differing ideologies create contested discourses and policy proposals that work to either reproduce (traditional political advocacy groups), reform (NYC DOE), or challenge (youth activist groups) existing systems and structures. Implications of these competing ideologies and policies as well as their connection to historic governance and integration debates in NYC are discussed.

## 2.2 Introduction

It is now an annual ritual every spring for news outlets in NYC to lambaste the low number of Black and Latinx students that receive offers to the city’s specialized high schools (SHS), the “crown jewels” of the New York City public school system (Shapiro, 2019b, 2020, 2021b; K. Taylor, 2018). While the racial demographics of all students in the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) are approximately 41% Latinx, 22% Black, 18% Asian, and 15% white, only 9% of the 2021 SHS offers went to Black or Latinx students (S. Chang & Gould, 2021). SHS are highly resourced schools and promoted as a ticket to social mobility and future college and career success. Admission to eight of the nine SHS in the NYC DOE is solely based on how a student performs on one three-hour multiple choice test, the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT). While there is a general consensus that the low numbers of Black and Latinx students at SHS are troubling, stakeholders disagree about whether structures like the SHSAT are to blame and how the current system should be maintained, reformed, and/or transformed.

After a 2013 campaign promise to end “the tale of two cities” where City Hall “often catered to the interests of the elite rather than the needs of everyday New Yorkers” (H. Walker, 2013), Mayor Bill de Blasio’s education policies focused on what he called the “diversity problems” of NYC DOE schools (NYC DOE, 2017). His signature policy aimed to increase Black and Latinx student enrollment at SHS by eliminating the SHSAT and replacing it with a top 7% plan, where the top 7% of students from every middle school, based on their grades and state test scores, would be offered a seat at the SHS (NYC DOE, 2019b). The pushback was immediate and from multiple sides. Those in favor of the SHSAT see it as a fair and objective test, and view its removal as “lowering standards” (Shapiro, 2019a), while SHSAT critics saw the mayor’s proposal

as failing to address the larger systemic problem of admission screens in NYC DOE, which goes far beyond the eight SHS.

Unlike many educational and political debates that often evade discussions of race (Annamma et al., 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2006), race is often foregrounded in discourse about SHS and admission screens, and is often connected to broader concerns about segregation and integration in the NYC DOE. Though all stakeholder groups proclaim to want equity and better educational opportunities for Black and Latinx students, groups disagree over exactly what this means and requires. In addition, the issue of the SHSAT and SHS can be divisive in NYC's highly diverse Asian American communities. Asian American students make up about 62% of the students at SHS, while they are 16% of the citywide enrollment (Shapiro & Lai, 2019). Test prep centers for the SHSAT have become pervasive in Asian American neighborhoods across the city. Many Asian American families, particularly immigrant Chinese American families, see the SHSAT as objective and fair, and attending a SHS as the only pathway for their children's success (C. Chang, 2018; Garces & Poon, 2018). At the same time, other Asian American residents (including SHS alum) and Asian American community organizations, support SHS admission reforms or the elimination of SHS altogether (C. Chang, 2018; Coalition for Asian American Children + Families, 2018, 2021; Shapiro, 2019a).

To better understand what exactly is under debate and at stake, we identified three groups of policy actors that hold substantially different ideas about what types of policy changes should be made: the NYC DOE, traditional political advocacy groups, and youth activist groups. We collected and analyzed policy texts from all three stakeholder groups to address the following research questions:

1. How do meritocratic ideologies inform how educational equity, opportunity, and systemic oppression are constructed in current debates about integration and academic screens in the NYC DOE?
2. How do these different ideologies lead to policies and actions that reproduce and/or disrupt systemic inequities and oppression?
3. How are/can groups use historic struggles for racial justice in the NYC public schools to inform their organizing and visions for the future?

We used principles from critical policy analysis and critical discourse analysis to assess what each group identified as problems and possible solutions; the strategies they used or proposed to make these changes; and the extent to which their understandings and future visions drew from history.

We argue that each group engages different ideologies of meritocracy, which leads to different understandings of opportunity, equity, and systemic oppression. These differing ideologies create contested discourses, policy proposals, and visions for the future that work to either reproduce (traditional political advocacy groups), reform (NYC DOE), or challenge (youth activist groups) existing systems and structures. We discuss the implications of these competing ideologies and policies and highlight their connection to historical struggles over governance, integration, and self-determination in the NYC DOE.

## 2.3 Historical Literature Review

To provide historical context for the current debate around admission screens and integration, we overview some of the major policy battles and community organizing that have occurred in NYC since *Brown v. Board I* (1954) decision. Different activist groups engaged different visions and strategies for creating better educational environments and outcomes for students of color. These conflicts were both ideological and pragmatic, creating both coalition and conflict (Lewis, 2013; C. Taylor, 1997). We highlight conflicts that occurred in: organizing for integration; the struggle for community control and self-determination; and policy shifts that occurred under decentralization and mayoral control. This history highlights how struggles to dismantle systemic racism in the NYC DOE intersects not only with integration policies and community activism, but governance structures and meritocracy ideologies.

### 2.3.1 Organizing for Integration

After the *Brown I* decision in 1954, the centralized New York City Board of Education (BOE) continued to function much like it had before. Similar to most cities and school districts at the time, NYC neighborhoods were segregated and its public schools were geographically zoned. As a result, the schools were highly segregated. One of the first challenges to the BOE's geographic zoning practices was in 1957. Mae Mallory, a Black mother and activist, and her Black lawyer Paul Zuber sued the BOE, claiming its zoning policies relegated Mallory's daughter and other Black children to inferior schools (Farmer, 2019). Eight additional Harlem mothers joined the lawsuit, and the press called them "The Harlem Nine." The mothers had three demands of the BOE: an "open transfer" policy so their children could attend schools outside of their district; inclusion of Black history and curricula in schools; and community control of the parent

associations in their children's schools (ibid., p. 513). After the mothers boycotted the schools to hasten a court decision, the judge sided with the parents stating they "have the constitutional guaranteed right to elect no education for their children rather than to subject them to discriminatory, inferior education." (ibid.).

Despite this legal victory, the BOE's school zoning and integration policies and practices remained largely the same. In 1954, the BOE pledged to "put into operation a plan which will prevent the further development of such [segregated] schools and would integrate the existing one as quickly as practicable," but the BOE talked out both sides of their mouths (Taylor, 1997, p. 78). Though the BOE claimed to support rezoning for integration, they refused to do away with the neighborhood school concept, which created stark racial inequalities like the over-enrollment of Black schools and the under-enrollment of white schools (ibid., p. 73).

Both national organizations like the NAACP and grassroots community organizations like the Parents' Workshop for Equality in the New York City Schools persistently pressured the BOE throughout the 1950s and early 60s to create and implement an integration plan. In response, the BOE employed a series of stalling tactics and broken promises, which ultimately led to a coalition organizing the Freedom Day boycott on February 3, 1964. An estimated 464,361 students (about 45% of the city's students), did not attend classes on Freedom Day, making it one of the largest protests in the Civil Rights era (Taylor, 1997, p. 141).

Yet, despite the high level of participation, not all organizations and activists agreed with the "militant" tactic of a boycott including national leaders like Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young, along with Kenneth Clark, the psychologist from *Brown*. Predominantly white organizations like the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the United Parents Association, the American Jewish Committee, and the Catholic Interracial Council also did not support the boycott (Taylor, 1997).

Even local NAACP offices, who were more moderate members of the coalition who planned Freedom Day, were wary of boycotts. They had pushed for the one-day boycott to try to force the BOE's hand, while more radical groups like the Harlem Parents' Committee and the Parents' Workshop had wanted a protracted boycott that continued until the coalition's demands were met by the BOE (ibid., p. 123). Despite these challenges, the boycott was a great success in terms of organizing and participation, but the BOE ultimately did not respond to their demands, and continued to stall the implementation of a citywide integration plan.

### **2.3.2 Community Control & Organizing for New Governance Structures**

As the BOE continued to stall, break promises, and take no real action to promote integration after the Freedom Day boycott, divisions grew between activists who wanted to continue to work towards integrationist ideals and those who were more interested in self-determination and community control. The latter group believed "the only possible solution to relieve black suffering was not integration but black political empowerment" (C. Taylor, 1997, p. 177). This vision led to calls for self-determination through the community control of schools, rather than integration policies implemented by the centralized BOE. The aim was to improve the segregated schools within Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods by giving the community control over the schools' policies, curricula, and personnel, which was not possible under centralized control (ibid.). In this way, the centralized governance required for integration became incompatible with goals of self-determination and community-based governance.

As a result, activists disagreed about what systems of governance and what structures and policies would create the best educational environments and outcomes for Black and Puerto Rican students (Taylor, 1997). For many in the Black and Puerto Rican communities, integration was seen as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. For instance, while the Harlem 9 advocated

for an open choice system in 1957, choice itself was not the aim, nor was integration. As Mae Mallory explained, the goal was not to “sit next to white folks,” but giving Black and Puerto Rican families more options and access to better resourced schools (Farmer, 2019, p. 514). Given the lack of progress with the BOE and a desire for self-determination, community control was seen as a better strategy to achieve a better educational system for Black and Puerto Rican students. As a result, disagreements between integration and community control were also about power and control of school districts (Lewis, 2013; C. Taylor, 1997).

On December 19, 1966, more than 50 Black and Puerto Rican parents and community leaders took over the BOE’s headquarters in downtown Brooklyn, dubbing themselves the People’s Board of Education. At the time, the BOE had been utilizing a centralized governing structure since 1842 (Lewis, 2013). The research and activism of the People’s Board led them to propose community control as a grassroots antidote to the BOE’s “pervasive failure” to educate students in predominantly Black and Puerto Rican schools (Lewis, 2013, p. 3). Community control would allow parents and community members to have the power to engage in day-to-day decision making like staffing and curricula choices within schools.

In 1967, despite little support from the BOE and fierce opposition from union leaders, the mayor’s office, philanthropic leaders, and education officials established three experimental districts in East Harlem, the Lower East Side, and Ocean Hill-Brownsville in response to activists’ demands (Lewis, 2013). This new governance structure of community control granted residents in the experimental districts the ability to elect a school-governing board that would make decisions about staffing, curricula, and other school operations that were typically dictated by the centralized BOE. Still, politics remained fraught and relationships fractious between the BOE, UFT, and the experimental districts. For instance, UFT leaders and many UFT teachers felt that community

control was a threat to their job security and due process rights, and they aggressively lobbied against community control in the state legislature. These struggles for power and control were also racialized, since the experimental districts primarily served Black and Puerto Rican students, while the vast majority of UFT teachers were white. UFT perceived local governance as a threat to the power they had attained within the centralized BOE (Jones, 2012). Historian Heather Lewis (2013) explains the power struggles this way:

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment, and the governing board's resulting actions, confronted mediating structures that had insulated the city public schools from black and Latino communities for a half century...a democratic debate about who should govern schools in disenfranchised African American and Puerto Rican communities was at the core of the power struggle over the control of Ocean Hill-Brownsville. (pp. 53-54)

After the state legislature failed to create legislation to defuse the conflicts between the experimental districts, the BOE, and unions, UFT engaged in a 6-week strike against the employment practices of Ocean Hill-Brownsville in the fall of 1968. This ultimately led to the termination of all experimental districts "expos[ing] the weakness of the state's democratic structures of public education in poor communities" (ibid., p. 54).

### **2.3.3 More Shifts in Governance: Decentralization and the Hecht-Calandra Act**

The state passage of the decentralization law in 1969 limited the centralized control of the BOE until 2002. Implemented in 1970, the law led to a new governance structure: the creation of 32 community school districts with elected school boards (Lewis, 2013). While decentralization is arguably a more local form of governance, compared to the centralized BOE structure, decentralization still aligns with hierarchical control of a centralized system. As scholar Barbara

Sizemore (1972) explains, “community control requires a change in power relationships,” and, as a result, that decentralization as community governance is a “hoax” because while decentralization brings dominant power groups closer to community members, “the hierarchical administrative decision-making apparatus of the bureaucracy stays intact,” and maintains the existing power structure (p. 283).

Despite these limitations, some leaders and educators tried to find ways to make the decentralized system serve their Black and Puerto Rican students and communities well. For instance, superintendents J. Jerome Harris in Bedford-Stuyvesant (District 13) and Anthony Alvarado in East Harlem (District 4) were steady and effective leaders in the 1970s and 80s, succeeding in cultivating staff and resources to create supportive and high achieving schools in their districts (Lewis, 2013). But, at the same time, other high poverty school districts were dysfunctional, characterized by school board dissension, high superintendent turnover, corruption, and patronage (ibid., p. 135).

The Hecht-Calandra Act, a state law that dictates the SHSAT be used in SHS admissions (and is highly contested in current debates), was also passed during the decentralization era. The state law came about after a BOE-appointed committee began studying SHS admissions after a superintendent, Alfredo Mathew Jr., charged that the SHSAT “discriminates culturally” and “‘screen out’ black and Puerto Rican students” (Anon., 1971; Malcolm, 1971). Proponents of the SHSAT, many affluent and white, mobilized to create the Hecht-Calandra Act to transfer the power to make changes to SHS admissions from the BOE to the state. The bill passed the Assembly 107-35 in 1971, but New York City Democrats were split. Debates between legislators were “emotionally charged” with “accusations of hypocritical liberalism, racial prejudice and unfair intrusion by upstaters in city affairs” (Clines, 1971). The Hecht-Calandra Act remains a

contentious law, with both Mayor de Blasio and youth activist groups seeing the law as promoting discrimination and segregation.

#### **2.3.4 Mayoral Control and Free Market Ideologies**

Mayoral control gained prominence in US school districts in the 1990s and 2000s, during the era of NCLB, accountability testing, and other free market-based educational reforms. Free market ideologies assume the goal of education should be to satisfy individual consumers (i.e., parents and students). From this perspective, school choice is necessary and good because it allows schools to compete for consumers, and allows market demand to demonstrate which schools are “successful” and which are “failing” (Chubb & Moe, 1988). Free market ideologies also portray market systems as superior to democratic and bureaucratic educational systems because market demand is seen as a “free” and “objective” measure that is separate from politics, and avoids the hierarchy and control mechanisms embedded within bureaucracies (Chubb & Moe, 1988; Lewis, 2013).

The trend towards market ideologies along with the bad reputation of decentralization as dysfunctional and inefficient, helped Mayor Michael Bloomberg get the state legislature to pass a bill abolishing community school boards and establishing mayoral control in 2002 (Lewis, 2013). Mayoral control, as the name suggests, concentrates power with the mayor and mayoral appointees. There are no elected school boards under mayoral control. Advocates of mayoral control see this governance model embodying market values of efficiency and effectiveness. They also claim that mayoral control promotes greater political accountability by attaching the success of the school system to the mayor (F. M. Hess, 2008; Wong & Shen, 2007). This top-down, market-, and “data-driven” approach to governance and accountability concentrates power into the hands of a few and is ideologically opposed to both school boards and community

governance models. Chubb & Moe (1988), for instance, portray both the democratic control of schools and educational bureaucracies as inefficient and thus ineffective governance models.

Mayoral control gave Mayor Bloomberg unprecedented power to create and implement centralized reforms. Market ideologies undergirded his educational reforms including: the closure of over 160 “failing” schools (Fertig, 2013); increasing the number of charter schools and their enrollments by more than 10 fold (Campanile, 2020); and a system-wide high school choice program. These and related policy shifts also led to an “under-the radar explosion” of admissions screens (Hu & Harris, 2018). In 2002, only 15.8% of school programs screened students for academic achievement, but after the Bloomberg reforms, this number almost doubled to 28.4% of schools by 2009 (Disare, 2016).

Critics of mayoral control highlight how it perpetuates raced and classed patterns of disinvestment, dispossession, and disenfranchisement of low-income, Black, and Latinx communities (Lipman, 2017; Stovall, 2020). By concentrating power with the mayor and mayoral appointees, there is no accountability to the community and it becomes “nearly impossible for the most marginalized and isolated residents of a city to participate in a process to improve their educational wellbeing” (Stovall, 2020, p. 117). This lack of community engagement renders low-income residents of color “both invisible and disposable by city government” (ibid.) These outcomes are not accidental, but have been actively justified through market and meritocratic ideologies that center competition and choice as mechanisms to improve educational quality rather than democratic and community-engaged processes (ibid.). For instance, mayoral control in NYC and Chicago led to vast numbers of schools in low-income neighborhoods being closed for being “underperforming” or “underutilized,” despite community organizing and resistance that showed the value of the school to students and the community

(Ewing, 2018; Lewis, 2013; Winerip, 2011). As David Stovall (2020) explains, the structures, practices, and ideology of mayoral control operate as “a technology of Whiteness through the exclusion and marginalization of communities through policies that do not consider their needs” (p. 119).

Given this history, we seek to frame the current debates and organizing in NYC as part of a long history where Black, Latinx, and other historically marginalized communities are continually struggling and working towards better public schools and better education for their children. Within and across these struggles—though not always explicit—are competing visions of a quality education and what governance structures, systems of power, strategies, and policies are needed to achieve this end.

## **2.4 Conceptual Framework**

### **2.4.1 Ideology, Sensemaking, and Power Structures**

The term “ideological” is often used as a pejorative, particularly in political discourse, to suggest that certain policy actors are biased and that their beliefs and proposals are based on those biases rather than “facts.” However, we use the term *ideology* to indicate the various mental frameworks that *all* social groups deploy to make sense of, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works (Hall, 1996, p. 29). In so doing, we emphasize that underlying all sensemaking are (implicit) assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and what is good and valuable. In day-to-day interactions and policy debates, these assumptions often fly under the radar and remain unquestioned (Kumashiro, 2009). The implicit and “common sense”

nature of these assumptions are likely one reason why some people proclaim that their stances are “objective” or “fact-based,” rather than acknowledging that interpreting facts is an ideological process. For instance, it is a fact that the majority of students at SHS are white and Asian American, but what this fact *means* and *whether/why it matters* depends on what ideologies, or mental frameworks, people leverage to interpret this fact. As a result, analysis of policy debates should attend not only to the “facts,” but how those facts are ideologically understood and leveraged within a broader argument (Horsford et al., 2019; Kumashiro, 2020).

Analyzing ideology not only illuminates the underlying assumptions and ideas that are guiding different groups and policy stances, but how oppressive systems of power and structures are reproduced, justified, and/or challenged. While ideologies persist across time and translate to different contexts, they are also “constantly contested” and dynamic (Philip, 2011, p. 326). Ideological contestations are one key way that existing power structures are challenged. In the NYC case, whether and which current admission processes and screens are seen (un)necessary and (un)ethical depend on the ideologies used to analyze the system. For example, historically, meritocratic ideologies have heralded “objective” measures like IQ tests and standardized tests like the SHSAT as a fair and necessary way to stratify students and distribute resources, denying that such structures (re)produce racism and other systemic oppressions (Au, 2009, 2016). However, the recent shift towards more generalized acceptance of systemic racism in NYC and other liberal cities, means that dominant meritocratic ideologies must now respond to charges of systemic racism in standardized tests and other admission screens. This study highlights and analyzes the ideological contestations within and between stakeholder groups as they construct divergent, and often competing, ideas of systemic oppression. We highlight theoretical and

practical implications of these different constructions and ideologies, including what kind of changes and visions for the future are seen as (in)appropriate and (in)adequate.

#### **2.4.2 Meritocracy, Hierarchy, and Racialized Systems**

Meritocracy is a pervasive ideology within educational discourse and plays a prominent role in the different views NYC DOE stakeholder groups have towards current student sorting structures like the SHSAT and admissions screens. *Meritocracy* promotes distributing resources and opportunities based on individuals' hard work, talents, and/or motivation. These kinds of meritocratic differences between individuals are viewed as “a source of justified inequalities” (Howe, 2015, p. 183). Meritocracy's emphasis on the individual—rather than systems, structures, and collectives—is also connected to capitalist and market logics. Au (2009) describes meritocracy as an ideological extension of capitalist production “where individual products and individual producers “freely” compete in the educational and social market places, where only the “best” products and the most hardworking producers succeed, and where those that fail merely didn't work hard enough” (Au, 2009, p. 46). We can see these types of meritocratic logics in the current NYC debate. Stakeholders who subscribe to meritocratic ideologies view measures like test scores and/or grades as fair or objective measures of talent, motivation, and hard work that ought to determine what students *deserve* to attend the most well-resourced and “elite” schools, and, by extension, which students deserve to get sorted into under-resourced schools.

Given that meritocratic ideologies promote the stratification of students based on talent, merit, and hard work, meritocratic logics tend to normalize hierarchies as natural and ethical within public education and other social institutions (Howe, 2015). While meritocratic

hierarchies like tracking are often normalized within educational contexts, these practices become more fraught when historicized. As philosopher Charles Mills (1997) has shown, the concept of hierarchies has been used by Eurowestern societies to legitimate the oppression of indigenous groups for centuries. He explains that, “By the nineteenth century, conventional white opinion casually assumed the uncontroversial validity of a hierarchy of "higher" and "lower," " master" and "subject" races, for whom, it is obvious, different rules must apply” (p. 27). These raced and classed hierarchies served to *morally* justify systems of colonization, violence, and exploitation, along with denying rights of citizenship and self-determination to oppressed groups (Mills, 1997).

Similarly, in education, the origins and practices of standardized testing are deeply tied to ideologies of racialized hierarchy and meritocracy. Wayne Au (2013) traces the origins of standardized tests to the scientific racism of IQ testing and eugenics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He explains that standardized tests have historically played a “dual, seemingly contradictory ideological role” where:

psychologists, philanthropists, and educators saw the tests as a way to accurately sort students based on measured ability (which conflated with ethnicity, race, and class), and thus served ideologically to justify existing socioeconomic inequalities. Ironically, drawing on the same presumption of objectivity, early advocates of testing also saw standardized testing as a means of challenging class privilege. (p. 12)

The paradox is that while standardized tests were/are often supported on the basis of being “objective” measures of merit, these tests were designed by powerful white men who constructed “merit” in ways that served to reproduce and justify existing inequalities by reproducing ideological hierarchies of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and so on (Au, 2009; Park & Liu, 2014).

As a result, the ideologies of meritocracy and individualism tend to “mask structural inequalities under the guise of “naturally” occurring aptitude amongst individuals” (Au, 2013, p. 13) This is because when both success and failure are viewed as primarily a result of an individual’s skills and choices, systemic factors are invisibilized and/or seen as largely irrelevant. Within an individualist framing, poverty and inequality become “the consequences of individual choice or personal inadequacies, not the normal outgrowth of our economic institutions” (Bowles & Gintis, 2011, p. 26). The solution then becomes “fix[ing] up the people,” rather than changing social structures and systems that (re)produce inequalities (ibid.). In this way, individualism is intertwined with pervasive deficit ideologies that proliferate in “achievement gap” discourse (Horsford, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006) and the logics of many intervention programs (Howe, 1997). In both cases, policies target “at-risk” or “low-achieving,” individuals so that they can better succeed in the current system. While these within-system interventions may seek to support historically marginalized students, their individualist framing, intentionally or not, reproduces deficit logics where individuals and groups are positioned as the problem to be solved rather than the unjust power structures and systems. When these interventions have predictably minimal impact due to not addressing larger systemic inequities, the individualist framing reinforces this deficit perspective by interpreting these results as further evidence of inferiority, lack of merit, or undeservingness of the marginalized group rather than seeking systemic explanations (Aggarwal, 2016; Au, 2009; Tuck, 2012).

#### **2.4.2.1 Meritocracy Ideologies and Whiteness**

Given this context, it is clear that meritocratic logics in the US have historically served to promote white supremacy ideology. Though all white people do not subscribe to meritocratic ideologies and these ideologies are not exclusive to white people, meritocracy does generally

support hegemonic *whiteness*, or practices that enact racism in ways that (un)consciously maintain the broader system of white supremacy (Picower, 2021, p. 6).

To give two brief examples in education, scholars have examined how meritocratic logics within the model minority myth among Asian Americans (Poon et al., 2016) and Black resilience neoliberalism (Clay, 2019) serve to maintain systemic whiteness. Poon and colleagues (2016) explain that the framing and racial stereotypes of the model minority myth serve as a tool of racial wedge politics. The portrayal of Asian Americans as a monolithically hardworking and high achieving racial group serves to undercut claims of systemic racism: if Asian Americans can succeed, then the system can't be racist! This individualist framing not only undermines solidarity between communities of color, but reproduces whiteness by proffering white ideals of success and blaming individuals without acknowledging the role of systems (Poon et al., 2016).

Similarly, Clay (2019) describes Black resilience neoliberalism as a discourse and ideology that normalizes and valorizes “exercising human capital in relation to “overcoming” or enduring structural racism, both of which ignore Black suffering” (p. 82). In his work and collaborations with Black youth, Clay (2019) discusses how Black youth’s criticism of “Black folks’ inability to rise above barriers” as evidence of Black youth being educated in whiteness and learning to see themselves through the eyes of their oppressors (p. 102). These whiteness ideologies give “a false impression of our society as meritocratic and “good,” eclipsing structural barriers and the covert processes that reproduce those barriers” (ibid.).

In this way, ideologies of meritocracy and related logics of individualism and hierarchy are varied and pervasive throughout educational discourse, working to (implicitly) reproduce and valorize whiteness. Within this study, we seek to understand how meritocratic ideologies and power structures are being contested, negotiated, (re)articulated by different stakeholder groups.

Different stances by groups and organizations represent not only different problem constructions and policy solutions, but, more broadly, different understandings of the current systems of power and governance and different visions for what these systems could and ought to be.

## **2.5 Methodology and Methods**

This section outlines critical policy analysis (CPA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA), which are the two methodologies that guide our analysis. We explain how we used these methodologies to create our coding scheme and outline the methods we used to analyze the policy texts and synthesize themes within and across stakeholder groups.

### **2.5.1 Critical Policy and Critical Discourse Analysis**

To analyze the policy discourse among different stakeholder groups in the current NYC DOE debate, we combined principles from critical policy analysis and critical discourse analysis. Traditional policy analysis has typically viewed policy design as a formal, rational, linear, and incremental process where policy implementation and impact can be measured in objective and positivistic ways (Horsford et al., 2019). However, critical scholars in education (and beyond) have challenged these assumptions and what counts as policy research. According to Horsford and colleagues (2019), one of the biggest shortcomings of traditional approaches to policy analysis is that it “fails to account for unequal distributions of power, resources, and opportunity, and how they inform the extent to which policies work, for whom, and to what end” (p. 21). *Critical policy analysis* (CPA) is a methodological response to these shortcomings and provides “a realist perspective for analyzing policy in an era of widening inequality and political divisions across

lines of race, class, gender, geography, and citizenship” (ibid.). By attending to how these various social oppressions were historically generated and have been perpetuated by policy, CPA challenges traditional approaches to policy that tend to “idealize” policy analysis in ways “abstract *away* from relations of structural domination, exploitation, coercion, and oppression” (Mills, 2005, p. 168). Traditional policy analyses are not always inattentive to inequities, but if/when they are acknowledged, they are typically construed in individualized, ahistorical, and/or deficit-informed ways (e.g., the achievement gap). In contrast, CPA offers a historicized “nonideal” approach that centers policy’s entanglements with systems of oppression.

While CPA encompasses a variety of approaches to analyzing policy, Horsford and colleagues (2019) provide a framework with five guiding features: (1) challenging traditional notions of power, politics, and governance; (2) examining policy as discourse and political spectacle; (3) centering the perspectives of the marginalized and oppressed; (4) interrogating the distribution of power and resources; and (5) holding those in power accountable for policy outcomes (pp. 21-22). While all five inform our analysis, we want to elaborate on (1) and (4). First, challenging traditional notions of power, politics, and governance entails recognizing that “policy is produced, resisted, and reshaped in many different sites other than legislature” (ibid., p. 33). Policies can be influenced by policy actors and actions that exist outside the formal policy system including think tanks, media, advocacy organizations, educational technology, and venture philanthropists. Our study attends to multiple policy actors by analyzing policy texts of the NYC DOE, two teen activist groups, and two traditional political advocacy groups. In addition, CPA understands power not just as a conflict over resources but as ideological struggles over how problems, interests, and needs are framed. In order for discrimination and inequality in schools to be challenged, they need to be problematized rather than being seen as “just the way things are”

(ibid., p. 34). For some, the existing system and structures are taken for granted as “common sense,” or as natural and inevitable, while other policy actors actively challenge these assumptions and systems. Our analysis focuses on policy actors’ different assumptions of what is “common sense” and how this impacts their policy proposals. By including three different types of policy actors within this study we also examine how power and resources are being distributed and challenged within NYC. We attend not only to the ideology that undergirds each group’s problem constructions and policy proposals, but the strategies they use to promote their proposals.

To analyze the policy texts, we utilize *critical discourse analysis* (CDA), a methodology that investigates the connections between discourse, social arrangements, and power. More specifically, Fairclough (1993) explains that CDA aims to:

systematically explore often opaque relationships...between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power. (p. 135)

In CDA, language is viewed as “a site of [ideological] struggle” and the study of discourse can help identify different theorizations of social change (Fairclough, 2001). CDA is useful for policy analysis because it helps uncover how the authors of policy texts represent the social world, institutions, identities, relationships, and power (Hyatt, 2013).

### **2.5.2 A Critical Framework to Analyze Equity Constructions in Policy Discourse**

We drew from CPA and CDA to create the coding scheme outlined in Table 1. The purpose of the coding scheme was to focus our attention on key places where stakeholders’ realities, ideologies, and power are being contested.

**Table 1 Coding Scheme for Policy Texts**

| <b>Dimension</b>                               | <b>Description</b>  |
|--|---|
| Framing the problem                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moral and/or empirical description of “what’s wrong,” (un)fair, and (un)just</li> <li>• Demonstrates conflicts over resources, ideas, and interpretations of reality</li> <li>• Informs and is informed by what practices and ideas are accepted and challenged as “common sense”</li> </ul> |
| Constructing the “solution” and future visions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Solutions” and/or future visions are what we are aiming towards; how we want structures, relations, and/or outcomes to change in the future</li> </ul>  |
| Warrants                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reasons, authority, or evidence that stakeholders use to justify their problem framing, solution/vision, and strategies for change</li> </ul>  |
| Strategies and (implicit) theory of change     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit or implicit means by which groups are working towards their desired goals and future visions.</li> <li>• Explicit and/or implicit theory of change: Who and what (does not) need to change? When, how, and why will they change?</li> </ul>   |
| Power relations                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses what individuals, groups, and ideologies are given a voice and role in policy design and implementation and the extent to which traditional power hierarchies are assumed or challenged.</li> </ul>   |
| Connections to and use of history              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses how and the extent to which history (does not) inform the other five dimensions.</li> </ul>   |

All six dimensions of the coding scheme are interconnected and inform one another. The first three dimensions—framing the problem, constructing the solution, and warrants—represent the bulk of the policy texts in this study. While the problem and solution tend to be more explicit, warrants/justifications are often more implicit, especially if they are drawing on “common sense” logics of the current system (e.g., meritocracy, individualism). Some policy texts also discuss specific strategies for achieving their policy goals, which helped us identify a theory of change. Strategies and solutions provide clues about assumptions and ideologies undergirding policy proposals: Who and what (does not) need to change? When, how, and why will they change? Assumed and desired power relations are the fifth dimension of the coding scheme. Often implicit, it requires assessing what individuals, groups, and ideologies are given a voice and role in the policymaking process and the extent to which traditional power hierarchies are seen as (in)compatible with more just futures. Lastly, the sixth dimension assesses how and the extent to which history informs the other five dimensions. Traditional policy analysis tends to be ahistorical

and assume market values of efficiency and productivity, while critical policy analysis often discusses the historical origins of systemic problems (Horsford et al., 2019). As a result, whether/how history was foregrounded or omitted in policy texts provides clues about policy actors' values and ideologies.

### **2.5.3 Sample**

The debate surrounding educational screens and SHS has been well-covered in the local news since 2018. In reviewing related articles, particularly from *The New York Times* and *Chalkbeat*, we identified three sets of vocal stakeholder groups that had different policy stances: the NYC DOE, traditional political advocacy groups, and youth activist groups. We decided to select two organizations to analyze for both the youth activist group and the traditional political advocacy group, using the following selection criteria: (a) the organizations needed to be highly active (e.g, regularly hold events, post materials on their website, are in the news) and (b) express perspectives that seemed representative of the broader group. For the traditional political advocacy organizations, we selected the Educational Equity Campaign (EEC) and Parent Leaders for Accelerated Curriculum and Education (PLACE NYC). For the youth activist organizations, we selected Teens Take Charge (TTC) and IntegrateNYC. Information about each organization is provided in Table 2.

#### **2.5.3.1 NYC DOE**

For the NYC DOE group, we analyzed texts from Mayor de Blasio's Office and the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG), which was a task force assembled by de Blasio (NYC DOE, 2017). The SDAG had 45 members, including parents, students, teachers,

administrators, community leaders, researchers, and representatives from community non-profits. Between December 2017 and the publication of their first report in February 2019, the SDAG and its subcommittees held nearly 40 meetings with over 800 New Yorkers (SDAG, 2019a). The SDAG released their second report in August 2019.

### **2.5.3.2 Youth Activist Groups**

Teen Take Charge (TTC) formed after two Bronx teens discussed school segregation and inequality on the *Miseducation* podcast in the summer of 2016. TTC describes their membership as “a diverse group of 50 active members from more than 30 high schools across all 5 boroughs” (TTC, 2020b). In their work, TTC studies present-day educational inequity, its historical roots, develops policy proposals to address specific problems, and leads advocacy campaigns targeting the city and school officials with the ability to enact their solutions (ibid.). To advance their campaigns, TTC engages in coalition building and a variety of direct action campaigns like sit-ins, strikes, and social media campaigns to engage the mayor and the public in their policy proposals and visions for the future.

Since their formation in 2014, IntegrateNYC has created a variety of local programming for students and teachers across schools to explore the history of segregation, the impacts of segregation, and possibilities and strategies for integration (IntegrateNYC, 2019a). IntegrateNYC is a youth-led organization that has approximately 516 members who are between the ages of 9 and 21. Members identify as Black, Latinx, Asian, white, and mixed-race and all attend schools in the NYC DOE (IntegrateNYC, 2020c). At IntegrateNYC’s first City-Wide Youth Council on School Integration in May 2016, students from ten of NYC’s school districts created what has become IntegrateNYC’s mission and integration plan: the 5Rs of Real Integration (ibid.). The 5Rs are: Race and Enrollment, Resources, Relationships, Restorative Justice, and Representation.

Student activists from IntegrateNYC have led direct action campaigns and testified at the local and national level in support educational policies that support integration (IntegrateNYC, 2019a; IntegrateNYC, 2019b). IntegrateNYC also had student representatives who served on Mayor de Blasio's SDAG.

Both TTC and IntegrateNYC have also recently engaged in litigation to challenge the current practices of the NYC DOE. On November 16, 2020, TTC filed a federal complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, charging that the NYC DOE's system of admissions screens violates Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (*Teens Take Charge vs. NYC DOE*, 2020). On March 19, 2021, IntegrateNYC filed a lawsuit with the Supreme Court of New York State against the NY State and NYC education departments, charging that racial and economic segregation in the NYC DOE violates the State Constitution and State Human Rights Law by failing to provide a sound basic education, equal protection, and equal opportunity (*IntegrateNYC, Inc. vs. The State of New York*, 2021).

### **2.5.3.3 Traditional Political Advocacy Groups**

Education Equity Campaign (EEC) was formed in April 2019 by Ronald S. Lauder, the billionaire cosmetics heir, and Richard D. Parsons, the former chairman of Citigroup, to support the SHSAT and the expansion of specialized high schools. Both are NYC DOE alum and Lauder graduated from Bronx Science, a SHS (Shapiro, 2019c). They formed EEC as a multimillion-dollar lobbying, public relations, and advertising effort to ensure Mayor de Blasio's bill to eliminate the SHSAT would not pass the State Legislature (ibid.). While Lauder and Parsons' names are conspicuously absent from EEC's website and marketing materials, EEC's spokesperson is Reverend Kirsten J. Foy, a Brooklyn Tech alum and prominent Black minister. EEC's policy

proposals aim to keep the SHSAT and expand the number of SHS and G&T programs (EEC, 2019).

Parent Leaders for Accelerated Curriculum and Education (PLACE NYC) was formed in September 2019 by “concerned elected parent leaders representing tens of thousands of families in their official capacities” (PLACE NYC, 2021a). PLACE NYC are active and vocal critics of both Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza. Between February 2020 and April 15, 2021, they published 27 statements, letters, and newspaper op-eds on their website. Most directly critiqued decisions and proposals made by the Mayor and Chancellor (PLACE NYC, 2021b). The statements also often solicit parent engagement in the form of petitions, surveys, and attending town halls (ibid.). PLACE NYC’s mission statement is: “Challenging education for every student. Integrated classrooms of life-long learners. Access and opportunity to achieve full potential” (PLACE NYC, 2021a). The twelve Elected Officers and Executive Board of PLACE NYC are parents of NYC DOE students. The two co-presidents of PLACE NYC are Asian American as are two Executive Board members.<sup>1</sup> Another Executive Board member explains that she grew up in East Harlem to immigrant Ecuadorian parents. The remaining seven parent leaders are white. All twelve parents hold leadership positions at the school- and district-level including: School Leadership Teams, school PTA officers, Community Education Councils, and/or the Chancellor’s Parent Advisory Council. Community Education Councils (CECs) are parent-led education policy advisory bodies that exist in each of the NYC DOE 32 districts citywide. All but two of PLACE NYC’s twelve parent leaders serve on a CEC.

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<sup>1</sup> Two parent leaders explicitly identify as “Asian” on the PLACE NYC website. The other two Asian American parent leaders and the seven white parent leaders do not state their race or ethnicity, so we assumed their race based on their pictures. We acknowledge these assumptions could very easily be wrong, and, even if accurate, are crude categories that tell us little about the parents’ identities and experiences. At the same time, race and ethnicity provide important context for understanding PLACE NYC’s positions and policy recommendations.

**Table 2 Overview of Groups, Organizations, and Data Sources**

| <b>Three Groups</b>                         | <b>Organizations in Sample</b>         | <b>Description of Organizations</b>   | <b>Materials Analyzed</b>   |
|---|--|---|---|
| NYC DOE                                     | The Mayor’s Office                     | NYC DOE is under mayoral control. Mayor appoints high-level education officials who create and implement systemwide policies.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equity &amp; Excellence for All report</li> <li>• Two op-eds by de Blasio</li> <li>• State bill to change SHS admissions</li> </ul>                                |
|   | School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) | Mayoral appointed 45-member committee that included parents, students, teachers, administrators, researchers, and community leaders. Formed in 2017 and published two reports in February and August of 2019.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making the Grade I and II Reports (SDAG)</li> </ul>  |
| Traditional policy & advocacy organizations | Education Equity Campaign (EEC)        | Ronald Lauder and Richard Parson’s multimillion-dollar lobbying and advertising effort formed in 2019 to fight de Blasio’s SHSAT reform. Promoted expanding SHS, publicly funded SHSAT test prep, and G&T.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign and publicity materials on their websites including policy proposals (both)</li> <li>• State and City Council bills supported (both)</li> </ul>           |
|   | PLACE NYC                              | Formed in 2019 by “concerned elected parent leaders” who critique Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza’s reforms. Promote expanding SHS, publicly funded SHSAT test prep, and G&T.   |   |
| Youth activist organizations                | Teens Take Charge (TTC)                | A “diverse group of 50 active members from more than 30 high schools across all 5 boroughs” formed in 2016 who study present and historical educational inequity to develop policy proposals and grassroots campaigns that target officials and politicians.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign and publicity materials on their website including policy proposals</li> <li>• Federal Civil Rights complaint against NYC DOE</li> </ul>                  |
|   | IntegrateNYC                           | Formed in 2014, IntegrateNYC is a diverse group of over 500 student members who create a variety of local programming and policy campaigns across the city to explore the history of segregation, the impacts of segregation, and possibilities and strategies for integration including the 5 R’s of Real Integration. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign and publicity materials on their website including policy proposals</li> <li>• State lawsuit against NY State Education Department and NYC DOE</li> </ul> |

### 2.5.4 Data Sources

We analyzed a variety of texts for the six organizations in our sample, which are outlined in Table 2. Appendix A provides a full list of each data source analyzed.

In the NYC DOE group, three types of policy texts were reviewed from the Mayor's Office. One was a 2017 report that explained the administration's visions and goals for a more diverse school system citywide and proposed the creations of the SDAG (NYC DOE, 2017). The second type of text were two op-eds written by Mayor de Blasio. One discussed his plan to remove the SHSAT and replace it with the 7% plan (de Blasio, 2018) and the other discussed the SDAG's recommendations from their first report (de Blasio, 2019). We also analyzed Mayor de Blasio's failed State Senate and Assembly bill about changing the SHS admissions system. For the SDAG, we analyzed the two reports they published in February and August of 2019.

For the traditional political advocacy and youth activist organizations, we read campaign and publicity materials posted on their websites. This included policy proposals and any City Council or New York State legislature bills that they proposed or explicitly support(ed). For the youth activist organizations, we also reviewed TTC's federal complaint and IntegrateNYC's state lawsuit.

### **2.5.5 Data Analysis**

All of the data sources for each of the six organizations were compiled and coded using a six dimensions coding scheme based on principles of CPA (Table 1). For the website materials, this coding was done in Google Docs. Any videos that were embedded on an organization's website were transcribed and also coded. For reports, litigation, and other documents, we coded in Zotero, an open-source reference management software where a library of resources can be shared. We coded the data sources collaboratively to agree upon what portions of the documents aligned with each of the dimensions of the coding scheme. After reviewing all of the materials for an organization, we compiled a summary, including supporting quotes, into a table.

We then synthesized themes for each dimension; first, across organizations within each group and then across the three groups in order to identify points of convergence and divergence. Thinking across all organizations and groups, we identified salient themes and patterns in ideology and discourse based on their frequency of use across dimensions and the extent to which they were in tension with the discourse of other groups.

### **2.5.6 Researchers' Positionalities**

The authors met in 2012, when emily was a special education teacher and Tuhfa was a tenth grader at Vanguard High School, an unscreened NYC DOE school. We got to know each other because Tuhfa's friends were some of emily's advisees. Our collaborations began in Philosophy Club where we discussed ethical dilemmas during lunch and after school. We stayed in touch after Tuhfa graduated high school and after emily left NYC to go to graduate school.

We are not members of any of the organizations we are studying. While we have attended some of TTC's virtual events as concerned and interested citizens (rather than for research purposes), neither of us have insider perspectives about the organizations in the study. However, our past experiences in the NYC DOE as a student and teacher do inform our perspective and research. For this reason, we do not pretend to be "objective" or detached observers. Instead, our knowledge of and experiences in the NYC DOE and the city shape our interpretations. We do not view this as a limitation; all researchers have lenses that shape what questions they ask and how they engage in research.

Tuhfa grew up in a Bangladeshi-American household in the Bronx, graduated from the NYC public schools, and is now in law school. I (Tuhfa) became interested in education policy as I went through the application process for admission into NYC's public high schools in my

final year of middle school and learned about the already imbedded notions of “good schools” and “bad schools” from classmates and teachers. Some of my classmates were expected to attend “bad schools,” which had metal detectors lined up at the entrances and low average SAT scores, while others were expected to attend elite screened high schools which also came with the pressure of attending a top college. Some of my classmates began prepping to attend these elite high schools in elementary school, attending outside exam prep programs and spending thousands to study exam concepts that fell outside of the NYC DOE curriculum for middle school students.

Though I (emily) taught as a special educator in the NYC DOE for five years, I have more outsider perspective. I am a cis white woman who grew up and attended public schools in rural North Carolina. In experiencing both types of school systems, there were obvious differences, but segregation and stratification were a common theme. In North Carolina, my schools were 20-30% African American, but tracking was a key tool used to segregate students and stratify opportunities, both racially and socioeconomically. In New York City, Chicago, and Pittsburgh there was more clear segregation and stratification *between* schools and school districts. This led to my interest in wanting to understand how school districts utilize different educational structures (e.g., standardized tests, special education programs, funding formulas, high school application process) to achieve the same stratified results. Most of what I learned is from my students and colleagues’ experiences and ideas, particularly those whose day-to-day lives are impacted by racism, classism, sexism, and ableism. I am continually learning to both recognize and resist my complicity in these systems.

## 2.6 Findings

In analyzing the policy texts across all dimensions of the coding scheme, there were consistent patterns in the three different stakeholder groups' policy discourse and proposals. The problem constructions, strategies, and policy proposals of the traditional political advocacy organizations (EEC and PLACE NYC) tended to *reproduce* existing meritocratic ideologies within admission screen procedures. They heralded both elite reputation of the SHS and the competitive and objective nature of the SHSAT rather than seeking to reform these structures. Meanwhile, the NYC DOE, particularly the mayor, sought to *reform* some admission screens to be race conscious while also retaining some aspects of meritocratic ideology. While the NYC DOE viewed the SHSAT as discriminatory, they did not broadly challenge the meritocratic logics built into the SHS system and selective admissions processes. The youth activist groups (TTC and IntegrateNYC), however, *challenged* meritocratic ideology and are seeking alternative systems and structures that have transformative potentials. Both TTC and IntegrateNYC explicitly reject the idea that some schools and students deserve more resources and opportunities on the basis of merit (e.g., test scores, grades). In this way, the youth activist groups are resisting underlying logics of individualism, meritocracy, and stratification that the other two groups accept as natural, normal, and good. Instead, they view these structures as part of systemic racism that need to be eliminated and replaced rather than reproduced or reformed.

We demonstrate this pattern through three sets of findings related to problem framings, organizing strategies and power relations, and whether/how history is leveraged in their policy texts and campaigns.

### 2.6.1 “Systemic” Problems and Meritocratic Logics

While the dominant policy discourse often engages individualist framings that obscure systemic inequalities (Horsford et al., 2019), we found that all groups referenced “systemic” problems. However, these “systemic” problems were constructed in divergent ways by the three groups, drawing from different interpretations of meritocracy. As a result, the extent to which each group sought to change the current system greatly varied despite the similarity in language.

EEC paradoxically uses the idea of a “broken system” to expand and reproduce the current meritocratic structures within the system. One of their campaign videos begins by calling the NYC DOE “a broken system.” Spokesman Kirsten Foy claims:

We all need to say “no” to a broken system. The way you say no to a broken system is by *fixing* the broken system. The problem with the [SHS] admissions doesn’t start at the day of the test [the SHSAT], it starts years earlier in our elementary and our middle schools. So if we want to fix the broken system, we’ve got to start there. (EEC, 2019)

In this problem framing, the SHSAT or SHS are not part of the “broken system.” Instead, the problem is elementary and middle schools that do not appropriately prepare students for the SHSAT. Yet, EEC provides no specific critique of elementary and middle schools, nor a way to address these problems.

Instead of changing the broken system, four of their five points in EEC’s proposal for “fixing” the “broken system” expands existing structures: SHS, universal SHSAT, SHSAT test prep, and G&T programs in every district. Their fifth proposal to “improve our middle schools” offers no vision of what that means or what policies it would require (EEC, 2019). Essentially, EEC argues that to fix the broken system we need to reproduce and strengthen the meritocratic system of stratification that already exists. This ideological construction is a paradox, rather than

a contradiction, because “broken system” rhetoric is often used to reaffirm the necessity of reforms and to portray broad and transformative systemic changes as impossible, unreasonable, or naïve (Kaba, 2021).

PLACE NYC also reproduces meritocracy ideology and structures when they describe admission screens as “academics-based criteria” and use a “matching” logic to justify a process for stratifying students:

Many of the most successful schools in New York City use some form of academics-based admissions criteria to match the needs of students with the schools that would best serve them...Academics-based criteria ensure that the children attending the schools can handle the course work expected of them—this is vital in a city where student proficiency in reading, writing and math vary greatly. Tearing down what works for many students won’t help anyone. (PLACE NYC, 2020c)

This reasoning relies on multiple meritocratic logics and assumptions. For one, they claim admission screens are necessary because schools “vary greatly” in their proficiency levels. This euphemizes systemic inequality and structural oppression, rendering it natural, normal, and inevitable rather than a product of human-created systems (Dumas, 2014). This rationale also reproduces values of individualism, competition, and hierarchy. Instead of seeing school-level variation in proficiency levels as evidence of an unjust educational system, PLACE NYC implicitly positions this variation as the natural outcome of better and worse students competing for their appropriate school “match.” This logic obscures historical processes of disinvestment and structural oppression, and engages deficit ideologies (Gorski, 2011) by assuming that students in the least proficient schools are there because they as individuals cannot “handle the course work.” While PLACE NYC claims this “matching” process “works for many students,” they provide no

evidence of this, and ignore the many groups for whom the system does *not* work well. Research shows in the NYC DOE’s current system of choice and academic screens that low-income students, Black and Latinx students, dis/abled students, and ELLs are more likely to be placed in under resourced and low performing schools than their white and affluent peers (Corcoran et al., 2018; Hemphill et al., 2019; Roda & Kafka, 2019; Roda & Wells, 2013; Sattin-Bajaj, 2012; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2018).

While the NYC DOE critiques some admission screens as discriminatory and seeks to reform them, they often stop short of broadly challenging meritocratic systems and structures. In 2018, Mayor de Blasio made the decision to make the SHSAT and SHS admissions a focus of his educational reforms. He published an op-ed in *Chalkbeat* to explain his policy proposal. In it, de Blasio (2018) provides an explicit problem framing:

The problem is clear. Eight of our most renowned high schools – including Stuyvesant High School, Bronx High School of Science and Brooklyn Technical High School – rely on a single, high-stakes exam. The Specialized High School Admissions Test isn’t just flawed – it’s a roadblock to justice, progress and academic excellence.

de Blasio portrays the SHSAT as discriminatory and challenges its supposed objectivity and validity. This is in direct opposition to claims made by EEC and PLACE NYC. But, at the same time, his critique is also implicitly couched in the logic of meritocracy, placing the aim of “academic excellence” alongside “justice.”

Meritocratic logics also motivate de Blasio’s proposed solutions like expanding the Discovery Program to “offer 20 percent of specialized high school seats to economically disadvantaged students” and a “new admissions process” where students are admitted based on their “rank in their middle school and their results in the statewide tests that all middle school

children take” (ibid.). While this policy proposal challenges the SHSAT as a discriminatory admissions structure, it does not challenge the hierarchy of the SHS, nor the meritocratic idea that students should be sorted into schools based on their “talent” and “ability.” Instead, he offers a different system of meritocracy that is more race conscious. Mayor de Blasio’s reforms frame the problem as having “smart [Black and Latinx] kids” who are “locked out” of SHS due to the SHSAT (de Blasio, 2018). In this way, the NYC DOE mirrors EEC in assuming that students should be sorted into schools based on academic “merit,” but, unlike EEC and PLACE NYC, they do not think all of the current sorting structures are fair or equitable.

The youth activist groups, unlike the traditional political advocacy groups and the NYC DOE, consistently challenge meritocratic ideology and logics. They frame all academic admission screens as systemically discriminatory. For example, one of TTC’s current campaigns called “Education Unscreened” explains:

Discriminatory admissions “screens” in high schools have a profound segregating effect on the system. Of the 30 most academically screened high schools, 27 are majority white and Asian (in a system that’s less than one-third white and Asian). None of those 30 schools approach the system average for economic need. Meanwhile, hundreds of unscreened schools are at least 85% black or Hispanic and 85% low-income. To end this tale of two school systems, we must eliminate all discriminatory admissions screens, including state exam scores, GPA, attendance, punctuality, zip code, portfolios, in-person interviews, auditions, and specialty exams. (TTC, 2020a)

TTC is explicitly framing, morally and empirically, admission screens as key structures that promote segregation by race and class in the NYC DOE.

Similarly, in the summer of 2020, IntegrateNYC began a campaign called “End Discriminatory Admission Screens.” They describe screens as formally promoting “open choice,” but claim the process “has created a school system that privileges wealth, whiteness, and access” (IntegrateNYC, 2020a). A video on their campaign website further explains, “These [admission] screens make it easier for students with privilege to access more resources” (ibid.). Like TTC, IntegrateNYC’s future vision is a school system without screens. They demand, “the end to discriminatory admissions screens that perpetuate segregation” (ibid.).

Both youth activist groups have also made these arguments against admission screens in federal (TTC) and state (IntegrateNYC) litigation. Both TTC and IntegrateNYC’s systemic critiques are challenging not just the structure of screens, but their underlying meritocratic ideologies. The youth activist groups offer different arguments and moral evaluations that foreground how the structures are designed to exacerbate systemic inequities in schools and society. For example, TTC’s federal complaint against the NYC DOE charges:

The maintenance of racial segregation in New York City’s public school system is a direct product of...screen[ing] students on the basis of metrics ostensibly measuring academic merit, but which in reality measure racial inequality. (*TTC vs. NYC DOE*, 2020, p. 6)

Similarly, Integrate NYC’s lawsuit (2021) charges that the State and the NYC DOE fail to provide a “sound basic education” due to racial hierarchy embedded in the system (pp. 1-2).

In addition to meritocratic critique, TTC and IntegrateNYC are working to imagine and develop alternative structures, systems, and logics in the NYC DOE. For example, in the Q&A section that follows TTC’s Education Unscreened campaign, they explain that all students are “hardworking” and should have “equitable access to a rigorous education, leading to the fact that the label of “specialized high schools” won’t be needed anymore” (TTC, 2020a). This is not just

a rejection of meritocratic logics, but an argument for an alternative, non-hierarchical approach to school admissions and resource distribution.

### **2.6.1.1 Diversity and “Real Integration”**

Though all three groups state concerns about issues related to race and racism, the varied language and the depth of their analysis lead to reproductions (traditional political advocacy groups), reforms (NYC DOE), and/or challenges (youth activist groups) to current power structures, and social relations that maintain racial and other systemic oppressions.

The traditional advocacy groups reproduce the existing system by assuming and replicating existing power structures and relations between politicians, administrators, staff, students, and communities. Their policy proposals assume investing more resources into the current meritocratic structures of the system (e.g., more SHS, more G&T, public SHSAT test prep) will address systemic inequities by increasing the proportion of Black and Latinx students in these “elite” spaces. For example, both PLACE NYC and EEC use a “pipeline” analogy to justify the status quo processes of sorting and stratifying students based on their purported merits. EEC states that SHS “have long offered a high-quality education and a pipeline to success for public school students,” but that “in recent years, the schools have lacked demographic diversity and equity” (EEC, 2019). Similarly, PLACE NYC claims that “G&T and other honors programs... traditionally served as a pipeline for NYC’s specialized high schools to make these top schools truly diverse” (Chu et al., 2020). Much like the “broken system” problem formation, EEC and PLACE NYC are not actually problematizing the system or “pipeline,” but instead imply that it is a formerly functioning system that only recently has become inequitable; even though the history presented earlier suggests otherwise. As a result, EEC’s and PLACE NYC’s strategies are about restoring the system/pipeline to its earlier, more “diverse” and “equitable” state.

While this pipeline analogy has a veneer of reforming the system, it actually normalizes and justifies status quo structures (e.g., admission screens, standardized tests) by invoking market values like individualism, meritocratic hierarchy, and workforce preparation. Their theory of change is not about reforming (or transforming) current systems to be more equitable or just, but providing informational and test prep interventions to individual Black and Latinx students in order to increase their test scores and increase the percentage of Black and Latinx students who gain entrance to G&T programs and SHS. This means that EEC and PLACE NYC's strategies are reinvesting in and reproducing the meritocratic and deficit-based assumptions of the current system by locating the solution, and by extension the problem, in the individual test scores of Black and Latinx individuals.

The NYC DOE acknowledge some discriminatory structures and utilize a reform-oriented and more race conscious strategy to address school segregation. Since the beginning of his tenure, Mayor de Blasio and documents from the NYC DOE have emphasized diversity. In the 2017 report Equity and Excellence for All report (NYC DOE, 2017) the de Blasio administration outlined its vision, stating, "We believe all students benefit from a diverse and inclusive schools and classrooms where all students, families and school staff are supported and welcomed" (p. 2). The NYC DOE created three initial goals they view as aligned with this vision:

1. Increase the number of students in a racially representative school by 50,000 over the next five years;
2. Decrease the number of economically stratified schools by 10% (150 schools) in the next five years;
- and 3. Increase the number of inclusive schools that serve English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities (p. 4, emphasis in the original)

These underlined terms are then defined as being within a certain number of percentage points of the citywide average. Similarly, Mayor de Blasio promoted and lobbied the State government to

implement a SHS reform where the SHSAT was replaced with a 7% plan to address the “diversity problem” of SHS by creating school populations that are more racially and socioeconomically representative of the city population (de Blasio, 2018).

The “common sense” embedded in the NYC DOE’s/de Blasio’s proposals is that schools with representative demographics will solve the “diversity problem” by providing BIPOC, immigrant, disabled, and other groups of historically marginalized students with more resources and opportunities. This is akin to a “racial balance” logic that was a common interpretation of the *Brown* decision (Bell, 1976). School desegregation plans construed *Brown* as “mandating “equal educational opportunity”” regardless of whether those plans actually improved the education students received (ibid., p. 471). In other words, demographic shifts in schools do not require the system or individuals to make ideological or pedagogical shifts, which led to the paradoxical outcome where racial balancing plans created worse educational environments and outcomes for BIPOC students. For instance, segregated schools in the South had well-trained Black teachers that offered caring and affirming environments for Black students (V. S. Walker, 2000). which Mandated desegregation after *Brown* often disrupted these positive learning environments by forcing Black students in hostile majority white environments. Since white students were rarely asked to attend majority Black schools and because Black teachers were usually not allowed to teach in white schools, desegregation after *Brown* led to the dismissal and displacement of over 30,000 Black teachers (Tillman, 2004). As a result, it is unclear whether/how Mayor de Blasio’s proposals for more diverse and representative school demographics would, on their own, improve the educational environments and outcomes for historically marginalized students.

Unlike the two other groups, the youth activist groups do not take the current system and structures as a given. They challenge aspects of meritocratic ideologies and systems of education

that seem like “common sense.” For instance, IntegrateNYC’s vision for “Real Integration” explains that they “have learned from the past, and we do not want to stop at desegregation” (IntegrateNYC, 2021). Instead, their 5Rs of Real Integration (Race and Enrollment; Resources; Relationships; Restorative Justice; Representation) were created based on the belief that, “True, meaningful integration requires a transformation in our school system that centers students and communities of color” (ibid.). Given this approach, their vision for Race and Enrollment charges that all selective admissions policies are “racist and classist” and advocates for a community-designed replacement process (IntegrateNYC, 2020b). Similarly, their vision for Relationships advocates for changes to school culture and staff-student interactions including ethnic studies curricula that destabilize white middle class norms (ibid.). As a result, IntegrateNYC’s (and TTC’s) vision for the future goes beyond tinkering with existing structures and systems. They are seeking structural changes, including power shifts, in order to create systems that value and empower historically marginalized students and their communities.

Overall, there is a consistent pattern of reproducing, reforming, and challenging/transforming structures and systems in the three groups’ problem formations and policy proposals. The different ideological assumptions that underlie these patterns are summarized in Table 3. The traditional political advocacy group’s analysis and proposals reproduce current meritocratic logics of individualism, competition, hierarchy, and deservingness. While not entirely race evasive, these organizations engage individualized notions of opportunity and equity that ultimately reify whiteness. In the case of EEC, ideologies of whiteness are reified despite their spokesman and all of the people in their video advertisements being Black. EEC’s focus on individual achievement and merit diverts attention from how meritocratic structures like SHS, G&T, and the SHSAT have contributed to systemic racial inequities. Similarly, PLACE

NYC has four Asian American and one Latinx board member, but engagements with systemic oppression, racial, linguistic, or otherwise, are not discussed besides a vague commitment to “integrated classrooms” in their mission statement. These patterns align with Black resilience neoliberalism (Clay, 2019) and the model minority myth (Poon et al., 2016), which articulate how meritocracy ideology proliferates in Black and Asian American communities to reify whiteness. Meanwhile, Mayor de Blasio and the NYCDOE proposals acknowledge the raced and classed dimensions of SHSAT admissions, but they only seek to reform the current system by replacing the SHSAT with another merit-based admissions method that is more race conscious. This highlights the tenacity meritocracy ideology and the different forms it can take. The youth activist groups are the only group to challenge the broader ideology of meritocracy. They argue that all admission screens promote segregation and whiteness rather than academic merit. Their visions for future, like IntegrateNYC’s 5Rs for Integration, imagine how structures like admission screens, standardized tests, and Eurowestern curricula can be dismantled and transformed to create a new, non-hierarchical and more liberatory system.

**Table 3 Patterns of Ideological Logics Among Three Groups**

|   | Traditional political advocacy groups ( <i>Reproduce</i> ) | NYC DOE ( <i>Reform</i> ) | Youth activist groups ( <i>Challenge; Transform</i> ) |
|---|--|---------------------------|---|
| <i>Ideological logics</i>                   |  |                           |   |
| Individualism                               | X  | X                         | 0   |
| Competition and hierarchy                   | X  | X                         | 0   |
| Deservingness                               | X  | X                         | 0   |
| Individualized notion of racism             | X  | 0                         | 0   |
| Collectivism and solidarity                 | 0  | 0                         | X   |
| Meritocracy as promoting systemic whiteness | 0  | 0                         | X   |
| <i>Solutions or Future Visions</i>          |  |                           |   |
| Reinvest in current structures              | X  | X                         | 0   |
| Reform current structures & systems         | 0  | X                         | 0   |
| Conscious of systemic oppressions           | 0  | X                         | X   |
| Systemic and structural transformation      | 0  | 0                         | X   |

*Note.* “X” indicates presence in the discourse and “0” indicates a general absence in the discourse.

## 2.6.2 Politicking at the City and State Levels: The Grassroots and the Grasstops

The pattern of reproducing, reforming, or challenging meritocratic logics also describes how the three groups engaged power systems and their strategies for change.

While NYC DOE policy proposals are reform-oriented, their strategies and use of power in politicking demonstrated a tension between top-down approaches and seeking to engage stakeholders in the reform process. The top-down approach can be seen in de Blasio's decision to create a policy proposal that aimed to solve the "diversity problem" at SHS by replacing the SHSAT with a 7% plan where the top 7% of students from every middle school were eligible to attend (de Blasio, 2018). This approach to policy aligns with the top-down governance system of mayoral control, where the mayor and his high-level appointees create policies for the system. Yet, unlike admissions policies at all other schools in the NYC DOE, SHS are controlled by the state legislature due to the 1971 Hecht-Calandra Act discussed earlier. As a result, the de Blasio administration spent a lot of time lobbying their proposal in Albany, which was ultimately unsuccessful (Shapiro, 2019d).

The tension between the NYC DOE's top-down approach and their attempts to engage stakeholders in creating reforms can be seen in the administration's formation of the SDAG and their response to the SDAG's two reports. The SDAG and its stakeholder members were tasked with creating recommendations to help the NYCDOE meet its diversity goals. While the NYC DOE formally adopted 63 of the 68 recommendations (NYC DOE, 2019a) of the SDAG's (SDAG, 2019a) first report, there have not been public follow-ups or accountability towards their implementation. Further, Mayor de Blasio never formally responded to the SDAG's second, more controversial report that recommended eliminating G&T programs as well as most middle and high school admission screens due to their troubled history and inequitable outcomes (SDAG,

2019b). While the de Blasio administration promoted reform in rhetoric and their SHS policy, their inaction in creating policies based on SDAG recommendations and the demands of youth activist groups indicates a tendency towards a top-down, grass tops approach to reform.

The content and process of the mayor's 7% reform fueled the political actions of both the traditional political advocacy and youth activist organizations. The traditional political advocacy organizations were opposed to changing SHS and their admissions process and resisted the Mayor's reform by engaging in top-down strategies like utilizing the power and resources of its founders and members to engage in political lobbying campaigns. For instance, EEC's wealthy founders created a multimillion dollar advertising campaign (Shapiro, 2019c) and PLACE NYC's founders are in leadership positions in school districts and in the PTAs of the "elite" schools that their children attend. They used these connections and influence to lobby parents and politicians against the reforms (PLACE NYC, 2020a) and have promoted multiple petitions and letter writing campaigns to maintain existing meritocratic and stratifying structures like G&T programs and middle school screens during the pandemic (e.g., Chu et al., 2020; PLACE NYC, 2020b, 2020d). These top-down lobbying efforts may have been key reasons why de Blasio's SHSAT reform was unsuccessful in June 2019 (Amin, 2019).

While the traditional political advocacy groups see the de Blasio administration's reforms as a threat to the NYC DOE's "elite" programs, the youth activist groups do not think Mayor de Blasio went far enough to address racism and other systemic inequities in the NYC DOE. In response, both groups engaged in direct action tactics. These included TTC's City Hall sit-in and weekly school strikes during 2019 (TTC, 2020a; Veiga, 2019b) and IntegrateNYC's distribution of 25,000 newspapers and a rally in Times Square on the 65th anniversary of *Brown* to "Retire Segregation" (IntegrateNYC, 2019b). These acts succeeded in getting media attention and

meetings at City Hall. Still, TTC have continually expressed frustration with Mayor de Blasio for his inaction and delays to youth demands (Lehrer, 2019). Along with direct action, TTC and IntegrateNYC are also building grassroots coalitions for their campaigns across NYC and the country. On TTC's Education Unscreened campaign, for instance, they list over 30 community organizations that are campaign partners, including IntegrateNYC, Black Lives Matter chapters, the Movement of Rank & File Educators, and other organizations focused on education equity and racial justice (TTC, 2020a). These strategies suggest a bottom-up or grassroots approach that aims to challenge and transform existing systems and structures that the other two groups utilize to push their policy agendas.

At the same time, both youth activist groups recently engaged in litigation and partnerships with larger organizations to support their campaigns, which may signal a strategy to combine grassroots strategies with grassroots approaches. For example, TTC co-hosted a virtual summit in February 2021 with the UCLA Civil Rights Project that was sponsored by a foundation (Soloman E. Summerfield Foundation) and a grassroots parents movement (Integrated Schools) (TTC, 2021). We do not know the nature of these partnerships, but, historically, grassroots organizations in NYC (like the Parents' Workshop) and nationwide organizations (like the NAACP) that worked to integrate schools in the 1950s and 60s often disagreed about strategies and the extent to which they should leverage, negotiate, and challenge existing power structures (C. Taylor, 1997). While disagreements and dissent can be productive spaces, the larger and more powerful organizations can replicate top-down tactics by pressuring the radical and less powerful groups to follow their strategies grounded in reform-oriented ideologies. In addition, both youth activist groups are using the court system to protest what they viewed as the administration's inaction in making system-wide changes to promote more

equitable schools (*IntegrateNYC, Inc. Vs. The State of New York*, 2021; *TTC vs. NYC DOE*, 2020). While litigation may increase political pressure or hasten some changes to the system, we wonder if the youth activist groups recognize the tension in this strategy since critical legal scholarship highlights how changes in law tend to *preserve* existing power dynamics through an apparent *transformation* of law or legal structures (Siegel, 1997). For this reason, it is questionable the extent to which law and the legal system—as historical tools of white supremacy, colonialism, and other oppressive systems—can be used to substantively transform these systems (e.g., Bell, 1980, 1992b, 2004; Gotanda, 1991; Harris, 1993).

### **2.6.3 (Lack of) Connections to History**

A third way the three groups engage in reproduction, reform, and/or challenge meritocratic logics is in their use of history. The youth activist groups see the study of history as a core component of their organizing and activism and they particularly draw from the legacy of *Brown* and the Civil Rights Movement. The SDAG also draws on history, particularly in their argument against G&T programs. Meanwhile, the policy texts of the NYC DOE and the traditional political advocacy groups are generally ahistorical, which is typical in traditional policy analysis (Horsford et al., 2019).

The one exception to EEC and PLACE NYC’s ahistoricism is their reference to the former demographics of Brooklyn Tech, one of the SHS. EEC and PLACE NYC’s use of the historical demographics of Brooklyn Tech seek to legitimate the meritocratic ideology of SHS and the SHSAT by countering the idea that these structures necessarily promote racial discrimination. In an op-ed, board members of PLACE NYC attempt to use the fact that Brooklyn Tech “was over 50 percent black and Hispanic for two decades” (in the 1970s and 80s) to suggest that SHS can

promote “diversity” (Chu et al., 2020). Similarly, EEC’s spokesman Kirsten Foy claims that in this era Brooklyn Tech was “a beacon of diversity and a beacon of hope for communities of color all throughout the city” (EEC 2019).

While their interpretations are based on real data, how these organizations construe the historical demographics of Brooklyn Tech is misleading at best. For one, SHS serve a small percentage of high school students in the NYC DOE (approximately 6%), so the idea that these schools have ever served communities of color well is an overstatement. Second, Figure 1 shows that Brooklyn Tech was an outlier compared to Stuyvesant and Bronx Science, where Black and Latinx students have always been underrepresented (Shapiro & Lai, 2019). In addition, historic demographics are largely irrelevant to the modern-day circumstances of applying to SHS because of the recent explosion of test prep centers. Figure 2 shows test prep centers’ exponential growth in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx over the last 15 years (ibid.). Test prep for the SHSAT is now ubiquitous and expensive, which is why both EEC and PLACE NYC are demanding citywide test prep. However, it is naïve to think universal SHSAT prep will eliminate this “pay-to-play” model that advantages those with more resources. Thus, even if Brooklyn Tech was a “beacon of diversity” in the 70s and 80s, it only served a small percentage of NYC DOE students and was an outlier among the other SHS. Further, the recent growth of private test prep has exacerbated the structural inequities of the SHSAT over the last two decades, making comparisons to earlier eras misleading.

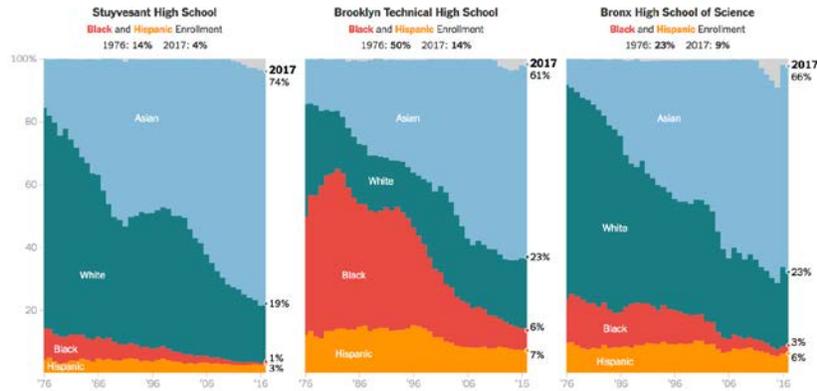


Figure 1 SHS enrollment by race from 1976 to 2016 (Shapiro & Lai, 2019)

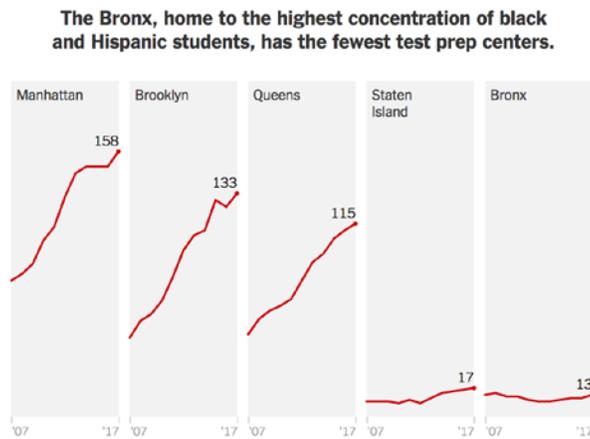


Figure 2 Growth of test prep centers by borough 2007-2017 (Shapiro & Lai, 2019)

In contrast, both youth activist groups emphasize how history informs their organizing and policy activism. By far, the most referenced historical era is the Civil Rights Movement. IntegrateNYC often alludes to *Brown* to make political and moral warrants about the necessity for eliminating admissions screens:

In honor of the 66th anniversary of Brown vs Board of Education...We are calling on Mayor Bill de Blasio, Chancellor Richard Carranza, and the NYC DOE to eliminate all exclusionary public school admissions "screens." (IntegrateNYC, 2020a)

IntegrateNYC also has a whole section of their website called "Teach In," which explains the history behind each of the 5R's of Real Integration. Three of the five R's pull from the Civil Rights

era including events like *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946), the 1964 Freedom Day school boycott, and The Boston busing crisis (IntegrateNYC, 2020d). They also reference groups and events from the community control era including the Black Panthers, the Rainbow Coalition, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district. However, Integrate NYC does not compare or discuss how these community control approaches differed from the integrationist ideals of the Civil Rights movement. Though this historicizing the 5 R's connects and situates their work within the legacy and struggle of the Civil Rights Movement, the framework does not explain how these varied strategies and future visions have been negotiated and utilized within their campaigns.

TTC's campaigns also often engage in historical contextualization. In their "Repeal Hecht-Calandra" campaign they call the 1971 Hecht-Calandra Act "a racist piece of legislation" that was "intentionally designed to thwart the city's efforts to integrate the four "Specialized High Schools" (TTC, 2020c). TTC critiques the official reasoning and meritocratic ideology of the Act, which was to "maintain high standards," a phrase that they argue suggests "the presence of Black and Brown students in these schools would somehow decrease their quality" (ibid.). TTC also highlights the historical concern about maintaining "high standards" at SHS echoes current arguments to keep admission screens, like PLACE NYC's "matching" rhetoric discussed earlier.

## **2.7 Discussion**

In this discussion, we draw connections between the findings from our analysis and the historic struggles over governance and integration in New York City.

### 2.7.1 Tensions between Mayoral Control, School Choice, and Integration

One peculiar omission we noticed throughout the youth activist groups' analysis was a lack of critique or a push for alternatives to mayoral control and/or school choice. As we discussed in the historical section, governance models have been a key point of disagreement and struggle in NYC since the *Brown* decision. The current system of mayoral control began under Mayor Bloomberg in 2002 when this centralized, top-down governance model and free market ideology was promoted as an antidote to the inefficiencies of democratic processes and government bureaucracies (Chubb & Moe, 1988; F. M. Hess, 2008).

Mayoral control's market framing of public schools also led to school choice expansion under Bloomberg. Many researchers have widely critiqued school choice policies as part of a larger trend of disinvesting in public schools and services, eroding community schools, and creating worse situations for historically disinvested communities of color (Stovall, 2020). In New York City, we see evidence of this in both primary and secondary schools. For instance, Sattin-Bajaj & Roda's (2018) research on parent behaviors in the high school choice application process demonstrate that affluent parents in the NYC DOE are able to use their resources to hoard opportunities. In addition, Sattin-Bajaj's (2012) survey of students' experiences with the high school application process showed that students' nativity, generational status, and academic track were correlated with different resources and resulting behaviors in the search and selection of high schools. Choice in NYC DOE kindergarten programs "may be contributing to school segregation, above and beyond the impact of persistent and pervasive housing segregation" (Mader et al., 2018).

While mayoral control and market ideologies are largely compatible with EEC and PLACE NYC's status quo policies and the NYC DOE's reforms, they strike us as largely incompatible

with the systemic and transformative changes IntegrateNYC and TTC advocate for. However, the market ideology embedded mayoral control and school choice systems are not directly critiqued by youth activist groups. For instance, TTC's Title VI complaint lists neither mayoral control nor school choice as a problem or (potential) systemic barrier that should be addressed. Instead, youth activist groups identify structures of these systems (e.g, admission screens, G&T programs, the Hecht-Calandra Act) as the primary targets for change. Historically, increased screening occurred after Bloomberg implemented system-wide high school choice under his mayoral control (Disare, 2016; Hu & Harris, 2018), which suggests that admission screens may be a symptom rather than the root of the problem.

We wonder the extent to which the lack of engagement with mayoral control and school choice are intentional/strategic or are an oversight. One reason youth activist groups may be focusing on eliminating structures of school choice rather than school choice itself is because the prior system of geographic zoning was also fraught by residential segregation and structural racism. Choice may seem like a better (or only) alternative. However, the elimination of all admission screens without addressing market ideologies of choice and the top-down governance of mayoral control leaves the door open for new ways to stratify students and opportunities even in the absence of formal admission screens. As a result, we think the governance model of mayoral control and the market ideology that underlie it are important to grapple with if the youth activist groups are in pursuit of transformative change, rather than within-system reform.

Varied visions of governance and structures that support a “good” education are part of the long-term struggle for Black, Latinx, and other marginalized groups in NYC to create better educational systems for their children and communities. Historically, different visions of improving education for BIPOC students have led to the promotion of different governance

structures. Recall, for instance, the division between Black and Puerto Rican activists in the 1950s and 60s who wanted to work towards integrationist ideals under a centralized BOE or working towards community control and self-determination. The tensions between integration and community control remain, though different, in today's system of mayoral control. Ideologically, mayoral control and school choice have historically served to position public institutions and democratic processes as inefficient and ineffective (Chubb & Moe, 1988) in order to promote privatization and the private interests of individuals with power and resources (Stovall, 2020). In NYC and in other cities, market ideology and policies have served to reinforce existing power structures and undermine the democratic power and self-determination of communities, particularly historically disenfranchised communities (Lewis, 2013; Stovall, 2020). We point out these tensions in hopes that mayoral control and school choice do not become “common sense,” such that youth activist and community organizations do not recognize governance systems and school zoning as structures that can, and should, be reimaged to create supportive and empowering learning environments, particularly for historically marginalized students and communities.

### **2.7.2 Limits and Tensions of Promoting Justice Through the Judicial System**

Litigation is a new strategy for both youth activist organizations and both of their cases make arguments about the discriminatory nature of admission screens, particularly for high school admissions. TTC and IntegrateNYC filed a federal complaint in November 2020 and a state lawsuit in March 2021, respectively. History gives us reason to be skeptical that winning these court cases will, by itself, lead to policy changes in the NYC DOE that lessen systemic harms and oppressions. For example, Bell (2004) came to see *Brown* as a symbolic victory that did not reform “the

ideology of racial domination that *Plessy v. Ferguson* represented” after his experiences litigating desegregation cases as a lawyer for the NAACP in the 1960s (p. 9). While the *Brown* decision is often lauded as a “perfect precedent,” Bell explains that its perfection lies in its ability to reproduce the existing system while apparently reforming it (p. 5). The ability of law and policy to reconstitute the racial state has been echoed in educational research (e.g., Aggarwal, 2016; Au, 2016; Horsford, 2017; Thompson Dorsey, 2013). We can also see this process in EEC’s rhetoric where they attempt to blame “the system” for racial inequities while proposing policies that double down on the current system’s structures.

However, this is not to say that the litigation can provide no benefits. In particular, we are hopeful that these court cases may motivate new people to join TTC's and IntegrateNYC’s fight. Bell (2004) argues that this was “the major value” of *Brown* and occurred due to media coverage that brought white resistance into public view and “appalled many who otherwise would have remained on the sidelines” (p. 7). We suspect that TTC and IntegrateNYC’s court cases, whatever the outcomes, have the potential to amplify their message and expand their coalition. Still, if the ultimate goal is dismantling and transforming the current system, then favorable court rulings cannot be viewed as a victory or end in itself, but as just one of many strategies necessary to mobilize more people and continue the struggle.

Given the youth activist groups’ use of Civil Rights history and their willingness to engage “radical” strategies and ideas in their campaigns, we wonder what other frameworks and concepts from the Black radical traditions (e.g., Hartman, 2008; Kelley, 2002; Robinson, 2005); endarkened feminist epistemologies (e.g., Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2000; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015; K.Y. Taylor, 2019); and/or decolonial theories (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2012; Grande, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012) may be helpful in describing current conditions and providing alternative societal

ideals and models of governance. In any case, more important than the particular framework(s) used is that the processes of theorizing, imagining, and strategizing for the future are collectively engaged and center the experiences and understandings of those oppressed by the current system.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The debates in New York City about admissions screens and integration will continue to be an ongoing struggle. While all stakeholder groups proclaim to want to improve the NYC DOE, particularly for low-income students and students of color, our critical analysis of policy texts revealed divergent policies and visions for the future. The three stakeholder groups studied either sought to reform (NYC DOE), reproduce (traditional political advocacy groups), or challenge (youth activist groups) current structures and systems. We argued that these differences were due to different ideologies of meritocracy and different understandings of systemic oppression.

Key ideological differences between the three groups can be highlighted by two assumptions of the current system of school choice and admission screens: (1) students should be sorted or “matched” into schools based on academic achievement and (2) this sorting can be done fairly/equitably with the existing tests and screens. The traditional political advocacy groups agree with both assumptions, seeing sorting and competition among students as a meritocratic necessity. The NYC DOE recognizes some mechanisms of sorting like the SHSAT are inequitable and unfair (2), but do not challenge (1) the idea that students should be sorted based on achievement-based metrics. In challenging both assumptions, the youth activist highlight the myth of meritocracy and argue how the stratification of students and schools

reproduces inequality and oppression. In response, they challenge the practice of admission screens and are working to collectively reimagine alternative structures for a more just educational system.

Given this pursuit, we explained why youth activist groups should recognize their work as part of the longer-term struggle of NYC community activists grappling with different forms of governance including the tensions between mayoral control and community control, community schools and school choice, and integration and self-determination. So far, Mayor de Blasio's reforms were never implemented, the SDAG's suggestions are in limbo, and the proposals of TTC and IntegrateNYC have been predictably met with resistance at the city and state level. Still, the youth activist groups, along with the traditional political advocacy groups, continue to organize and campaign and hope to influence the policy decisions of the city's next mayor. Whether and how current ideologies and power structures in the NYC DOE will calcify and/or shift in the next mayoral administration remains to be seen.

### **3.0 PAPER 2: HISTORICIZING CALLS TO DEFUND THE SCHOOL POLICE: RACIALIZATIONS OF SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE IN THE PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

#### **3.1 Abstract**

Since the uprisings against police brutality and anti-Black racism in the spring and summer of 2020, there have been renewed and expanded calls to defund and abolish police forces in cities and school districts across the U.S. These calls have been highly contested. A proposal from the Board of Directors of the Pittsburgh Public Schools to remove the district's school police officers (SPOs) led to a public hearing in June 2020. Public hearing testimonies were given by a wide variety of stakeholders, creating a unique case to study stakeholder reasonings and "common sense" ideas about policing and their connection to race, racism, and safety. This study utilizes historical analysis to contextualize the public hearing in a longer historical trajectory and critical discourse analysis to identify patterns of language use and sensemaking. Speakers who wanted to keep or remove SPOs differed in whether engaged or challenged "common sense" about policing and safety; the extent to which they used statistical evidence that showed raced, gendered, and dis/abled outcomes; and whether they could disentangle the idea of safety from systems of policing and punishment. These findings reveal salient ideological contestations between groups that serve to either foreground or obscure how antiblackness is, currently and historically, embedded in systems of policing.

### 3.2 Introduction

In press releases and mayoral tweets, Pittsburgh is often touted as one of the “Most Livable Cities” in the U.S. (Ebersson, 2018). Yet, in September 2019, the City of Pittsburgh’s Gender Equity Commission released a report that showed Pittsburgh was one the worst places for Black people, and Black women in particular, to live based on inequalities in income, health, employment, and education outcomes (Howell et al., 2019). Another report released by The Black Girls Equity Alliance, (2020) details how Black youth in Pittsburgh, and particularly Black girls, are criminalized in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). For example, in 2019, Black girls were eleven times more likely than white girls to be arrested, while Black boys were nine times more likely to be arrested than white boys (p. 5). In addition, both Black girls and Black boys were more likely to be arrested by the PPS police than the city police (ibid.). PPS not only has one of the highest suspension rates in the state of Pennsylvania (ACLU, 2016), but in a review of the district by the Council of the Great City Schools (2016), PPS had “ the highest [suspension] rate of all major cities on which we have data on” (p. 67).

The over-policing, over-disciplining, and high levels of surveillance that Black and Latinx students face within schools are well-documented forms of systemic racism and anti-Blackness in the U.S. educational system (e.g., Annamma, 2016; Dumas, 2014; Morris, 2016; Shedd, 2015; Vaught, 2017). The nationwide uprisings in the wake of the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, Tony McDade, and too many other Black people, have expanded calls to defund and abolish not just city police forces, but school police forces as well. As in many other U.S. cities, these calls have been met in Pittsburgh with both a groundswell of support and strong opposition. Which of these perspectives is able to garner support and power within communities, schools, and other institutions are of great consequence; it determines where

resources get allocated, how institutions are structured, how people relate to each other, and whether a long history of anti-Black criminalization and dehumanization will be reproduced or interrupted (Gilmore, 2007; Kaba, 2021; Kaba & Meiners, 2014).

These competing perspectives came to a head in June 2020 after two PPS Board members proposed the removal of the district's 22 school police officers (SPOs) and the investment of those funds into other support services for students. The move was supported by 16 local and regional nonprofits and advocacy organizations, who started a petition to support the measure (ACLU PA et al., 2020). However, other stakeholders including some teachers, administrators, parents, students, and union representatives supported keeping SPOs. On June 22 and 23, 2020, there was a live two-day virtual public hearing to discuss the proposal. 141 speakers submitted written testimony to be read aloud by district administrators. The public hearing was polarized, with 54% (n=76) of speakers supporting the removal of SPOs, 43% (n=60) supporting status quo practices, and 3% (n=5) promoting reforms. Those that supported SPOs viewed them as necessary to keep students and staff safe, and emphasized that SPOs are kind and dedicated professionals. Those who supported the removal of SPOs framed the issue systemically. They provided evidence that demonstrated the disproportionate harms that Black boys, Black girls, and students with disabilities experience under systems of school policing. After the public hearing, the Board decided to create the Re-imagine School Safety Task Force rather than vote on the proposal. The task force had its first meeting on January 21, 2021 and is still ongoing as of May 2021.

The public hearing testimonies are a unique data source for studying stakeholders' discourse and narratives of school policing and its connection to race, racism, and safety. These stakeholder views are not typically aired in public. For this reason, the public testimonies provide

unique insight into stakeholders' ideologies, or the mental frameworks that they use to make sense of safety and policing. The research questions guiding this study are:

- How do different groups construct arguments about school safety and the role of SPOs and systems of policing? What racialized meanings and ideological commitments do these arguments reveal?
- How can the history of safety, policing, and racism in PPS help us understand these racializations and ideological contestations about safety and policing?
- How can these historical and empirical inquiries help stakeholders resist reforms, practices, and collective action that (re)produce carceral logics and antiblackness?

To address these questions, I engage in both historical and critical discourse analysis. The purpose is two-fold. First, discourse analysis can identify the patterned ways that stakeholders make sense of and/or challenge the current realities of policing in PPS. This includes what kinds of evidence, experiences, and beliefs are explicitly and implicitly drawn on, and which are obscured. Second, this descriptive account paired with historical context can help communities and stakeholders strategize future actions. While my focus will be on Pittsburgh and PPS, this case study may highlight challenges and opportunities that are relevant to other communities and school districts.

### **3.3 Historical & Current Context of PPS**

Critical approaches to policy and discourse analysis emphasize the importance of historicism (e.g., Fairclough, 2003; Horsford, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006). As Horsford and colleagues (2019) explain in their discussion of critical policy analysis, a deep historical understanding of how systems of oppression have been institutionalized is needed to understand current distributions of power and resources:

Questions of how power and resources are distributed must be understood in terms of how political actors at global, national, and local levels are linked. This involves...a deep historical understanding of how power has become institutionalized particularly around class, race, and gender. (p. 40)

Studying history allows us to uncover the human-created origins today's prevailing power structures and relationships. History shows that today's conditions are not "natural" nor "inevitable," but the material and sociocognitive products of human decisions. History also reveals how "common sense" logics and systems can be challenged and changed. On the other hand, dominant approaches to policy and practice in education (and other institutions), often engage in color evasive and ahistoric discourses that both normalize and inevitabilize current systems of oppression (Dumas, 2014). These discourses serve to reproduce the current system by promoting ideas and practices that foreclose the possibility of creating alternative systems and more liberatory futures (Clay, 2019; Kaba, 2021).

While a thorough historical analysis of PPS is outside the scope of this paper, I outline how, since its inception, PPS's policies and practices have repeatedly produced (intentionally or not) anti-Black outcomes. In particular, a historical look at PPS's (de)segregation policies illuminates how the concept of safety has long been racialized and intersects with school discipline and policing practices. With this historical framing, we are able to understand that school policing is not a race-neutral practice, nor is it an aberrant practice of anti-Black violence in schools. Instead, the current struggle over school policing is just one chapter in a much longer story of anti-Black violence in PPS and Black resistance to institutionalized white supremacy and oppression.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools were founded in 1835 after the Pennsylvania Legislature passed the Common School Law of 1834 (Heinz History Center, n.d.). While the school system technically outlawed racial segregation in 1881, very few schools in the district allowed Black and white students to attend the same schools. In 1926, historians Trotter & Day (2010) report that out of the 106 public elementary schools in Pittsburgh, only 20 admitted any Black students (p. 13). In addition, no Black teachers were hired in the district between 1881 and 1937 (ibid.). The Board of Education's (BOE) hostility towards Black teachers was also not a secret. When a Black resident of the Hill District, Thomas Harrison, asked the BOE about employing Black teachers in 1934, the BOE's solicitor replied,

colored teachers never will teach white children in the City of Pittsburgh. Such a step would be suicidal and would bring upon the Board of Education the condemnation of the entire community (ibid.)

It was only after State Representative Homer Brown exposed the BOE's discriminatory hiring practices in 1937 that two Black teachers were hired in the district. Prior to 1937, none of the district's 3000 teachers were Black (Sizemore, 2008, p. 132). Still, residential and institutional segregation persisted. At the end of WWII, about 10% of Pittsburgh's public school students were Black, but there remained only two full-time Black teachers in the entire district (Trotter & Day, 2010, pp. 38-39). The discriminatory working conditions in the BOE mirrored broader trends of employment discrimination in Pittsburgh. According to a 1942 state report, 50 percent of Pittsburgh firms barred Black workers from employment or relegated them to the lowest rungs of the employment ladder (ibid., p. 39). Similar to nationwide trends, Black teachers remain underrepresented in PPS. In the 2016-2017 school year, while 53% of PPS's students and 23% of the city population were Black, only 14% of PPS's teachers were Black (Research for Action,

2018).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, residential segregation has persisted in Pittsburgh, aided by redlining and natural geographic barriers like rivers and hills. Three maps that demonstrate the persistent connections between redlining, residential segregation, and school enrollments are in Appendix B.

Black students also faced anti-Black discrimination and oppression within PPS, both before and after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Black schools were often overcrowded and poorly maintained by the district, even though the number of predominantly Black schools increased from nine to nineteen between 1955 and 196 (Trotter & Day, 2010, p. 83). In addition to Black schools being given less resources, many Black students faced hostile learning environments. Black teacher Alice Bernice Walker recounts that Fifth Avenue High School enlisted the police to discipline Black children. Administrators permitted policemen to take Black male students into an alley and beat them for “misbehaving” in school (ibid.). According to historian and former PPS student Ralph Proctor, Black students in PPS also experienced slower forms of violence like counselors and teachers advising Black students to pursue vocational classes and careers, while white students were placed in academic tracks to prepare for college (ibid.). Still, the Black community and Black teachers worked to create school environments that supported Black students. For instance, educator and scholar Barbara Sizemore studied the “abashing anomaly” of high achieving African American elementary schools in Pittsburgh throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Sizemore, 1988, 2008).<sup>3</sup> Though the success of these schools were often unacknowledged by the district, Sizemore’s research showed that they all created organizational structures, routines, and practices that centered high expectations and achievement for Black students (ibid.).

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<sup>2</sup> 85% of the district’s 1,743 teachers were white while the remaining teachers were Hispanic (1%) and multi-racial (0.5%). The remaining student population was 33% white, 8% multi-racial, 3.5% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 0.17% American Indian or Alaskan Native.

<sup>3</sup> These schools included Beltzhoover, Vann, and Madison Elementary Schools, all of which were closed in the early 2000s.

From the 1960s until 1996, PPS failed to create a desegregation plan that was approved by the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC), the statewide body that monitored desegregation (Heinz History Center, n.d.).<sup>4</sup> During this time, PPS implemented many unapproved desegregation strategies including: open enrollment, district-wide redistricting, new school construction, busing, and magnet schools. The focus in all of these plans was the “racial balancing” of school demographics to align with district-wide enrollment percentages, per the PHRC guidelines. At the same time, Pittsburgh was experiencing, like many U.S. cities, deindustrialization, urban disinvestment, and white flight to the suburbs. While the population of Pittsburgh was decreasing, the percentage of Black residents and Black students rose (Trotter & Day, 2010).

### **3.3.1 The Knoxville Case: Connecting Desegregation, Safety, and Policing**

One of PPS’s early attempts at desegregation exemplifies the racialization of safety and policing. In 1971, white students at Concord Elementary in the Carrick neighborhood were rezoned from Overbrook, a white junior high school, to a majority Black junior high, Knoxville, in the neighboring Beltzhoover neighborhood. Both junior high schools were less than three miles from Concord Elementary and, due to the hilly terrain of the area, both schools required students to be bussed (Anon, 1971a; Kishkunas, 1971). While white parents in the Northeast and Midwest commonly protested busing as a color evasive tactic to prevent desegregation (Delmont, 2016), the necessity of bussing Concord students to attend the white junior high meant that white parents had to find another “race neutral” reason to object to Knoxville.

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<sup>4</sup> In 1996, Republican Governor Tom Ridge signed a bill that stripped the authority of the PHRC to enforce desegregation plans.

After only attending Knoxville for a few days, about 50 Carrick parents stopped sending their children to Knoxville and filed a lawsuit against PPS alleging that Knoxville was “unsafe.” A letter from the attorney representing the 50 Carrick parents sent to PPS’s superintendent on October 4, 1971 reads:

As per the School Board meeting last Saturday with the parents and committee members at the Concord School, we are submitting the enclosed alleged incidents that occurred on Knoxville premises. Because of the numerous threats to the *health, safety and welfare* of the children and the *traumatic* effect upon them, we are formally requesting that the Board direct that said students be sent to Overbrook School to continue their education.<sup>5</sup>

The attached list of alleged incidents is a four-page document of sentence fragments that lists dates and purported incidents. No names or descriptions of students are provided, nor is any context or evidence for the alleged incidents provided. The incidents range in severity from “Seat pushed into aisle three times,” to “harassed for money,” and “punched in the eye.” This lawsuit launched a slew of newspaper articles and local debates. In the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* alone, there were 30 articles about the case between September and November of 1971. Many writers make clear the racial dimensions of the case and its implications for future desegregation policies. The superintendent and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (PFT) supported Knoxville students and staff, proclaiming that Knoxville was a “good school” and a “safe school.”<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the Carrick parents secured donations from local organizations, including the Fraternal Order of Police (Anon, 1971b).

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<sup>5</sup> This and other historical PPS documents in this article were found in the Guide to the Records of Pittsburgh Public Schools (1870-1980) at the John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh, PA. The memo quoted above was in Box 167, Folder 7.

<sup>6</sup> Statement of Dr. Louis J. Kishkunas at Knoxville Junior High School on September 15, 1972 and “PFT Backs Knoxville Junior High School Faculty and Educational Program: Reiterates Support for School Board’s Reorganization Efforts” on October 28, 1971. Both were in Box 167, Folder 7.

But, in keeping with the color evasive assumptions of the legal system (Bell, 2004; Gotanda, 1991), neither the Allegheny Court of Common Pleas decision in November 1971 nor the September 1972 appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court based their decisions on race, desegregation, or integration. These were issues deemed irrelevant to the case.<sup>7</sup> For Black writers and community members at the *Courier*, there was a cruel irony in white parents appealing to the court for their children's safety when Black students were facing harassment and violence committed by white students (Anon, 1971c; Perry, 1971a), which was abetted "by their compatriot, sympathetic white police partners in crime" (Perry, 1971b). While the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ultimately overruled the Common Pleas injunction in September 1972, the BOE passed a resolution (7-3) two months later proclaiming they "do not endorse forced busing for racial balance purposes."<sup>8</sup>

It was also during the Knoxville legal battle when the BOE first requested, on December 21, 1971, to give four Security Department employees at PPS the ability "to act as policemen for the School District, with the accompanying powers and responsibilities for police officers."<sup>9</sup> These four employees included Stanley Rideout, a Black WWII veteran and former juvenile probation officer, who served as the chief of school security and police in PPS until 1996 (Crompton, 2019). As the district continued to develop and implement desegregation plans in the 70s, school discipline became a topic of focus. In November 1973, PPS released A Bill of Student Rights, Responsibilities and Grievance procedures.<sup>10</sup> In May 1975, the BOE president appointed an Ad

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<sup>7</sup> In the Common Pleas case, the judge's ruling explicitly states he is not making a ruling on PPS's integration policies, but granted an injunction to protect the children's safety and welfare (which denied these as racialized concepts). The PA Supreme Court case overruled the injunction on procedural grounds, not on substantive arguments related to race or integration.

<sup>8</sup> Pittsburgh Board of Education Minute Books, Box 193, 1972-73 School Year, November, 21, 1972, p. 66-67.

<sup>9</sup> Pittsburgh Board of Education Minute Books, Box 193, 1971-72 School Year, December 21, 1971, p. 98.

<sup>10</sup> Box 176, Folder 6

Hoc Committee on School Discipline and Security.<sup>11</sup> In November 1975, this Ad Hoc Committee recommended that corporeal punishment (namely, paddling), be reinstated, which was narrowly voted down by the BOE, 7-8.<sup>12</sup> Restoring corporeal punishment was a demand of the December 1975 teachers' strike by PFT, which exacerbated tensions with the Black community, who saw the policy as disproportionately impacting students of color (Deppen, 2018). The motion for corporeal punishment was reintroduced three more times in 1976 and 77, twice by the Ad Hoc committee and once by Board member Jean Fink. All motions narrowly failed.<sup>13</sup>

In 1993 and 2018, there were two motions to arm SPOs. These motions were proposed by two Black police chiefs, Stanley Rideout and George Brown. Both attempts were ultimately unsuccessful, but both were backed by PFT leaders (Behrman, 2018; Fondy, 1993; Lee, 1993; Niederberger, 2018). PFT is also against the current proposal to remove SPOs from PPS. The fact that PFT represents SPOs and school security aides (SSAs), and that SPOs are overseen by PPS is an unusual arrangement since most school police forces have agreements with city police forces. With SPOs being more deeply enmeshed in both PPS and paraprofessional union, this may present even more obstacles for systemic reforms. Further, while the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) put out a resolution in June 2020 that stated "school safety should be separated from policing and police forces" (AFT, 2020), leaders in the PFT chapter continue to support keeping a school police force.

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<sup>11</sup> Pittsburgh Board of Education Minute Books, Box 194, 1974-75 School Year, May 2, 1975, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Pittsburgh Board of Education Minute Books, Box 194, 1976-76 School Year, November 25, 1975, p. 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> Pittsburgh Board of Education Minute Books, Box 194: March 23, 1976; January 26, 1977; July 27, 1977.

### **3.3.2 Ongoing Struggle of the 1992 Advocates for African American Students Complaint**

Along with the ongoing debate about whether to remove SPOs, PPS is also in a conciliation agreement with the Advocates for African American Students based on a complaint they filed with the PHRC against the district in 1992. In it, the Advocates cited inequities between white and Black students in terms of resources, academic achievement, discipline outcomes, and representation in gifted and special education programs (Born, 2017). PPS fought the complaint, but the PHRC found these claims to have standing in 1996. Afterwards, the case stalled for almost a decade. According to Wanda Henderson, one of the original Advocates and current chair of PPS's Equity Advisory Panel, the case was seen as "too hot to handle. Nobody in Pittsburgh wanted to deal with it, because they told us if they took it, that would end their career" (interview, March 17, 2021). Eventually, the head of the PHRC, Homer Floyd, had the case transferred back to Harrisburg (ibid.). While the district never admitted wrongdoing, a Conciliation Agreement was finalized in 2006 with 86 agreements related to addressing the inequities outlined in the complaint as well as monitoring and oversight mechanisms (PHRC, 2006). Having not made sufficient progress towards the goals in the Agreement in 2015, the PHRC and PPS entered into a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The 58 items in this MOU guide the district's current On Track to Equity Plan (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2019).

Since its inception in the nineteenth century, PPS has persistently created structures and policies that, unwittingly or not, promote antiblackness. These include hiring practices, desegregation policies, discipline policies, and school and city policing practices that create hostile and unsupportive learning environments for marginalized groups, and particularly for Black students. This history is important for contextualizing the current debates. As activist Mariame Kaba (2021) explains, "History is instructive, not because it offers us a blueprint for how to act in

the present, but because it can help us ask better questions for the future” (p. 15). In this case, history instructs that safety, discipline, and policing are racialized, rather than race neutral ideas and practices. History demonstrates that policing and discipline policies in PPS (and beyond) play(ed) a role in harming and criminalizing Black students.

### **3.4 Literature Review**

#### **3.4.1 Ideology and the “common sense” of the carceral logics**

Analyzing ideology embedded in discourse is helpful for understanding how people and organizations make sense of police, policing, safety, racism, and their interrelations. *Ideologies* are the mental frameworks (e.g., language and concepts) that social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works (Hall, 1996, p. 29). A benefit of ideology is that it highlights the connections between individual sensemaking and systems of power (Philip, 2011). I do not use ideology as a pejorative term, but as a way to describe how individuals and groups can conceptualize, legitimize, and enact varied visions of “safety” in schools and society more broadly. Rather than being deterministic, ideologies require grappling with both its stability and dynamism (ibid.). Ideologies are “durable” or “stable” in the sense that they can persist across time and translate to different contexts. Ideologies are also “fragmentary, disjointed, and episodic” because they are rarely fully articulated, often contradictory, and have the ability to transform (Hall, 1996, p. 42). As a result, it is helpful to imagine ideology as “not operat[ing] through single ideas; they articulate (i.e., connect) elements such as concepts, representations, images, assumptions, and episodic memories” (Philip, 2011, p. 186).

Ideologies are key to the process of (re)establishing dominant ideas and sensemaking that acquire power and justify current systems and practices. In education, ideologies are often (re)produced in educational policy and discourse. Sonja Horsford and colleagues (2019) explain that policy is driven by ideology and values, not just “rational” analysis of data and outcomes. When policymakers, administrators, and teachers decide what policies to (not) create or implement, their exercise of power

includes not just conflict and negotiation in political arenas but also the social construction of our very "interests" and "needs." Thus, many instances of discrimination and inequality in schools are not challenged because they are taken for granted and viewed as "just the ways things are." Their existence becomes common sense and thus beyond question. (p. 34)

In this way, it is helpful to think of the dominant ideology and social theories as “common sense.” For instance, prison scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) explains that common sense suggests there is a “natural connection” between crime and punishment, even though people in power can change law “depending on what, in a social order, counts as stability, and who, in a social order, needs to be controlled” (p. 12). She explains that the need to control formerly enslaved Black people are why Jim Crow laws were established by the white elite after the Civil War amendments were passed. An arguably parallel process occurs in schools. Scholar Connie Wun's (2016) research demonstrates how students, particularly Black girls, are punished for infractions like cell phone use, dress code violations, and “obscene behavior” such as “prolonged kissing” (p. 12). While these actions are not “inherently bad or criminal,” the policies “produce ideas about what constitutes deviance” and thereby criminalize girls of color (ibid.).

One “common sense” logic that undergirds dominant understandings of safety and discipline in schools (and broader society) are carceral logics. *Carceral logics* are the commonsense notions that maintaining safety and order in society requires “unquestioned social control” through surveillance, coercion, and punishment that is enacted across institutions (Annamma, 2016, p. 1211). This means that carceral logics not only exist in prisons, but across social institutions. In schools, carceral logics undergird the common belief that surveillance technologies (e.g., metal detectors) police/policing, and punitive discipline policies are needed for safety. Carceral logics are also embedded in disclosure of criminal history on job and college applications and hypervisible and humiliating rituals like drug testing for welfare benefits among many others (ibid.) As Annamma (2016) outlines, the borders between these various state institutions are “purposely porous”; they work together as a network, sharing and pooling data to determine when an individual is in need of retribution (p. 1211). In PPS, for example, student data is often shared with the city police department, the Department of Human Services, and Child Welfare Services. This is not to say the practice of sharing information is inherently bad, but to point out that it often serves carceral and punitive ends.

While carceral logics permeate U.S. society, they are not applied to all people equally. They exist within political landscapes that are raced, gendered, classed, and dis/abled. As a result, carceral logics also teach us who has human worth. Gilmore (2007) contends that dehumanization is a necessary factor in the acceptance of carcerality, and that racism is the “ordinary means” through which the dehumanization achieves ideological normality” (p. 243). By *racism*, Gilmore (2007) means “the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (p. 247). Sojoyner (2013) similarly identifies

antiblackness and the desire to contain Black liberation movements as the origin and function of school discipline practices as:

a reactionary strategy in response to Black movements for freedom, discipline practices are best understood as attempts to make Black liberation irrational and Black subjugation, its logical converse, commonsensical. (p. 242)

This means that school discipline practices can be understood as part of broader ideological processes that racialize and criminalize people of color, particularly Black people. In schools, these processes of racialization and criminalization have normalized the daily hyper surveillance and repression of Black students within public schools (Sojoyner, 2016, p. 74).

### **3.4.2 The School-to-Prison Pipeline and Alternative Abolitionist Framings**

Carceral logics are pervasive in U.S. institutions, and the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) has become the dominant framing for describing and challenging the “dual trends” of racially disproportionate outcomes in school discipline and the criminal justice system (Wald & Losen, 2003, p. 11). More specifically, Skiba and colleagues (2014) define *STPP* as:

a construct used to describe policies and practices, especially with respect to school discipline, in the public schools and juvenile justice system that decrease the probability of school success for children and youth, and increase the probability of negative life outcomes, particularly through involvement in the juvenile justice system.

STPP focuses particularly on the outcomes of exclusionary discipline practices in schools like suspensions, expulsions, and arrests, which have increased since many school districts adopted a zero-tolerance approach to school code violations in the 1990s (Wald & Losen, 2003). STPP studies have identified empirical relationships between exclusionary school discipline practices

and students' engagements with the juvenile justice system and their disproportionate impact on students of color (for a summary of some of these studies, see Skiba et al., 2014). STPP research also examines the connections between police officers in schools and the criminalization and arrests of students in school (Kim et al., 2010).

While STPP has been helpful in highlighting the connections between schools and the criminal justice system, it has limited analytic and practical potential for disrupting carceral logics and systems. Urban anthropologist Damien Sojoyner (2013) explains on how philanthropic and government organizations' use of STPP does not align with decades-long organizing of anti-prison community organizations who seek to radically alter society through the abolition of prisons. Instead of focusing on the shared historical origins and technologies of prisons and schools, philanthropic and government organizations have co-opted and repackaged STPP to be a "non-threatening, ubiquitous, rhetorical device" that assuages the demands of community and neighborhood organizing" (p. 244). The dominant STPP framing thus fails to recognize and challenge antiblackness as the foundational ideology and problem that undergirds both schools and prisons. As a result, the primary "answer" to STPP posed by these dominant groups is to focus on student behavior and policy transformation. Such solutions assume that "by altering behaviors and certain policies, students will no longer be pushed out or arrested" (ibid.). While STPP can be well-intentioned, the framing obscures the connection between antiblackness, schools, and prisons, and fails to recognize how both institutions have historically targeted Black communities and subjected them to multiple forms of punishment (Wun, 2018).

Rather than viewing prisons and carceral logics as corrupting school practices, Sojoyner's (2013) historical study of policing and surveillance in Black public schools in Los Angeles shows that:

the structure of public education is responding to the actions taken by Black students that are perceived to threaten the status quo. In this regard, the criminalization of Black youth is not only intentional, but it is in response to direct agitation on the part of Black people. Thus, strategies to address the STPP that focus on shifting behaviors serve to legitimate the idea that disciplining student behavior is necessary, as long as the mechanisms do not push students out of school or entail arrests. (p. 245)

In addition to not challenging antiblackness, STPP frameworks also focuses attention away from other harmful forms of discipline that are not exclusionary. Suspension, expulsions, and arrests are “fast,” visible, and/or easily trackable forms of violence where Black people are physically and psychologically harmed, but anti-Black violence also has other forms. “Slow” violence is less visible and fuels Black suffering through day-to-day discipline and surveillance, low expectations, and sustained disinvestment in social, academic, and material resources (Dumas, 2014; Mayorga & Picower, 2018). Wun’s study (2016; 2018) of Black girls’ experiences with discipline in schools highlights how teacher surveillance and policing of their ordinary behaviors (e.g., chewing gum, drinking Gatorade) were not pushing them into the STPP, but it did make them feel like criminals within the school. In this way, while police presence increases student criminalization in schools, practices off policing are also built into the day-to-day practices and cultures of schools.

#### **3.4.2.1 Abolitionist Alternatives**

The clash between reformist and abolitionist framings has become more apparent since the uprisings against anti-Black police brutality occurred during the spring and summer of 2020. Calls were renewed for systemic changes in policing. One set of reforms called #8CantWait was released by the non-profit Campaign Zero (2020). Their campaign seeks to reduce police violence through reforms to police training and accountability policies. Their eight proposed reforms include:

banning chokeholds and strangleholds, requiring de-escalation, and requiring a warning before shooting (ibid.). Their website calls on “local, state, and federal lawmakers to take immediate action to adopt data-driven policy solutions” (ibid.). By promoting policy-driven, within-system reforms, #8CantWait does not question or challenge the underlying ideologies of the current carceral systems. For this reason, abolitionists see the #8CantWait campaign as failing to address the core problems of police and policing. In response, a “lose formation of abolitionists” from across the U.S created #8toAbolition campaign (8toAbolition, 2020). It presents an alternative vision that positions policing and prisons as incompatible with justice: “At its root, policing and prisons are systems designed to uphold oppression”(ibid.). They argue that the #8CantWait reforms are insufficient because they ultimately do not challenge the ideological roots of the carceral system that are designed to “sustain white supremacist, capitalist, ableist, and cisheteropatriarchal systems of extraction and death” (ibid.). Gilmore (2007) has described the difficulty of incremental reforms as “get[ting] caught in the logic of the system itself, such that a reform strengthens, rather than loosens, prison’s hold” (p. 242).

This is not to say that abolitionists are against all reforms. To the contrary, abolitionists have a long history of fighting for *non-reformist reforms*, or “measures that reduce the power of an oppressive system while illuminating the system’s inability to solve the crises it creates” (Berger et al., 2017). By having aims that exist outside of current systems, abolitionists must imagine alternative systems and futures that they are working towards. As abolitionist Mariame Kaba (2021) explains, the question should not be “What do we have now, and how can we make it better?” but “What can we imagine for ourselves and the world?” (p. 3). While abolitionists vary in their future visions, all agree the current carceral system “does nothing significant to prevent, reduce, or transform harm in the aggregate” and fails to make people accountable to their actions

(ibid., p. 4). Abolition does not seek a world without harm, which is an impossibility. Instead, the aim is to create a society that addresses harm without relying on structural violence and oppression (ibid.). To create this world, Kaba describes an ongoing process of transformation that starts with the self. Abolition is internal and community-based work where people collectively (un)learn and imagine a system that is able to meet people's needs and repair harm.

In the case of #8toAbolition, all eight demands promote divestment from carceral systems and investment in community services. The demands include: defunding the police; removing police from schools; providing safe housing for everyone; investing in care, not cops; and investing in community self-governance (8toAbolition, 2020). The goal of these non-reform reforms is “not better, friendlier or more community-oriented police and prisons,” but building “a society without police or prisons, where communities are equipped to provide for their safety and well-being” (#8toAbolition, 2020). Of course, this is easier said than done. For one, adherence to state ideologies and technologies of power provide social, economic, and political rewards, and thus encourage reproduction (Sojoyner, 2016, p. 51). The habitualness of common sense logics and our experiences in oppressive systems can limit our imaginations to think outside the current system.

### **3.5 Methodology and Methods**

#### **3.5.1 Critical Discourse Analysis**

Calling language *discourse* signals that the use of language is a social practice and a form of action. Discourse also highlights how language use is “a historically situated mode of action” that is “socially shaped but also socially shaping” (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). *Critical discourse*

*analysis* (CDA) is a methodology that investigates the connections between discourse, social arrangements, and power relations, and investigates how “events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power. (Fairclough, 1993, p. 135). The idea of “ideology” is not meant pejoratively, but to indicate that all people have mental frameworks they use to make sense of and render intelligible the way society works, and that these frameworks are shaped by and embedded within systems of power (Hall, 1996). In CDA, language is viewed as “a site of [ideological] struggle” and the study of discourse can help identify different theorizations of social change (Fairclough, 2001). I used principles of CDA to analyze speakers’ problem constructions, arguments, and constructions of safety, which are further discussed in the analysis section.

### **3.5.2 Sample**

The primary data source for this study were the 141 written stakeholder testimonies submitted to the Board’s public hearing on the proposal to remove PPS’s 22 SPOs from schools. Due to COVID-19, the public hearing was virtual. Every submitted testimony was read aloud by district administrators during a live meeting that spanned two days, June 22 and 23, 2020. Since administrators read the testimonies instead of the authors, there was often a clash between the blasé and matter-of-fact tones the administrators used to read the testimonies and the impassioned language and rhetoric choices made by the author. Given that authors did not read their testimonies during the public hearing, I decided to analyze the written testimonies rather than the video of the public hearing. I obtained copies of the testimonies by submitting a Right-to-Know request to the district.

Each testimony in the sample was placed into one of three groups based on their stance: Remove SPOs (n=76), Keep SPOs (n=65), or Keep + Reform SPOs (n=5). The difference between Keep and Keep + Reform testimonies is that the latter discussed at least one way in which current discipline policies and practices could be reformed, while Keep testimonies supported status quo practices. Table 3 provides some descriptives speakers within each of the three stances. The Keep and Remove stances both have a substantial amount of testimonies from caretakers, 27% and 39% respectively. All of the testimonies by SPOs and SSAs take a Keep stance, making up 27% of Keep testimonies. All of the testimonies by local education advocates take a Remove stance, making up 23% of the Remove testimonies. PPS principals, teachers, and other employees make up 28% (n=17) and 5% (n=4) of the Keep and Remove testimonies, respectively. One collective of high school principals wrote a Keep + Reform testimony. Current students and alum make up a small portion of all groups, 7% (n=4) in Keep, 0% in Keep + Reform, and 3% in Remove (n=2).

**Table 3 Stakeholder Roles by Testimony Stance**

| Stakeholder Role            | Keep Stance<br>(n=60) | Keep + Reform Stance<br>(n=5) | Remove Stance<br>(n=76) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| PPS Principal(s)            | 5%                    | 20%                           | 0%                      |
| PPS Teacher                 | 15%                   | 0%                            | 4%                      |
| Other PPS employee          | 8%                    | 40%                           | 1%                      |
| School police officer (SPO) | 20%                   | 0%                            | 0%                      |
| School security aide (SSA)  | 7%                    | 0%                            | 0%                      |
| PPS Student                 | 7%                    | 0%                            | 3%                      |
| Caretaker of PPS Student(s) | 27%                   | 0%                            | 39%                     |
| PPS Alum                    | 2%                    | 0%                            | 4%                      |
| PFT leaders                 | 3%                    | 20%                           | 0%                      |

|   |    |     |     |
|---|----|-----|-----|
| Local education advocates/activists                 | 0% | 0%  | 23% |
| Local educator or social worker<br>(outside of PPS) | 0% | 0%  | 5%  |
| Community member                                    | 5% | 20% | 21% |

While these numbers provide some important descriptives, it does not capture the complexities and overlap in these stakeholder roles. Many speakers highlighted their multiple stakeholder roles, so I selected the role “closest” to the day-to-day happenings of PPS schools. For example, if a speaker is both a PPS teacher and a parent, I categorized them as a PPS teacher. If a speaker is a parent and an education advocate, I categorized them as a parent. Some testimonies represented multiple people (e.g., the principal collective), but I consider each testimony as having one “speaker.” I did not categorize the sample by gender and race because I do not have complete information on either of these. Some speakers identified their race and/or gender within their testimonies, so, when available, I provide this information to contextualize quotes in the findings

### 3.5.3 Data Analysis

I analyzed the testimonies using NVivo 12 qualitative coding software. I developed three sets of qualitative codes that attended to the speakers’ (a) problem constructions, (b) arguments, and (c) safety/solution constructions. While these broad categories were selected prior to coding, the subcodes were inductive, meaning they were based on the language and ideas conveyed by speakers. I primarily used in vivo coding to capture the actual language and voice of the speakers, but also utilized concept coding to represent the implicit meanings speakers alluded to, particularly in reference to defining safety (Saldaña, 2016).

In investigating problem constructions, I was curious *who* speakers centered in their testimony and whether/how various systems of oppression were referenced. As a result, I used in vivo codes to assess whether testimonies referred to specific populations of students (e.g., Black students, Black girls, students with disabilities). In hearing from Board member Pam Harbin that people often conflate SPOs with SSAs, I also coded when SPOs and SSAs were conflated to see if this was related to the stance and discourse of speakers. I was also interested in the *what* of problem construction. To assess speakers' engagement with racial systems and systemic oppressions, I used in vivo coding to track the specific terms speakers and stances used (e.g., implicit bias, school-to-prison pipeline, structural racism). I also coded color evasive language (e.g., "bad schools" and "troubled youth") as well as specific and vague references to the 2020 uprisings and the broader BLM movement.

For the argument coding, I used in vivo codes to assess what reasons and/or evidence each speaker gave to support their stance. Reasons explained why SPOs were (not) needed in schools and evidence could reference personal experiences, research, and/or statistics that demonstrated those reasons. Within these argument codes, I also attended to "ideological moves," which are the language choices and rhetorical moves that speakers used to appeal to and/or challenge "common sense." What cued this coding was either charged and evaluative language (e.g., "absurd," "ignorant") or statements that directly challenged the opposing stance (e.g., "Let me address some of the myths around school policing that might be brought up today").

The third set of codes analyzed how speakers with different stances constructed the concept of safety and, in the case of Remove and Keep + Reform testimonies, how this approach to safety would address the problem they outlined. (Keep testimonies did not, by definition, identify a problem because they supported the status quo policies and practices). When possible, I used in

vivo codes for speaker's descriptions of safety, but many speakers' meanings were implicit. As a result, I considered the speakers' stance and their reasons and evidence for why the current system was (not) working in order to make inferences about their ideas of safety to create concept codes. For example, multiple Keep speakers claimed that SPOs provided protection for students. From this, I inferred that speakers viewed safety as police protection. Keep speakers also often referred to the idea that schools are more susceptible to school shootings with police. For this, I inferred that speakers viewed safety as (police) preventing extreme and rare events of violence.

Together, these codes examine how the testimonies of the three groups converged and diverged to more precisely understand what is under debate and how the narratives and discourses of the public hearing both reflect and shape ideologies of race, policing, and safety. I discuss themes within and between stances in the findings. Thinking across these themes I highlight three central ideological contestations and consider their implications in the discussion.

### **3.5.4 Supplementary Data Sources**

While the findings from this article are based on the qualitative analysis of the June 2020 public hearing testimonies, I bring in supplemental information from other sources when it is relevant to the findings from the public hearing. For one, many of the Remove testimonies reference local research reports from organizations in their reasons and evidence (ACLU, 2016; Augustine et al., 2018; Department of Human Services, 2020; Howell et al., 2019; The Black Girls Equity Alliance, 2020), so I discuss these reports in the findings when relevant. Similarly, I reviewed news articles from two local sources, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and *PublicSource*, to see how they covered the public hearing and task force. I also read documents and press releases

from the Board, PPS, and local organizations related to the original motion to remove SPOs as well as the Re-imagine School Safety Task Force that was formed in response to the public hearing.

I also conducted interviews and meetings with PPS stakeholders (n=10) along with a survey (n=42) to better understand the history and ideologies embedded within the public hearing testimonies. The interviews and meetings included local education activists, a former Board member, a retired teacher, a parent, a former SPO, and a former student. The survey explicitly asked stakeholders about their views of the safety, SPOs, SSAs, the current discipline system, and proposed reforms. I received 42 complete responses, the majority of whom were PPS employees (n=33). The surveys were particularly helpful for understanding and triangulating definitions of safety that were often implicit in the public hearing testimonies.

### **3.5.5 Researcher Positionality**

While I have lived in Pittsburgh for the past five years, I have no close affiliation with PPS: I have not worked there and I did not grow up in or attend school in Pittsburgh. I am also not a member of any of the organizations that developed the campaign to remove police and systems of policing in PPS. While this makes me more of an “outsider” to the debate, it does not make me an “objective” observer because, like all people, my past experiences and personal values shape how I engage with this work. As a white, middle-class cis woman who grew up in rural North Carolina, I had minimal interactions with police. As an adult, my experiences as a special education teacher in the New York City public schools, and my experiences as a resident in NYC, Chicago, and Pittsburgh have greatly expanded and shaped my views related to policing. I have listened to the testimonies of my students, friends, and colleagues, particularly those who are Black and Latinx. I’ve heard how they have been Stopped & Frisked just for walking down the street, about how the

NYPD put a mobile surveillance tower in their neighborhood, or how one of my students had to go to court for being too loud at a Dunkin' Donuts.

While I cannot fully relate to these experiences because they are not my own, I use the experiences of others to interrogate my own experiences, assumptions, and positionality. The process is an ongoing commitment and a persistent struggle. I am also committed to examining systems and collective points of view because policing has historically served to create systemic oppressions in addition to personal experiences that are raced, classed, gendered, and dis/abled.

### **3.6 Findings**

#### **3.6.1 Differences in Problem Construction and Language Specificity**

In analyzing the language use related to the *who* and *what* of problem construction, there are clear differences between the two Keep stances and the Remove stance. The difference in language specificity is one way we can see how different groups are constructing the (lack of) problem with policing and what is being (ideologically) contested between groups. The two Keep groups and the Remove group not only differ in whether to remove SPOs, but also whether they viewed systemic racism and violence in policing as problems that exist in PPS. A summary of differences in *who* and *what* language are provided in Table 4. Each count represents a unique speaker.

In constructing the *who* in their problem construction, very few Keep speakers reference specific types of students, though there are a few implicit racial appeals in terms like “bad schools,” “inner-city school district,” “troubled students,” and “problematic neighborhoods.”

However, language in the Keep groups is generally vague and race evasive. Remove speakers, on the other hand, are much more likely to be explicit in referencing Black students, Latinx students, and/or students of color. In addition, almost half of the Remove speakers (n=30) referenced Black girls and/or Black boys to indicate how both race and gender play a role in the types of violence and harm students experience under systems of policing. Similarly, 18 speakers discuss how students with disabilities, particularly Black boys with disabilities, who are overrepresented in discipline and arrest statistics. Meanwhile, Keep speakers tended to only reference “students.” The exceptions were a few SPOs and SSAs, who are Black, discussing how they are mentors to Black students in the schools.

**Table 4 Language Specificity in Problem Construction by Stance**

|                     | BIPOC students | Black girls or Black boys | Students with disabilities | Conflate SPOs and SSAs | Racism | Systemic, institutional, or structural racism | Police brutality | School-to-prison pipeline |
|---------------------|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--------|---|------------------|---------------------------|
| Keep (n=60)         | 4              | 2                         | 0                          | 24                     | 2*     | 2*  | 2*               | 3*                        |
| Keep + Reform (n=5) | 1              | 0                         | 0                          | 3                      | 1*     | 2*  | 1*               | 0                         |
| Remove (n=76)       | 48             | 30                        | 18                         | 2                      | 9      | 27  | 7                | 32                        |

**\* Speakers use this term, but deny or minimize its relevance to PPS**

Another difference in the *who* of problem construction were that Keep (+ Reform) stances were much more likely to conflate SPOs and SSAs than the Remove stance. While there are overlaps in duties between SPOs and SSAs, the distinction is important for the motion under debate in the public hearing. Board members Taliaferro and Harbin, along with the supporting community

organizations, had only demanded that SPOs be removed from schools. This demand was based on the fact that only SPOs have the power to arrest students and issue citations, which can lead to students entering the juvenile justice system. Often, Keep stances seemed to conflate SPOs and SSAs in order to make a “common sense” argument that the only alternative to school-based policing was the city police (or chaos), which I discuss further later.

The patterned difference in language specificity between stances continued in analyzing the *what* of problem construction in the speakers’ testimonies. Keep speakers generally evade discussing racial systems much like they evade race in discussing students. Remove speakers are much more likely to discuss racial systems and racialized problems of policing. Remove speakers are also generally explicit and consistent in identifying the problem as *systems* rather than *individuals*. For example, many Remove speakers clearly state that systems of school policing are contributing to the STPP, like this testimony by a Black woman and local education activist:

We are writing because we need to end the school-to-prison pipeline in Pittsburgh, especially for our Black students for whom it is most common and harmful.

Meanwhile, the majority of Keep testimonies do not discuss racialized systems; instead their language as color-evasive, actively avoiding the discussion of race, racism, and white supremacy (Annamma et al., 2017). In the few Keep testimonies that do mention racism, police brutality, and/or the school-to-prison pipeline, speakers refer to these problems in a broad sense (e.g., that they the national level or among the city police) while simultaneously denying, explicitly or implicitly, that these problems exist within PPS. For instance, one parent testimony make their belief about the irrelevance of the BLM and the uprisings explicit (even despite using vague and color-evasive language): “The protest [*sic*] taking place across the nation have NOTHING to do with the ongoing school security measures we're practicing.” Similarly, one SSA claims SSAs and

SPOs as an opposing force to systemic racism in Pittsburgh communities: “We aim to stop the systematic racism that plagues our communities when pertaining to policing.” The common assumption that seems to underlie these (and other) Keep testimonies is that because SPOs are good professionals and community members who care for students, that they do not/cannot contribute to systemic problems like police brutality or the school-to-prison pipeline.

The denial of systemic problems in Keep testimonies contradicts research done by local organizations that show PPS’s discipline and policing practices are producing raced, gendered, and ableist outcomes in suspensions, arrests, and citations. For example, the Gender Equity Commission’s 2019 report compares Pittsburgh with 89 other large cities across the U.S. and found that PPS refers students to law enforcement at rates higher than public schools in 95% of other U.S. cities (Howell et al., 2019, p. 53). The Black Girls Equity Alliance (BGEA) (2020) disaggregated these referrals, which revealed that Black girls are referred at rates higher than those of Black girls in 99% of U.S. cities and Black boys at rates higher than Black boys in 98% of U.S. cities (p. 8). BGEA’s (2020) analysis also showed that students with disabilities account for a large proportion of PPS students referred to juvenile justice by SPOs. Of the 57% of PPS juvenile justice referrals for which data are available, 45% of Black boys and 26% of Black girls referred to juvenile justice by the PPS police during the academic years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 had a disability (p. 5).

While it is possible that Keep speakers were unaware of these reports, the survey I conducted with stakeholders (n=42) suggests that ideological reasoning is also at play. After providing survey participants with data from reports by the ACLU (2016) and the BGEA (2020) that show the district’s high rates of suspensions and its large Black-white suspension gap, and how Black girls are much more likely to be arrested and given summary citations than their white

peers, the survey asked the extent to which participants dis/agreed that “These reports mean that PPS needs to make major changes to their discipline policies and practices.” Ten out of 42 participants responded “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree,” and five responded “Neither agree nor disagree.” This suggests 36% survey participants—the majority of whom are PPS employees—did not view these statistics as problematic. Similarly, the next question asked the extent to which they dis/agreed that, “The current discipline policies and practices of PPS are racially and systemically biased against Black students.” Only 50% of participants responded “Agree” or “Strongly Agree,” while 38% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed and 12% neither agreed nor disagreed. Unsurprisingly, the majority of these survey respondents also wanted to keep SPOs in PPS.

Taken together, the language specificity and problem construction between the Keep testimonies and the Remove testimonies suggest that they not only differ in whether they want to remove SPOs, but also whether systemic racism and violence in policing are even seen as problems that exist within PPS. Given that numerous public reports on the topic and the survey responses discussed above, I suspect the perception of the problem is not merely based on a lack of information and data, but an ideological contestation over whether this data demonstrates systemic injustices.

### **3.6.2 (Challenging) Appeals to “Common Sense” Carceral Logics**

In addition to differences in language specificity and problem constructions, the Keep (+ Reform) groups’ and the Remove group’s arguments varied in how they appealed to or challenged “common sense” carceral logics. Earlier I introduced *carceral logics* as the commonsense notions that maintaining safety and order in society requires “unquestioned social control” through

surveillance, coercion, and punishment that is enacted across institutions (Annamma, 2016, p. 1211). The arguments within Keep testimonies drew on carceral logics by relying on the assumption that police are necessary for school safety, while arguments in the Remove testimonies sought to challenge the necessity of police and systems of policing (though to varying degrees). I discuss how the groups appealed to or challenged “common sense” carceral logics both in the types of evidence that they used and the types of reasoning used within their arguments.

### **3.6.2.1 Research v. “common sense” appeals**

One of the key distinctions between Remove testimonies and Keep (+ Reform) groups’ testimonies are the extent to which they utilize research and statistics as evidence. Remove speakers referenced statistics from local reports on PPS outcomes 91 times collectively across 76 speakers; some (n=9) even included links to reports and articles. There is a range in the type of research cited, but by far the most cited pieces of evidence come from research reports conducted on PPS by local groups, particularly the ACLU (2016), BGEA (2020) and the City of Pittsburgh’s Gender Equity Commission (Howell et al., 2019). These local reports provide statistics that analyze the outcomes of exclusionary and punitive discipline practices like suspensions, arrests, citations, and juvenile justice referrals. These reports demonstrate disproportionate outcomes across different student groups, and speakers use these statistics to argue that current policy and practice are leading to raced, gendered, and ableist outcomes for students. Remove speakers vary in how explicit they are in using these statistics to challenge “common sense” about policing and punitive discipline practices in schools. One of the explicit challenges to common sense carceral logics comes from a parent:

We know there is no evidence that supports that having police in schools makes students safer and that it in fact creates a hostile learning environment and pushes primarily Black

and Latinx students into the school to prison pipeline. Part of the district's mission and beliefs statement is "Education begins with a safe and healthy learning environment". If the Board and administration truly believe that, you will discontinue police presence and police practices immediately.

Another explicit challenge comes from a Black woman and clinical law professor who directs a youth advocacy clinic at a local university:

Removing police from our schools is the only solution to make our schools safer and more conducive to learning. The facts are no longer in dispute. There doesn't need to be another commission, task force or working group. The time for deliberation has passed. The time for action has arrived. And the only question for you is whether you will be complicit in continuing to fuel the school-to-prison pipeline or whether you will be the people who stand up and courageously change educational environments to what they can, and should, be for this city's children.

Similar to this testimony, multiple Remove speakers stated that "the time is now" for substantive changes (n=15), that kicking the can down the road must end (n=2), and making plans and promises with no action (n=4) are no longer acceptable.

In stark contrast to the Remove speakers, Keep and Keep + Reform speakers did not engage with research and statistics as evidence. In fact there are only two references to statistics or research, one from a Keep speaker, one from Keep + Reform speaker:

I believe a more in depth study needs to be taken before even consideration of such a drastic measure [removing SPOs] can take place. I urge you to do your due diligence as elected officials and focus on unification rather than statics [*sic*] that aren't adequately represented.  
(community member)

Being singularly focused on the citation statistics — that hide why charges are considered and by whom — as a reason to dismantle the PPS Safety Department will not help students.

(PFT leader)

Both of these quotes imply that the existing statistics and research are not sufficient for understanding the problems with school policing (if they even exist). The PFT leader attempts to counter the Remove speakers, but oversimplifies the arguments and evidence they use. His claim that citation statistics “hide why charges are considered and by whom” assumes, rather than argues, that we should prioritize individual explanations over systemic ones.

This failure and/or refusal to engage with local research suggests that the Keep speakers are unwilling to seriously listen to and counter the arguments being made by Remove speakers. Instead, Keep (+ Reform) speakers often sought to dismiss the demands of the Remove group by appealing to “common sense” carceral logics rather than engaging with and countering the evidence, experiences, and critiques offered by the Remove speakers. While coding the Keep (+ Reform) testimonies, I identified three types of explicit appeals to “common sense”: (a) (ir)rational rhetoric (n=12), (b) moral disgust (n=2), and (c) rhetorical questions (n=7). Irrational rhetoric was the most common, with speakers claiming the proposal to remove SPOs from PPS was “absurd,” “ridiculous,” “ignorant,” “wrong-headed,” “backwards,” “a fool’s errand,” and an “unreal proposal.” A few used ableist language in their (ir)rational appeals, asking if the Board if they had “completely lost [their] damn minds,” and calling removing SPOs an “insane idea,” “completely blind and naive,” and a “hysterical reaction.” A blind paraprofessional who wanted to Keep SPOs refers to his blindness to suggest the irrationality of the proposal: “I’M BLIND AND I CAN SEE THAT THAT WON’T WORK!!” A few speakers used rhetoric to indicate moral disgust, stating “it [the proposal] sickens me” or that they are “appalled” by the proposal.

Another tactic in Keep (+ Reform) testimonies is asking rhetorical questions. These questions were another way to demonstrate the supposed irrationality of the proposal to remove SPOs. For instance, a parent asks: “Who’s going to protect them [the students]? Who’s going to step in if a shooting happens? Who’s going to step in if a big fight happens? Not teachers or counselors!!” In this parent’s mind, the only possible answer is “the school police.” Similarly, one security aide’s testimony utilizes many rhetorical questions; I quote the first few:

1.) If we disband our School Police department who do you think will respond to calls? 2.) How do you think scenarios will turn out with Police outside of schools responding to large fights? False Sexual Assaults? Assaults on other staff or students? 3.) When weapons are brought in by parents, community members, off duty officers, constables and etc..?

In asking these kinds of rhetorical questions, we learn about the assumptions being made by the speakers. For one, these questions often focus on extremely violent events like school shootings, assaults, and large fights, which are relatively rare occurrences. While these events can and do happen, this focus on “fast violence” obscures the more day-to-day “slow violence” that students of color, and particularly Black students, face on a daily basis due to policing practices in schools. Daily practices of surveillance like the use of metal detectors and police patrolling school hallways can make students feel criminalized (Shedd, 2015), which two PPS students’ Remove testimonies also attest to. One high school student conducted a survey of her peers and found that “Many respondents cited specific instances where they saw police escalate a situation, use unnecessary aggression when breaking up a fight, or target Black students.”

Further, as Wun’s (2016) research on the experiences of Black girls’ in schools points out, Black girls often feel they are under “constant surveillance and perpetually disciplined” in more informal ways that go undocumented and are not often the focus of school discipline and STPP

literature. This criminalization of ordinary teenage behavior aligns with findings from BGEA's 2020 report on PPS's discipline and juvenile justice outcomes. They found that the majority of arrests made by PPS police are for minor offenses that are not safety related. Instead, about half of arrests of Black youth (54% for Black girls and 42% for Black boys) by PPS police in 2019 ultimately resulted in a charge of disorderly conduct, a "highly subjective," "catch-all" charge that includes excessive noise, obscene gestures or language, and other typical teenage behaviors (p. 7). By focusing on the rare and "fast" violence school shootings, Keep speakers are, intentionally or not, working to obscure these slower and more pervasive types of violence and trauma that school policing practices perpetuate.

### **3.6.2.2 Moves to innocence vs. accountability**

The "common sense" appeals in the testimonies of the two Keep groups also demonstrate that the Keep groups have difficulty imagining alternatives to police and systems of policing. Repeatedly, Keep testimonies assume that (1) students *need* to be policed, and that (2) students *will be* policed, even in the absence of SPOs. While assumption (1) is often implicit, here is an explicit reference from a white male SPO's testimony:

Not once have anyone ever told me that there will come a time when the security or school police of a school will never be needed and just let the students' police themselves. We are Professional Career Officers and highly trained security officers.

Assumption (2) is discussed more often. For instance, 21 testimonies from the Keep groups reference the idea that the school police are a better alternative than the city police. A Black woman SPO asks:

So school police is out then what, we have to call [the] city [police]? They don't know are [*sic*] kids, won't have the time to sit and talk to our kids and will be bringing guns,

tasers, mace ect into our schools. Our kids will become very uncomfortable if city police is entering the schools to deal with situations.

The claim here, and in the other testimonies that reference the city police, is that without school police, city police will now be responsible for fulfilling the SPOs' duties. However, replacing SPOs with city police officers is not what the proposal or the Remove speakers are advocating for. They are asking for the Board and district to create a new, reimagined system of supports for students and communities rather than systems of policing and punishment. But from their testimonies, it appears that Keep (+ Reform) speakers are unable and/or unwilling to imagine alternative systems and visions for school safety. Perhaps this is the power of hegemony, where the dominant "common sense" ideology of policing and punishment are so pervasive that speakers cannot fathom alternatives (Hall, 1996; Sojoyner, 2016).

In addition, I argue that the Keep (+ Reform) groups' appeals to the harms of city policing and the persistent emphasis on SPOs as "good," "caring," and "professional" individuals are functioning as moves to innocence. *Moves to innocence* are strategies to remove a person's involvement in and culpability for systems of domination. It is a "desire for a position of innocence" and a "desire to claim virtue via oppression" (Mawhinney, 1998, p. 17). While it may very well be true that many or even all SPOs are good at their job and care about students, SPOs being good individuals does not preclude the possibility of them participating in the (re)production of systemic violence and oppression. Similarly, the idea that SPOs are a better alternative to city police--a claim Remove speakers would like agree with--does not mean that SPOs are the best choice or even a good choice for promoting school safety. In this way, the Keep argument boils down to "it could be worse." Instead of claiming responsibility for the harms systems of school policing have caused, speakers (implicitly) sought innocence by appealing to the goodness of SPOs

as individuals and the worse alternative of the city police. Instead of acknowledging and grappling with PPS's high rates of arrests and citations relative to other similar districts, a PFT leader asks: "Do you think the Pittsburgh City Police will need to get approval from the School District to write citation *[sic]*?"

Another move to innocence is the argument is that having a "diverse police department" shows that SPOs are not as bad as the city police. One SSA and two PFT leaders mention the racial and gender make-up of the school police force: 55% of SPOs are women and 40% are African American. One speaker contrasts this with the city police department, which is 85% male and 84%. While an intuitive argument, studies indicate that the race of police officers does not have a significant effect on their use of force and that diverse police forces do not have higher rates of community satisfaction (Vitale, 2018, pp. 11–13). Regardless, even if this claim were true, it still evades accountability by not acknowledging the violence, harms, and trauma that have been committed against students. Ideologically and practically, it functions as a move to innocence.

Together, the "common sense" appeals of speakers in the Keep (+ Reform) groups seek to undermine the demands of the Remove group as absurd, unreasonable, and lacking sense, all without seriously engaging the evidence, experiences, and critiques offered by the Remove speakers. The Keep speakers also fail to demonstrate the willingness and/or ability to engage in imagining alternative systems, which may be connected to the groups' different ideas and visions for school safety.

### **3.6.3 Competing Visions of School Safety**

One of the most direct ideological contestations between the Remove group and the Keep groups is whether SPOs and systems of policing undermine or promote school safety. What is less

explicit in the testimonies are the particular ideas of safety that underlie these assessments. It is not just that speakers in these groups have different ideas of what police and policing entail, but also what school safety is and entails.

In terms of systems of policing, Remove speakers (n=76) are particularly concerned about the powers SPOs have to arrest students and give summary citations, which can enter students into the juvenile justice system. SSAs do not have these powers. As a result, many Remove speakers emphasize the harms and racial disproportionality associated with student arrests (n=41), the juvenile justice system (n=21), and summary citations (n=18). Meanwhile, the few speakers in the Keep groups (n=65) that mention student arrests (n=4), summary citations (n=3), and the juvenile justice system (n=2) do so in ways that make these actions seem necessary (e.g., “I [an SPO] took people to court when all other alternatives about safety was [*sic*] understood.”); well-intentioned (“[SPOs are] focused on using patience with those who have to be arrested/detained/restrained”); and/or deflect blame (“We [SPOs] are not to blame for arrest being made victims are the ones pressing charges”). 24 Remove speakers discussed how these and other punitive discipline practices serve to criminalize students. The one Keep testimony that mentions criminalization, written by a Black woman SPO, acknowledges the criminalization of Black students broadly, but also that laws and punishments must be upheld: “I understand because I do agree we have to stop criminalizing black students. But, our students need to KNOW they cannot break the law.”

In keeping with the moves to innocence discussed above, the Keep speakers’ lack of engagement with the Remove group’s core concerns about policing--arrests, summary citations, the juvenile justice system, and the criminalization of (Black) students--are moves away from accountability to communities that they serve. It is a failure to grapple with ways that systems of policing can harm, rather than protect, students.

In discussing the concepts of “safety,” there were two testimonies, both from Remove speakers, that directly asked what safety means. One parent testimony states:

“Your job as board members is to create policies that keep our kids safe. But safe, is not an easy thing to define. As a district we need to look at what we mean when we talk about keeping students safe. What does it mean to say that all students deserve to feel safe in school? How will you - as board members - create policy to ensure that you aren’t prioritizing the *feeling of safety of some students* over the *actual safety of other students*?” [emphasis added]

This statement concisely summarizes what is often being implicitly contested, both within and between groups. What does it mean to *feel safe*? *Whose* safety are we considering and valuing? While these questions are not always answered outright by Remove speakers, they frequently argue for an alternative vision of safety that requires PPS to divest resources from police and invest them in safe and supportive environments for learning (n=52). Like the initial petition undersigned by ACLU PA, One Pennsylvania, and 13 other local organizations, speakers explained a range of support services and resources that should be invested in including: counselors, social workers, peacebuilders, culturally responsive curricula and restorative justice practices, and implicit bias and disability awareness trainings for PPS staff. These kinds of changes are viewed by Remove speakers as better able to address the root causes of negative student behaviors rather than current practices of policing and punishment.

In addition, some Remove speakers elaborated on the importance of the demand to “Invest in a community led re-envisioning process of what school safety and support can look like moving forward without police” (ACLU PA et al., 2020). These visions often directly contested “common sense” notions of safety. One community member explains, “Safety is not the police. It is not

uniforms and guns and authority and reactivity. Safety is love and care and understanding and accountability.” Further, the testimony of a Black woman educator and advocate is clear that the Board must reframe its idea of “safety”:

I challenge you today to reframe how you look at school safety by prioritizing a school community of care, rather than over policing...Students and their communities are calling for trust, for autonomy, for healing. School policing does none of that...how can the School board work together with these communities to redefine school safety as something that is not a mere protection from harm, but as a construction of spaces that promote the health and care of students, teachers, and staff?”

In these reimaginings, Remove speakers emphasize how love, support, trust, and healing must replace punishment and fear. This vision also requires relationships and community building. Instead of making top-down decisions, these Remove speakers posit a process where the district collaborates with and is accountable to the communities they serve.

Speakers in both Keep groups do not seriously take up the alternative visions of safety outlined by Remove speakers. Instead, their constructions of safety lie in preventing or intervening in acts of fast violence (e.g., school shootings, fights, assaults) and overseeing practices of surveillance. Multiple Keep speakers (n=14) explain that having SPOs (and security aides) around makes them “feel safe” or less fearful. A Black male student in support of SPOs asks, “Is school really safe without school police and security?” This demonstrates how police/policing has essentially become synonymous with safety for many of the Keep speakers. Similarly, police are seen as providing “protection” (n=22) from physical harm, usually from outside “intruders.” Since 60 of the 65 Keep testimonies do not even entertain the idea of reform, it seems that many Keep speakers agree with this PPS employee that SPOs are part of the “structural integrity” of schools:

The worse [*sic*] thing you could do is to get rid of or define the structural integrity of your schools. Please do not redefine and restructure a department who are doing right by are youth.

For the five speakers that do discuss possible reforms, they offer tentative suggestions related to reviewing citation practices, more accountability for police misconduct, increased training, and more mental health and academic supports for students (in addition to keeping SPOs). While recognizing some of the harms of policing, these reforms do not challenge the “common sense” carceral notions of safety.

## **3.7 Discussion and Conclusion**

### **3.7.1 Three Ideological Contestations**

Analysis of the public hearing testimonies on whether to remove SPOs from PPS demonstrates that there are multiple ideological contestations occurring and interweaving throughout this debate. The findings outlined how Keep (+ Reform) and Remove speakers varied in their problem construction, language specificity, use of research, and their ideas about policing and school safety. Taken together, these findings highlight three core ideological contestations. The first is whether discipline and policing practices should be discussed in a color evasive way or examined from a raced, gendered, and dis/abled perspective. Remove speakers are concerned about the disproportionate impacts of these practices on students of color, particularly Black students, and how gender and disability impact policing outcomes. Keep speakers, on the other

hand, were generally color evasive, including a lack of engagement with research and statistics that highlighted raced, gendered, and dis/abled discipline outcomes.

The second ideological contestation is whether discipline and policing practices should emphasize the work of individuals (e.g., SPOs) and/or the policing systems and systemic outcomes these individuals exist within. Keep speakers often highlighted the good qualities of SPOs and SSAs as people and the multiple ways that they participate in the community. As a result, these testimonies rarely discussed the acts of policing that only SPOs have authority to engage in: arrests and citations which can enter students into the juvenile justice system. The focus on individuals facilitates “moves to innocence” where the systemic harms of policing are minimized or obscured. However, these systemic harms and their raced, gendered, and ableist dimensions are highlighted in Remove testimonies. They do not deny that SPOs are good people, but rather see this as beside the point given the current research on district-wide discipline outcomes.

The third ideological contestation is related to whether policing is necessary and inevitable. Both Keep groups believe that policing is necessary though the Keep + Reform group is willing to entertain some policy changes. Both groups cannot seem to imagine a (nonchaotic) school environment that does not have police and practices of policing. This is evidenced by their multiple “it could be worse” appeals, most often assuming that the city police will simply replace SPOs if they are removed from schools. Remove speakers challenge this assumption and many are seeking to remove not just the physical presence of the police, but also the policing practices and logics that are much broader than the practices of SPOs. These Remove speakers highlight how punishment currently operates in place of adequate supports for students. This is why the petition and many Remove speakers focus on “a community led re-envisioning process” and investing in a wide array of support services and trainings. Their vision requires not just policy changes and a

shift in resources, but new systems of school safety that are developed by and for the communities they serve.

### **3.7.2 Moves to Abolition, Reforms, and Possibilities for Co-optation**

How these ideological contestations are negotiated within and between stakeholder groups will play a key role in whether any changes made by PPS and the Board will be a move towards abolition, or a reform or co-optation that reproduces the dominant carceral logics of punishment. I highlight a few of the ways each of these possibilities--moves to abolition, reform, and co-optation--could play out in the particular context of PPS.

For one, the coalition and collective of community organizations that led to the Board proposal and public hearing to remove SPOs from PPS is a move towards abolition. So is their clear demand for divesting from SPOs and systems of policing within the district in order to invest in a wide variety of student supports and employee trainings because this redistribution of resources (including money, time, and human resources) has the potential to be a non-reformist reform that “reduce[s] the power of an oppressive system while illuminating the system’s inability to solve the crises it creates” (Berger et al., 2017). In addition, the campaign demands and Remove testimonies are also working to challenge common sense and push the Board, PPS, and broader community to collectively envision new systems that cultivate healing, support, and love rather than dole out punishment. If this community re-envisioning process is able to shift relations among stakeholders, these demands and strategies may be able to address the “two things” organizer and activist Mariame Kaba explains abolition is about: “It’s the complete and utter dismantling of

prison and policing and surveillance as they currently exist within our culture. And it's also the building up of new ways of intersecting and new ways of relating with each other" (Meares, 2017).

However, there are also many ways that these demands and strategies can turn into reforms and co-optation that do not substantively change current systems of policing or challenge carceral logics. For one, none of the reforms that the Keep + Reform speakers offer (e.g., additional SPO training, reviewing citation practices) seek to substantively change how systems of policing operate and the carceral logics that underlie them. Instead, they are "affirmative remedies" that "address the outcomes of social inequities without changing the structures that create and reproduce them" (Dumas, 2009, p. 95). Such reforms ultimately (re)legitimize police and systems of policing rather than challenge them.

I also anticipate that the Remove group's use of STPP rhetoric to describe the problem of school policing can be co-opted in ways that have occurred at the national level. Sojoyner (2013) explains how the STPP discourse has been co-opted by philanthropic organizations and government offices that engage "the pipeline as reformist attempt to assuage the demands of community and neighborhood organizing" in ways that do not challenge the status quo (p. 243). He describes how the mainstream rhetoric around the STPP undercuts the critiques of anti-prison organizing by focusing on policy changes and changing student behavior in ways that do not engage the historical roots of policing in schools and thus fail "to challenge the ethos of anti-Blackness as foundational to the formation and enactment of school discipline" (p. 245). STPP's narrow focus on suspensions, arrests, and other exclusionary practices tend to overlook the everyday, "mundane forms of policing and punishment" that also criminalize students (Wun, 2018, p. 217).

Given the possibility of co-optation and the theoretical shortcomings of STPP, stakeholders who are seeking to remove police and systems of policing from schools should seek frameworks and concepts to use in their organizing that are more aligned with abolition. Some options include: the prison industrial complex (Anderson-Zavala et al., 2017; Davis, 2003); the school-prison nexus (Meiners, 2011); the prison/carceral regime (Sojoyner, 2016, Wun, 2018); enclosures (Sojoyner 2013, 2016); and pedagogies of pathologization (Annamma, 2018). A key point that distinguishes these approaches from STPP is that they recognize that schools have never been an institution wholly separate from prisons. Instead, these frameworks attend to the historical interconnections between schools and prisons; their shared ideologies, technologies, and practices of control and punishment. Still, no terminology or framework is insusceptible to co-optation in ways that reproduce the current system. For this reason, language and frameworks should be seen as *a means to an end*, rather than an end in themselves. This means the utility of frameworks and concepts is based on the extent to which it helps particular collectives imagine alternative futures and engage in actions that materially create these conditions while dismantling oppressive systems (Dotson & Sertler, 2021; Kaba, 2021)

### **3.7.3 Moving Forward**

Which realities and ideologies of policing and SPOs will be reified in future PPS policy remains to be seen. While the Reimagine School Safety Task Force was originally scheduled to present findings and recommendations by March 2021, they are experiencing multiple, ongoing delays. Some delays have been logistical, while others are likely ideological. The members of the Task Force, like the public hearing speakers, greatly vary in their current assessment of the current and what visions they have for the future. How these ideological contestations will play out in their

recommendations and the extent to which they reproduce or challenge antiblackness and the violence of policing remains to be seen. Policy changes can be important steps to materially improve conditions in schools. Yet, history should also make us skeptical about the ability of policy changes to bring about broad social change (Sojoyner, 2016). PPS's history shows that any improvements for Black students and teachers have been fought for by the community rather than handed down through policy. As local activist Wanda Henderson explains, "the struggle still continues."

## **4.0 PAPER 3: WHEN KNOWLEDGE ISN'T POWER: RESISTING EPISTEMIC OPPRESSION IN TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION**

### **4.1 Abstract**

A commitment to social justice and social justice teacher education (SJTE) programs are becoming ubiquitous in schools of education, but social injustice remains a contested concept and SJTE are contested spaces. Historically, a central aim of social justice education has been challenging systemic inequities and oppressions that are deeply embedded in education and society. However, social justice can be sloganized and engaged in ways that ultimately reproduce oppressive systems and structures. One challenge to disrupting systemic oppression in SJTE is ideology, or the connections between individual sensemaking and systems of power. While dominant ideologies and their common sense reasoning are known to invisibilize and normalize oppression, educational research is nascent in its study of the micro-processes of (un)learning ideology. This theoretical paper aims to build on this work by presenting philosopher Kristie Dotson's (2014) account of epistemic oppression. I argue that epistemic oppression has great theoretical and practical utility for teacher education by showing how and why current ideological systems persist and can also help teacher educators make visible and challenge oppressive "common sense" ideologies. I emphasize that resisting and dismantling the dominant ideologies is not just cognitive work, but deeply relational work that also requires collective political action.

## 4.2 Introduction

And as the rebellions rage in a post-COVID-19 US to end state-sanctioned violence against Black peoples, we can watch different truths begin to prevail while also detecting an encroaching entrenchment in epistemological systems that governed (and still govern) towards violence writ large. And it is the violence, which to the unreflexive just looks like the ‘everyday’ or the normative products of a well-functioning ‘common sense,’ that has so deeply disturbed me in my life and has preoccupied my work. (Dotson, 2021, p. 14)

The need to redress antiblackness, colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and other intersecting, systemic oppressions in education and US society remains urgent and dire. While social justice teacher education (SJTE) has moved from a marginal position to the center of the teacher education field in the last few decades, these programs remain contested spaces. Historically, the aim of social justice education has been challenging inequities that are deeply embedded in systems of schooling and society (Cochran-Smith, 2001). At the same time, “social justice” has taken on many meanings in ways that make it “conceptually ambiguous” and that have often lacked historical and theoretical grounding (Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 445). Similarly, social justice can be sloganized, a process where the term lacks “any specific meaning” and can then be used to “justify and frame teacher education efforts that represent a variety of ideological and political commitments,” not just those that seek to critique and change the current social order (Zeichner & Flessner, 2009, p. 296).

This theoretical ambiguity is problematic because it can lead to “social justice” existing in name only, rendering its aims of social transformation “diluted, trivialized, or co-opted”

(Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 445). Further, while there have been progressive moves in teacher education from frameworks of Eurocentrism to multiculturalism and now to “social justice,” the institution of teacher education still, by and large, operates in ways that ultimately uphold white supremacy and racial capitalism (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). This is because educational structures in the university and K-12 schools have reified Eurowestern and colonial norms of white supremacy and its counterpoint, antiblackness. Eurowestern and colonial frameworks render indigenous knowledges as deficient (Anzaldúa, 2012; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Simpson, 2014) and promote antiblackness, or “a cultural disregard for and disgust with blackness” (Dumas, 2016, p. 11).

One reason social justice can be sloganized and co-opted is due to ideology. While often used as a pejorative, I am engaging *ideology* as “the practical as well as the theoretical knowledges which enable people to “figure out” society, and within whose categories and discourses we “live out” and “experience” our objective positioning in social relations” (Hall, 1996, p. 30). In this way, *all* people use ideologies to make sense of the world. This and similar framings of ideology have been used in SJTE research to connect individual sensemaking with systems of power. For example, Bree Picower (2021) describes whiteness as a socialization process and a dominant “ideology and way of being in the world” that “enact[s] racism in ways that consciously and unconsciously maintain the broader system of White supremacy” (p. 6). Picower also outlines the necessity of two ideological racial reframes--“comprehending that historical racism shaped current inequality” and “perceiving race is a social construction”--in order to resist enacting the harms of whiteness in teaching (pp. 87-89).

However, identifying and shifting oppressive ideologies is difficult. Not only because it is often subconscious, but because it also challenges the power of the dominant system and its

“common sense.” Kevin Kumashiro (2009) explains how common sense logics portray schooling as a neutral enterprise focused on academic matters. As a result, the inclusion of political and social issues is typically viewed as “a distraction from the real work of schools, as inappropriate for schools, or simply nonsensical,” despite research that demonstrates moral, social, and political issues constantly arise in classrooms (p. xxxiv). Further, Kumashiro (2009) highlights how this common sense understanding of school also serves to invisibilize and normalize oppression:

oppression often plays out unrecognized and unchallenged in school because it has successfully convinced us that schools are neutral, are nonoppressive, and *should not* be taking a stand one way or the other on issues of oppression. Common sense does not often tell us that the status quo is quite oppressive. It does not often tell us that schools are already contributing to oppression. (p. xxxvi)

As a result, making the dominant ideology visible and helping teachers and teacher educators resist oppressive ideologies is a central struggle to SJTE. Yet, studies on the micro-processes of (un)learning ideology and how ideology impacts learning are nascent in educational research (exceptions include Philip, 2011; Philip et al., 2018). In addition, Curnow and colleagues (2019) note that there is very little engagement with epistemological development in social movement scholarship and activism even though “Black feminist thought, Indigenous scholarship, feminist standpoint theory, and critical Whiteness studies have long argued for attention to ways of knowing as a fundamental way of shifting power relations” (p. 734). However, the study of learning within social movements and collective social action is growing in the learning sciences (Curnow & Jurow, 2021).

In this paper, I present concepts and frameworks from the social epistemology literature in philosophy that I argue are helpful for understanding: (a) how and why dominant ideological systems persist and (b) for conceptualizing and strategizing ways that SJTE can intervene in challenging oppressive “common sense” ideologies in teaching. In particular, I highlight the theoretical and practical value of philosopher Kriste Dotson’s (2014) account of epistemic oppression (EO). Dotson outlines three different types of EO, their connection to social and political oppression, and the different types of changes that are required to address them.

I argue that Dotson’s account of EO has both theoretical and practical relevance for SJTE due to the pervasiveness of EO in education (and society) and its ability to explain why and how systems of inequality are perpetuated in teaching and teacher education, in both good and bad faith efforts towards social justice. I also discuss how the practices of epistemic resistance (Medina, 2012) and epistemic reflexivity (Dotson, 2011) provide a means to learn new epistemic resources and epistemological systems in order to resist and lessen EO.

In focusing on epistemological dimensions of day-to-day and systemic injustices, I am not trying to obscure the material forms of violence, surveillance, will-breaking, and spirit murder that students and educators of color experience in schools (Dumas, 2014; Love, 2020), but rather to show how EO is part and parcel to perpetuating and normalizing that violence. I emphasize that resisting and dismantling the dominant epistemological system is not just cognitive work, but deeply relational and political work that requires a long-term and ongoing commitment to building relationships, trust, and solidarity.

I first present two challenges in SJTE and disrupting systemic oppression more broadly: the multilevel nature of systemic injustice and the need for collective social action. I then introduce Dotson’s (2014) account of EO and make a theoretical and practical argument for why

it is helpful in addressing the two challenges presented. Epistemic resistance (Medina, 2012) and epistemic reflexivity (Berenstain et al., 2021; Dotson, 2011) are then discussed as possible conceptual tools teachers and teacher educators can develop to resist EO and oppressive epistemological systems. I then think about EO in the context of day-to-day teaching practice. I outline a paradox that results from EO's dual interpersonal and systemic dimensions and the multilevel structure of the educational system: that teachers can simultaneously be victims, bystanders, and perpetrators of EO. I posit that this paradox could motivate teachers and teacher educators to challenge binary thinking and provide a lens that supports multilevel analysis and collective action.

### **4.3 Two Challenges in Social Justice Teacher Education**

The challenges of SJTE are various. In this section, I discuss two: learning to analyze the multilevel nature of systemic injustices in education (and society) and developing skills for the collective social action required to resist current oppressive systems and build new, more just systems in their place.

Before discussing this challenges, I want to explain why I am purposely vague about the context of teacher education and SJTE in this paper. Since teacher education and teacher learning can occur in many places and take a variety of forms, I hope readers think expansively about the various ways EO can take shape in different contexts. For this reason, I use the term "educator" throughout this paper to be inclusive. In my view, the specific histories of places and people in a particular context are central to theorizing EO and developing pedagogical practices and collective action that promote solidarity. While I was primarily thinking about teacher educators,

pre-service, and in-service teachers when I was thinking about and writing this paper, I believe inquiries related to EO are relevant to all educators, both within and outside formal educational environments. I encourage people to expand, translate, and challenge these ideas within and across various teacher education contexts they see as related and relevant.

#### **4.3.1 Multilevel Analysis of Systemic Injustices**

Along with the challenges of theoretical ambiguity and the danger of co-optation mentioned earlier, SJTE also has the pragmatic difficulty of helping educators concretize and contextualize these theories into practice. Nasir & Hand (2006) describe a multilevel analysis in education as considering “both social structures and how individuals act in concert with them to perpetuate and reinvent [status quo] processes” (p. 464). This description challenges the idea that injustices are *either* structural *or* interpersonal. Instead, the aim is to understand how structures and individuals work in concert. In a review of the sociopolitical context of teaching, Nasir, Trujillo, and Hernández (2016) distinguish between three levels in educational contexts: (1) macro-level social, political, and economic trends, (2) districts, schools, and the working lives of teachers, and (3) the practices of teachers and the learning opportunities of students. They argue that these three levels are not top-down or nested in nature, but co-constitute each other.

For pre-/in-service teachers to recognize, analyze, and act within a multilevel system is a complex and ongoing process. Teacher education can play a key role in helping educators grapple with the ways that macro- and meso-level structures explicitly and implicitly impact their teaching and working conditions and, at the same time, how teachers and teaching can influence and change those systems. This idea challenges the “common sense” notion that educators do not have any power to resist or change the system. At the same time, it

acknowledges that macro- and meso-level forces like accountability policies, school funding, and teaching contracts, constrain the ways in which teachers can act. Centering multilevel analysis would likely require significant curricular and ideological shifts since many teacher education programs do not offer sustained critical approaches that examine systemic power relationships (Sleeter, 2017). And, even for SJTE-focused programs, educators' experiences can reinforce deficit mindsets, despite the intention to disrupt them (e.g., Andrews et al., 2019; Jacobs, 2019). This may be because, at all levels, it is difficult to unlearn and resist dominant ideologies like deficit framings, white normative values, and hierarchical relations, since they are socially shared, often implicit, and manifest differently across contexts (Philip, 2011). For instance, "common sense" policies and logics continue to normalize a macro-, meso-, and microlevel focus on state standardized tests as *the* measure to assess student learning, "good" schools, and "effective" teachers, despite (and because of) their reproduction of raced, classed, gendered, and ableist hierarchies (Au, 2013; Kumashiro, 2009).

Recognizing the multilevel and inter-constitutive nature of educational systems has important implications for how teachers understand their agency within the education system and how they conceptualize themselves as a political actor. Engaging in a multilevel analysis of educational systems can help teachers interrupt an oversimplified, binary notion of agency where people either have it or they don't. Instead, teacher educators can support teachers in understanding the specific contours of their agency, so that they can recognize and strategize opportunities to act. This idea of *agency* aligns with Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2007) description, where systemic structures and constraints are viewed as necessary to exercise agency:

If agency is the human ability to craft opportunity from the wherewithal of everyday life, then agency and structure are products of each other. Without their mutual

interaction, there would be no drama, no dynamic, no story to tell. (p. 27)

As a simple example, a pre-service teacher may share in their teacher education class that they are required by their placement site to teach a particular curriculum and set of lesson plans. They express concern that the texts and lesson plans seem misaligned to the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), but they feel obligated to teach them. The class could engage in a multilevel analysis of the classroom and school context to strategize when and how the pre-service teacher may be able to push back and engage CRP. For instance, texts are not inherently oppressive or anti-oppressive; instead *how* the text is taught, what questions are and are not asked, can work to reinforce or disrupt the dominant narratives and social dynamics (Kumashiro, 2009). The pre-service teacher may have the opportunity to insert questions and/or supplemental materials into the lesson plan that trouble the dominant narrative or make connections to the local community. Perhaps they can also strategize whether and how to raise these concerns to the cooperating teacher to see if they want to collaborate on making these kinds of changes. And/or perhaps the constraints of the classroom and school may motivate the pre-service teacher to think and act *outside* the school and engage with the community to support and empower students.

In all cases, such actions require creativity and often some risk. As Kumashiro (2009) describes, anti-oppressive education, by nature, is “never-ending and ever-contradictory” and faces both practical and political barriers (p. 121). In learning to analyze multilevel structures and the contours of their agency in the classroom, it also presents the challenge of having educators recognize themselves as political actors. While SJTE views teaching and teacher education as “fundamentally political activities” such that “it is impossible to teach in ways that are neither political nor value-laden” (Cochran-Smith, 2001, p. 3), many pre-service teachers, who remain predominantly white women, come to teaching with the dominant idea that they are

not political and teaching is not or should not be a political endeavor (Picower, 2013). This is grounded in the dominant ideology where the current education system and status quo social conditions are viewed as politically neutral. Given the systemic nature of injustice and oppression, the challenge is not just shifting the mindsets and actions of individual educators, but also working to shift social and power relations through solidarity and collective political action.

#### **4.3.2 Collective Political Action and Politicization**

Recent work in the learning sciences highlights the opportunities for learning and identity development that are created in social action and social movements (e.g., Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Curnow et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2016; Pham & Philip, 2020). As Curnow and colleagues (2019) describe, these studies highlight the sociocultural learning embedded in social action and gravitate toward questions of how participants come to understand themselves as agentic, how they construct grievances, and how they mobilize their analysis collectively to change systems of oppression. (p. 718)

While teacher education has not been a central context studied in this literature, I argue this research is applicable and important to understand if and how educators come to see themselves as political actors working towards solidarity and social justice. As Mayorga & Picower (2018) explain, centering and working towards the demands and the vision of liberatory social movements like Black Lives Matter requires people within teacher education to “understand and transform ourselves” through the alternative futures and reimagined systems of the movement (p. 214).

Yet, while many SJTE programs attend to curriculum and critical pedagogy, the microprocesses of educators’ political learning and sociopolitical development are not typically studied or seen as learning processes in their own right (Curnow et al., 2019). While many

educators and researchers utilize Freirean (2000) approaches to critical pedagogy and sociopolitical consciousness, where educators and students collectively learn to “read the world,” these engagements call fall into individualized, intellectualized, and linear engagements that replicate, rather than disrupt, traditional learning theories and relations (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2017). This creates a tension where, despite the educator being situated in a collective learning process (say, a teacher education classroom), the “work of learning is tacitly understood as happening in the mind of individuals, rather than distributed across people, communities, tools, and environments” (Curnow et al., 2019, p. 719).

The challenge is grappling with critical consciousness not just as a cognitive, individual learning process, but as a process of collective political learning and action. Curnow and colleagues (2019) argue that the study of politicization can promote better understandings of how people learn and contest ideologies. They theorize *politicization* as “a collective learning process involving not only the intellectual and cognitive processes of developing a political analysis but also shifts in the practices of a group, their ways of knowing, and their identities” (p. 719). Given the inherently political nature of teaching, processes of politicization are also occurring in teacher education programs. Research about how politicization occurs and what forms it takes across a teacher education program should be of particular interest to SJTE programs since different ideologies and forms of teacher politicization can serve to disrupt and/or reproduce systems of oppression (Andrews et al., 2019; Philip et al., 2019; Sondel et al., 2019).

As one small step in this direction, the rest of this paper will argue that Kristie Dotson’s (2012, 2014) concept of epistemic oppression can be used an analytic tool to promote and assess teachers’ politicization towards more and less radical understandings of the sociopolitical and epistemological conditions of schools. Even though epistemology is only one dimension of

politicization and is neither fully representative nor separable from the other three dimensions Curnow and colleagues (2019) detail, I focus on epistemic oppression because of its ability to foreground the two challenges just discussed: (1) It illuminates how epistemic structures across multilevel systems impact day-to-day teaching and learning processes; and (2) it provides a lens to help educators recognize that classroom practices deemed “neutral,” “objective,” and “effective” in the dominant discourse can be invisibilized and normalized forms of epistemic violence and oppression.

#### **4.4 Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression and Resistance in Education**

“Knowledge is power” is often a phrase used to emphasize the importance and potentials of education. Its modern use is grounded in the liberalist values of the European Enlightenment. Within this framing, “knowledge” and “power” are idealized and seen as universal, assumed to be attainable by all individuals. Yet, this individualist framing fails to account for how power shapes knowledge and knowledge systems. Social, political, and economic forms of oppression also embed epistemic forms of oppression that have been built into social systems and institutional structures (Dotson, 2014; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007).

In educational institutions, for example, students are frequently stratified by race, class, and dis/ability in the US educational system (Au, 2016); the knowledge systems of marginalized groups have been historically suppressed and denigrated (Collins, 2000; Grande, 2004; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015); and sociopolitical and epistemic power structures in schools and universities often render oppression both normal and inevitable (Dumas, 2018; Love, 2020; Mayorga et al.,

2019). As a result, it is important for educators to recognize ways of knowing and knowledge systems as intertwined with power structures that work to devalue, obscure, and delegitimize the knowledge of marginalized groups in unwarranted and oppressive ways.

In philosophy, the field of social epistemology can help educators analyze the intersections of knowledge systems, power, and injustice. Social epistemology was developed to expand and critique individualistic and cognitivist Western traditions of epistemology. Instead of exclusively focusing on the cognition of individuals, *social epistemology* examines social interactions and knowledge systems (Goldman & O'Connor, 2019). The purpose is not only to describe social, historical, and cultural dimensions of knowledge and ways of knowing, but to provide a normative analysis about how to improve our knowledge practices (Grasswick, 2018). As a result, social epistemology often draws from feminist, queer, indigenous, and other knowledge traditions that challenge the normative standards of traditional Eurowestern epistemologies. In this way, social epistemology is one way to describe the many critical traditions that seek to disrupt systems of oppression (e.g., Du Bois, 1995, 2003; Fanon, 1967; Grande, 2004; Grant et al., 2015; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015; K.-Y. Taylor, 2019).

A growing subfield within social epistemology is epistemic injustice. Work related to epistemic injustice examines how social power dynamics are related to injustices in epistemological resources and processes. One broad definition of *epistemic injustice* is wronging someone in their capacity as a knower, by excluding them from participating in the creation and spread of knowledge, which is “a capacity essential to human value” (Fricker, 2007, p. 5). Examples include the lack of shared understanding and language for the experience sexual harassment prior to the 1970s (Fricker, 2007) and Patricia Hill Collins’s (2000) stereotypes or “controlling images” of Black women that serve to stigmatize and discredit Black women’s competence (Dotson, 2011). While epistemic injustices are often connected to social and political injustices, there are also distinct epistemological dimensions (Dotson, 2014). For instance, the dominant ideologies of white supremacy tend to devalue, discredit, and/or ignore Black, indigenous, feminist, and other alternative ways of knowing and knowledge frameworks.

Epistemic injustice builds off the work of feminist epistemologists and science studies theorists who have demonstrated that our “criteria of credibility” are “far from democratic” and

favor members of privileged groups (Tuana, 2006, p. 13). These criteria of credibility are sociohistorically situated and therefore imbue prejudices such as racism, classism, sexism, ableism, and ageism. As a result, these credibility prejudices promote epistemologies of ignorance, where privileged groups actively and willfully ignore oppression and their role in perpetuating it (Mills, 2007; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007; Tuana, 2006). While epistemic injustices can be one-off or sporadic experiences, I will focus on the pervasive and systemic forms of epistemic injustice, what Dotson (2014) calls epistemic oppression.

#### **4.4.1 Three Types of Epistemic Oppression**

*Epistemic oppression* (EO) entails persistent and pervasive epistemic exclusions that hinder an individual's or a community's contribution to knowledge production. These harms cause deficiencies in social knowledge and so they damage not only particular knowers, but the state of social knowledge and shared epistemic resources (Dotson, 2012, 2014). Persistent epistemic exclusions lead to the knowledge of certain people and groups being consistently devalued, denied, and/or deemed irrational. Dotson (2014) distinguishes three different types of EO. What differentiates each type is the type of change, or "order of change," that is minimally required to address it. I argue that these three different types of EO and orders of change map onto well-known, multilevel challenges of SJTE.

In order to understand the different forms of EO and the orders of change minimally required to address it, Dotson (2014) first introduces three features of the epistemological landscape. The first feature is the situatedness of knowers. All knowers are social beings who are socially situated; they do not have "infinite vision" (p. 120). As a result, our social position and habits of attention have a profound effect on what we come to know. In education, we often talk

about “positionality.” The idea of situatedness is very similar and draws from insights of standpoint epistemology (e.g., Collins, 2000).

The second feature is the interdependence of our epistemic resources. Epistemic resources are anything that help us come to know, including language, certain experiences, concepts, frameworks, theories, etc. Epistemic resources are interdependent because knowing requires people to share epistemic resources (e.g., language) to make sense of and evaluate our experiences.

The third feature of our epistemological landscape is the resilience of our epistemological systems. Epistemological systems are “our overall epistemic life ways” including our social imaginaries, habits of cognition, attitudes towards (particular) knowers, and other relevant sensibilities that encourage or hinder the production of knowledge (ibid.). These systems are resilient in the sense that they can “absorb extraordinarily large disturbances without redefining [their] structure” (ibid.) Dotson describes this resilience as both helpful and harmful. Helpful in the sense that we rely on epistemological systems to make sense of the world and a relatively stable/resilient system is needed to do that. At the same time, resilience can also produce ignorance and bad epistemic habits by making knowers insensitive to people and epistemic resources that challenge their epistemological system (Medina, 2012).

After outlining the epistemological landscape, Dotson (2014) distinguishes three types of EO. Each type varies in the order of change minimally required to address it (all three types are summarized in Table 1). These categorizations are useful for recognizing different types of EO and understanding the different types of changes needed to address them. At the same time, these categories are also artificial because all three types of EO are interconnected and interconstituted (Dotson, 2014). Finally, while one could read these descriptions as primarily cognitive and

individual, they are also deeply relational and political. The changes described by Dotson cannot occur without developing relationships and trust, and they require working collectively against dominant social, political, economic, and epistemological powers.

*First-order EO* entails persistent epistemic exclusion in knowledge production due to an *inefficiency* or incompetent functioning of a *shared* epistemic resource (ibid., p. 123). Credibility and how is distributed to certain individuals and groups is a common first-order EO. Credibility conferrals are contrastive in that giving excess credibility to some people often correlates with assigning credibility deficits to others (Medina, 2011). Credibility conferrals are also socially and historically informed. In education, for example, the testimony and knowledge of adults are often given more default credibility than that of students. Similarly, systems of power in the US confer more default credibility to people closest to the cis-het white male middle class norms.

First-order EO requires first-order changes. These are *within* system changes to existing, shared epistemic resources (e.g., credibility) in ways that correct for inefficiencies or better align one's behavior to one's values. For instance, an educator who wants to empower their students and treat them equitably must learn to correct for their prejudices so that they do not discredit or undervalue the testimonies of historically marginalized youth.

What makes first-order changes challenging are the relations of epistemic power. *Epistemic power* describes “relations of privilege and underprivilege afforded via different social positions, relevant resources and/or epistemological systems with respect to knowledge production.” (Dotson, 2014, p. 125). It is difficult to convince epistemically privileged populations that their privilege is unwarranted, and thus that they should “lower their own default credibility” in relation to less epistemically powerful populations (ibid., p. 126). One example of epistemic power in teaching and teacher education lies in the various manifestations

of whiteness where the sociopolitical dominance of whiteness makes it seem “neutral” and “objective.” The (subconscious) desire to maintain the epistemic power of whiteness can lead to “white protectionism” where (white) teachers engage with curriculum and students in ways that view the testimonies of students and people of color as less credible and less relevant (Picower, 2021).

**Table 5 Three Types of Epistemic Oppression**

| Type of epistemic oppression | Description of epistemic oppression  | Example of epistemic oppression*   | Order of change minimally required   | Difficulties to making this order of change  |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| First-order                  | Persistent epistemic exclusion in knowledge production due to an <i>inefficiency</i> or incompetent functioning of a <i>shared</i> epistemic resource  | Unwarranted distributions of credibility, e.g., Default devaluation of credibility for youth and BIPOC people relative to adults and white people, respectively; Assumed incompetence of dis/abled people  | First-order changes require correcting for inefficiencies <i>within</i> shared epistemic resources; making one’s behavior reflect one’s values   | Epistemic power (related to social, political, economic power); Hard to imagine what would motivate relatively epistemically powerful population to alter judgments that would lower their default credibility   |
| Second-order                 | Persistent epistemic exclusion in knowledge production due to inability to communicate experiences to others that <i>do not share</i> epistemic resources sufficient for comprehending those experiences and ideas                     | Biological, formal, and individual racism (systemic and institutional racism)**; Color evasive laws and policies (critical race frameworks); the achievement gap (the education debt); Eurocentric curriculum (CRP)                                  | Second-order changes call into question the adequacy of the epistemic resources <i>themselves</i> . Need to identify gaps in social imaginary and prevailing frameworks and revise them; a “conceptual revolution” | (In addition to the above) Epistemic resources in question function well for a significant portion of people, which leads to epistemological resilience and a low demand for change  |
| Third-order                  | Compromise to epistemic agency caused by inadequate, dominant <i>system</i> of epistemic resources. Challenges the relevance of dominant resources given their inability to recognize and value other knowledge production activities. | Colonialism (decolonial theory); Racial capitalism (Black radicalism); White supremacy (anti-racism); Carceral logics (abolition); Patriarchy (feminism); Ableism (DisCrit); deficit perspectives/ ideology result from any combination of the above | Third-order changes must recognize the instituted social imaginary and (radically) alter them; changing the epistemological system that upholds and preserves oppressive ideas and relations                       | (In addition to the above) Epistemological resilience allows system to be unresponsive to or co-opt ideas from alternative frameworks that challenge existing system; Failure to (recognize a need to) change epistemological system; Alternate system seems “impossible” within the dominant system |

\* Descriptions in columns based on Dotson’s (2014) account, except for the middle column

\*\* Parentheses connote a non-dominant alternative (system of) epistemic resources to resist epistemic oppression

*Second-order EO* involves the persistent inability to communicate experiences to others that *do not share* epistemic resources sufficient for comprehending those experiences and ideas. They differ from first-order EO because the epistemic exclusion is not caused by misunderstandings or inefficiencies in shared resources, but because the dominant group does not have the epistemic resources necessary to understand the experiences and ideas of people in a non-dominant group (p. 127). Second-order EO follows from the reality that while “interdependent epistemic resources illuminate some aspects of our worlds, they simultaneously work to obscure other aspects” (Dotson, 2014, p. 129). Historical, social and political formations of marginalization largely account for who suffers from second-order EO (p. 129).

For example, dominant conceptualizations of race and racism as concepts have perpetuated second-order EO in schools and society. Though people may use the same language of “race” and “racism,” they may be engaging in very different understandings. While modern ideas of race were initially conceived by Europeans as a biological trait to scientifically justify ideologies of racial hierarchy, it is now more generally accepted that race is a social construct that generates material inequalities and oppression (Haney López, 1994; Omi & Winant, 2014). But, even within socially constructed ideas of race, individualized, color evasive, and cultural deficit views of race generate and reproduce second-order EO by failing to grapple with underlying power relations that produce systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gorski, 2011). In response, scholars of color theorize and use systemic, structural, and institutional forms of racism that challenge the dominant conceptualizations. For example, critical race theory (CRT) portrays racism as pervasive in American law and society rather than aberrant (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and the idea of *antiblackness* describes a permanent and “structurally antagonistic relationship” between Black people and the dominant white imaginations of

humanity (Dumas, 2016, p. 13). These alternative conceptualizations of racism “call into question the [dominant] epistemic resources themselves” (Dotson, 2014, p. 128).

These kinds of second-order changes to address second-order EO requires a “conceptual revolution,” or identifying gaps in one’s social imaginary, schema, and frameworks and revising them (ibid.). Second-order changes also likely require first-order changes, since one will have to lend more credibility to those with relatively weaker default credibility in order to recognize that one’s epistemic resources are in need of significant revisions, and then to execute those revisions. Similar to first-order changes, a difficulty for second-order changes is epistemic power. While the creation of alternative epistemologies listed in Table 5 are “an important step” and a form of resistance for a relatively epistemically powerless population, it does not necessarily lessen second-order EO if the use of the dominant and insufficient epistemic resources is still expected or required (p. 129).

*Third-order EO* are compromises to epistemic agency caused by inadequacies in the dominant system or framework. Unlike first- and second-order EO, which detected shortcomings *within* shared epistemological systems, third-order EO critiques come from “outside” a set of epistemic resources to throw large portions of the epistemological system into question. In this way, the problem goes beyond the epistemic resources themselves “to the system *upholding* and *preserving* those resources” (p. 131, emphasis in original).

For example, antiblackness provides a specific reconceptualization of racism that, if taken up, can resist second-order EO. Yet, if we think about the broader social theory and view of reality that antiblackness promotes, it calls into question large portions of dominant epistemological systems like white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism. These systems and ideologies guide how groups interpret and inhabit the world. As a result, it may seem impossible

to institute alternative systems (i.e., third-order changes) to address third-order EO because the dominant epistemic systems are so ingrained.

Third-order changes to address third-order EO must recognize the instituted social imaginary and (radically) alter them. In addition to confronting epistemic power, these change also require overcoming the difficulty of epistemological resilience. The resilience of the dominant system often leads to a failure to recognize a need to change an epistemological system. The magnitude of disruption required to recognize the limits of one's epistemological systems may be immense and it is "absolutely not clear" what provokes such changes (Dotson, 2014, p. 132). Dotson also wagers that being able to recognize and address limitations in an epistemological system may be impossible for many (ibid.).

In education, deficit perspectives or deficit ideology is one example of third-order EO. Challenging deficit perspectives is a frequent theme of teacher education, even those without social justice missions. Yet, as Sleeter (2004) describes "the long-standing deficit ideology runs rampant in many schools...despite the abstraction that "all children can learn." Gorski (2011) and other critical scholars have noted how discussions of deficit perspectives often focus on improving the academic outcomes of individuals and ignore the sociopolitical context. However, this approach perpetuates a deficit ideology by implying that problems and solutions lie within individuals, rather than interrogating the systems and social conditions that impress upon them disenfranchised communities and individuals. While well-meaning educators may seek to resist deficit perspectives, the dominant understanding obscures and reproduces the social conditions of oppression and disenfranchisement. As a result, deficit perspectives can paradoxically work to justify and perpetuate the existing social conditions by (implicitly or explicitly) blaming students, parents, and other individuals (ibid.).

The third-order change required to address this third-order EO requires not just acknowledging difference or valuing difference, but learning alternative epistemological systems and related epistemic resources that are generated and used by marginalized groups. Because this is not merely a cognitive task, but a deeply *relational* and *political* task, it requires a long-term and ongoing commitment to building relationships, trust, and solidarity in order to understand and engage in alternative ways of being and knowing.

#### **4.4.2 Theoretical and Explanatory Value of Epistemic Oppression in Teacher Education**

There are at least three ways that Dotson's (2014) account of EO is helpful for understanding persistent problems in SJTE. First, the three different types of EO provide an explanation for how educators can seemingly understand and take up a concept or idea for more just teaching (e.g., CRP, anti-racism, asset-based perspectives), but engage in practices that (inadvertently) perpetuate the status quo. For example, educators attempting to implement CRP could still maintain a view where cultural differences are viewed as deficits (Jacobs, 2019) and/or could fail to engage the sociopolitical dimensions of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Part of the pervasive nature of EO is that dominant epistemic resources and systems are invisibilized so many people do not realize the alternatives. As a result, even well-meaning educators may not recognize the types of relational, political, and epistemological changes that need to occur in order to faithfully implement something like CRP.

At the same time, alternative epistemologies, when recognized, can also be seen as a threat or "indoctrination," given the assumption is that the current system is "neutral" and "objective." Two recent examples include the backlash against the *New York Times's* 1619 Project, which some conservative historians see as "a displacement of historical understanding

by ideology” (Serwer, 2019) and recent legislation to ban “critical race theory,” which many Republicans are using as a bogeyman for any curricula that does not center whiteness and/or American exceptionalism (Adams, 2021; Wilson, 2021). These arguments both invisibilize the EO of the dominant system and assume that this system is not also ideological.

Second, epistemological resilience helps explain both how the status quo persists and how concepts can be co-opted because resilience allows for epistemological systems to “absorb large disturbances without redefining its structure” (Dotson, 2014, p. 121). This explains how institutions of (teacher) education continue to uphold white supremacy and racial capitalism, despite the spread of social justice rhetoric and programs (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). Epistemological resilience also explains how oppressive structures within educational systems can be justified and normalized, like standardized testing (Au, 2016) and policing (Anderson-Zavala et al., 2017). In terms of co-optation, Gorski’s (2011) critique of deficit perspectives highlights how critical concepts can be taken up and used in ways that reproduce rather than disrupt dominant epistemological systems and power relations.

Third, the combination of epistemic power and epistemological resilience highlights how violence and oppression (social, political, economic, and epistemic) can be normalized in schools and broader society. These include acts of both “fast” and “slow” violence. Acts of “fast violence” include the school police flipping and dragging a Black girl from her desk for using her cell phone (Dumas, 2014), while “slow violence” includes low expectations and sustained disinvestment in schools and communities that “eat away at the health, well-being, and sense of belonging for students” (Mayorga & Picower, 2018, p. 217).

Together, these lessons illustrate how EO is a pervasive threat in educational spaces that is “very easy to commit” and “extraordinarily difficult” to avoid (Dotson, 2012, p. 37). Not only

are teaching and learning epistemological pursuits by nature, but public schools have historically served as places of forced assimilation and acculturation into the dominant and stratified society (Grande, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). Such goals leverage the epistemic power and resilience of the current dominant system to perpetuate all three forms of EO. To both resist and lessen EO in teaching is not an easy task, and it “may well be impossible” to entirely avoid EO (Dotson, 2012, p. 24). However, this does not lessen the ethical responsibility of educators to be conscious of EO and work to resist and minimize it.

#### **4.5 Applying Epistemic Oppression to Contexts of Teaching**

So far, I have emphasized EO in classroom interactions, both in teacher education and the practice of teaching. However, educational systems are multilevel, so I also want to discuss how EO manifests across different levels of the educational system and how educators can support each other in these analyses.

##### **4.5.1 Interpersonal and Systemic Dimensions of Epistemic Oppression**

Epistemic injustice and EO can be perpetuated by individuals as well as by systems and structures. Elizabeth Anderson (2012) distinguishes between transactional (i.e., interpersonal) and structural dimensions of EO. Transactional dimensions are related to exchanges and interactions between individuals while structural dimensions are “a system of rules that govern transactions” (p. 164). Similarly, José Medina’s (2012) account highlights how EO both occurs in the cognitive-affective functioning of individuals and within structures and systems. These

distinctions do not imply that epistemic injustices are *either* interpersonal or systemic, but that *both* dimensions should be duly considered, and that they often work together in complex ways.

As a result, Medina (2012) discusses the necessity of *epistemic resistance*, which is:

The use of our epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains those structures. (p. 3)

The actions of individuals and collectives can resist EO by changing their cognitive-affective responses, and, at the same time, structures that perpetuate EO need to be resisted.

Considering both the role of individuals and the role systems play in perpetuating EO is particularly helpful in examining multilevel educational contexts. In fact, multiple philosophers (Alcoff, 2010; Anderson, 2021b; Medina, 2012) have used educational contexts to describe and discuss the interplay between systemic and interpersonal forms of EO. Alcoff (2010) and Anderson (2012) take a macro-perspective to sketch how they see institutions and schools as key places to intervene on EO. They posit that extensive educational reforms like affirmative action, curricular mandates, and school integration would help change unjust structures and resource distribution as well as correct the identity prejudices of individuals that lead to EO. In their view, changes to the structures of the educational system can create both more epistemically just institutions and contribute to more epistemically just interactions among individuals.

While I agree with Alcoff and Anderson that educational systems and structures are key places for redressing EO, it is also necessary to attend to macro-, meso-, and micro-level interactions. As Medina (2012) explains, both systems and interpersonal relations must shift in order to create a more epistemically, ethically, and sociopolitically just society:

In order to overcome situations of oppression, we need to transform the polis and its

citizens simultaneously, and in multiple ways; we need to change their ethical, their political, and their epistemic ways of relating...the mistake of structuralist and collectivist views (such as classic Marxism) is to think that by changing the sociopolitical structures, people's ways of thinking and relating to each other will automatically change, whereas in fact a structurally more equitable society can nonetheless retain its epistemic and ethical injustices in its everyday interactions and practices (p. 85-86)

While teaching is constrained by educational structures (e.g., state testing, discipline policies, mandated curricula) and the sociopolitical context, it is also deeply relational and emotional work. So even though educational systems do promote EO and often constrain educators, they do not wholly determine educators' actions and relations. Instead, educators are agents who interpret and make decisions about how to respond to systems and structures. Educators do not have complete freedom in their pedagogical choices, but every context provides its own particular constraints and opportunities for agency and resistance. This means educators must "craft opportunity" to resist EO from "the wherewithal of everyday life" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 27). The educational system, with its multiple levels and structures, form an interlocking web of systemic and interpersonal forms of epistemic injustice that staff, students, families, and communities are enmeshed within. The difficulty is in identifying and enacting the types of agency and opportunities educators have to resist and lessen EO within their particular contexts.

Along with epistemic resistance, epistemological reflexivity is another process to support multilevel analysis and disrupting EO. *Epistemic reflexivity* is a recognition of the limitations of various epistemological systems and how everyday practices can generate harm. Epistemically reflexive systems and actors remain sensitive to oversights and harms and develop new epistemic resources and other means for resisting EO (Berenstain et al., 2021; Dotson, 2012). Epistemic

reflexivity is a major departure from the dominant, status quo epistemic practices that are “unreflexive as a rule,” and “often deem themselves as the ‘one true’ epistemology,” with all others epistemologies being deemed “deficient” as a result (Berenstain et al., 2021, p. 11).

The ultimate goal of epistemic reflexivity and epistemic resistance are to work collectively to supplant current oppressive and unreflexive epistemological systems. I imagine these practices would be part of a broader politicization process in teacher education, which would include “a collective learning process involving not only the intellectual and cognitive processes of developing a political analysis but also shifts in the practices of a group, their ways of knowing, and their identities” (Curnow et al., 2019, p. 724). It is important to realize that epistemic reflexivity should not be conceptualized as only “a virtue of actors” because “actors can break away from the system and the system will carry on” (Berenstain et al., 2021, p. 15). What these processes might look like in teacher education are discussed a little later.

#### **4.5.2 A Paradox of Epistemic Oppression**

So far, this analysis has focused on educators resisting becoming perpetrators of EO, but in thinking about EO, its systemic and interpersonal forms, and the multilevel structure of the educational system, I recognized a paradox where:

Educators can simultaneously be victims, perpetrators, and/or bystanders to EO due to being state agents who are, on the one hand, constrained by unjust educational systems and working conditions, but who, on the other hand, have opportunities and agency to individually and collectively resist these systems.

Educators are *perpetrators* when they engage in actions that, individually or collectively, cause or perpetuate EO among students, colleagues, or other community members, whether intentional

or not. Educators are *bystanders* when they are complicit in the EO of others, often due to inaction or ignorance. Educators are *victims* when they experience EO caused by educational structures or interpersonal interactions. While I focus on EO particularly, these arguments may extend to other forms of oppression because EO is often intertwined with social, political, and economic oppression (Dotson, 2014).

The paradox of EO arises because “common sense” thinking assumes that perpetrators, bystanders, and victims are mutually exclusive, *either/or* positions—i.e., that people cannot occupy two or more of these positions at the same time. However, given that EO occurs in both systemic and interpersonal forms and that educators are positioned within multilevel educational systems, it is not a contradiction for an educator to *both* experience EO due to repressive educational structures *and* to (unintentionally) perpetuate interpersonal forms of EO through their interactions with students and colleagues. In addition, structures and hierarchical relations in the multilevel educational system are historically unjust, particularly for students and educators from historically marginalized groups.

Engaging with the paradox of EO requires educators to contend not just with EO occurring within their classroom or school, but how those injustices are related to structures of the educational system, and their social, historical, and political context. For instance, the white supremacist and neoliberal ideologies embedded within educational institutions epistemically oppress many public school teachers (white and BIPOC) by promoting disinvestment in their schools and students’ communities and devaluing teacher knowledge, relationships, and practices that do not increase test scores (Au, 2016; Lipman, 2011; Rodriguez & Magill, 2016). At the same time, white teachers can perpetuate EO by (unintentionally) promoting ideologies of whiteness. Educators could also (unwittingly) be complicit in or actively reproducing ableist,

gendered, and colonial ideologies. Ultimately, the purpose is not to be perfect or eradicate all EO, which is likely impossible (Dotson, 2012). Instead, the paradox of EO should provide motivation educators to continually and collectively develop epistemic reflexivity and epistemic resistance in their practice.

#### **4.5.2.1 Challenging Binary Thinking**

Another benefit of the paradox of EO is that it challenges dominant epistemic resources and epistemological systems by challenging binary thinking. Once educators recognize their potential to be victims, perpetrators, *and* bystanders to epistemic injustice, the insufficiency of binary thinking becomes more apparent and can motivate a more complex notion of praxis to recognize and resist these injustices. Both/and conceptualizations allow for more careful examinations of educator/student positionings and agency within the multilevel educational system. They also help identify the ways in which educators can be dually implicated and harmed by EO, and the ways in which they, as individuals and collectives, can resist. Challenging binary thinking resists both the overly mechanistic ideas of agency (Medina, 2012) where teachers are just “cogs in a wheel” as well as the individualistic and neoliberal framing where there are “no excuses” for low student achievement (Sondel, 2016). In a non-binary inquiry, educators must continually grapple with the different levels and structures of the education system, and the opportunities and barriers their positionings present for promoting epistemic reflexivity and resisting EO.

This EO inspired description of non-binary thinking in teacher education departs slightly from Duto & Cartun's (2016) troubling of binaries in their teacher education courses. Their account highlights the limits of language and how dominant binary discourses like success/failure and control/chaos can promote problematic understandings and assessments of

teaching. While I agree that language is one difficulty, I think a broader challenge is the conceptual limits of dominant epistemic resources (of which language is one) that are often used to interpret student behavior and teaching practice.

In addition, their account downplays how emotion and cognition are intertwined. Dominant epistemic resources and systems often serve to make individuals *insensitive* and even *numb* to our own and others' affective and moral responses (Dotson, 2018; Medina, 2012). This means when we ask educators to attend to the affective dimensions of their practice, this itself challenges the dominant epistemic system. For instance, educational reform rhetoric like “evidence based practices” and “effective teaching” frame “good” teaching as primarily a technical endeavor, that is related to, but largely separate from emotional, relational, and political dimensions of teaching (Philip et al., 2019). As a result, part of resisting EO and developing epistemic reflexivity is recognizing how our meaning making and decision making are, at once, cognitive, affective, experiential, and moral.

#### **4.5.3 Attending to EO in Day-to-Day Practices**

While philosophers often discuss the relevance of epistemic injustice to educational issues, there is little educational research that study the interplay between these ideas, teacher learning, and teacher practices (exceptions include Sibbett, 2020). As a result, much work remains to be done to (re)theorize, implement, and study concepts of epistemic injustice and EO within educational contexts. I have argued that part of the utility of EO is its ability to support multilevel analysis, collective political action, and/or politicization among educators. While a detailed analysis of EO in day-to-day teaching practices is outside the scope of this paper, I discuss three components of this process and the related challenges of engaging a praxis of EO:

- (1) Practice and experiences should iteratively inform theory (re)construction.
- (2) Collective engagement and inquiry is necessary for recognizing and revising the gaps in our epistemic resources and epistemological systems. Collective inquiry and action is also required to disrupt and dismantle oppressive epistemological systems.
- (3) It is a constant struggle and an ongoing commitment to resist EO.

First, it is important to remember that within a *praxis*, theory and practice are not an either/or binary, nor is theory in a privileged position relative to practice (Freire, 2000). Instead, educators should engage theory and practice iteratively, using their experiences and practices to evaluate the utility of existing theories and (re)construct theories for particular contexts. Philip (2019) explains this process for one of his teacher education courses:

Learning and social theory were no longer frameworks to apply to practice. Novice teachers' work with students became spaces of theory building that nuanced, complicated, and troubled the theory they read. We were writing place-relevant theory rather than simply using theory developed in different contexts than ours. (p. 24)

Dotson's (2014) account of EO provides a multitude of opportunities for educators to engage in this kind of theory (re)construction. We might ask: In what ways can the distinctions between first-, second-, and third-order EO inform educator practices? How can epistemic power and epistemological resistance explain some of the challenges in a teaching context? How might educators' experience further nuance and complexify these concepts? How does an educator learn and decide how to engage in epistemic resistance within a particular context?

Educators can also consider these theoretical/practical questions alongside other theories and practices. For instance, Domínguez (2020) details how one of his teacher education courses supported pre-service teachers in cultivating *epistemic disobedience*, or an active resistance to

oppressive, colonial logics (p. 1). To do so, he reimagined the practice of pedagogical rehearsals by examining and decomposing (in)effective critical pedagogical practices through a theater of the oppressed (*teatro del oprimido*) approach. Using this approach, the pre-service teachers were spectator-actors re-enacting teaching dilemmas that were generated collaboratively, by drawing from real and hypothetical scenarios. The protagonist navigates the dilemma, and “with community input, [seeks to] “break” the oppression characters are experiencing” (ibid., p. 4). *Teatro* practices like this not only allow for educators to collectively analyze and interrupt particular embodied practices of oppression in teaching, but to use those experiences to build context- and place-relevant theories of EO and epistemic resistance.

Second, collective engagement and inquiry is necessary for recognizing and revising the gaps in our epistemic resources and epistemological systems. This is evidenced by the examples just provided. Both Philip (2019) and Domínguez’s (2020) teacher education courses encouraged pre-service teachers to collectively reimagine past and future practices through processes like (re-) narration and *teatro*. These practices engaged cognitive, affective, and moral aspects of teaching. They also required high levels of trust between the pre-service teachers and the teacher educators. Domínguez describes that the cohort had “worked for months to build trust and empathy” and how he was keenly aware that issues of power and trust were not only issues in the K-12 classrooms, but the teacher education classroom as well (p. 5). Similarly, Philip (2019) emphasizes the importance of novice teachers learning to “authentically listen” and be in relationship to others in order to enhance the humanity of the listener and the speaker (p. 6). Philip’s (2019) example of one novice teacher, Rosa, highlights how listening is effortful, even among “critically conscious” teachers. Rosa’s dilemma was that her feeling of being “right” about certain social issues made it difficult for her to listen to a student who denied the existence

of police brutality. Instead of imposing her ideas onto students—which mimics the unreflexivity in the dominant epistemological system—she learned to prioritize listening by withholding judgment and asking questions (p. 15). Thus, the goal of epistemic resistance and reflexivity is not to impose top-down meaning (critical or otherwise) onto educators or students, but to work together to “make sense of power across scales” and connect specific “interactions in place to larger structures and ideologies in society.” (p. 25)

Third, it is a constant ongoing struggle to resist and lessen EO (Dotson, 2012). Medina (2012) positions epistemic resistance as a struggle central to the work of creating and sustaining democratic sensibilities and democratic societies. As other critical educators and scholars have discussed, struggles towards social justice and liberation are interconnected and ongoing, from dismantling the carceral system (Kaba & Meiners, 2014), to working towards Black liberation (Love, 2020) to decolonization (Grande, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This is not to say that everyone’s visions of justice and liberation are aligned, but that solidarity requires “working through difference to achieve liberation for ourselves and for others” (Mayorga & Picower, 2019, p. 220).

In thinking about solidarity and collective action, it is also important to consider other contexts of teaching where collective political action and organizing are taking place among educators outside of the classroom. This could be in teacher collectives and inquiry groups (Martinez et al., 2016); teacher activist groups (Niesz, 2018); or union organizing (Pham & Philip, 2020); just to name a few. Teacher education programs could also consider developing additional field components and fostering community collaborations that would allow them to collaborate and learn with students in non-traditional contexts, such as on community action projects (e.g., Philip, 2019). These spaces of collective action are dynamic learning spaces where

people work together to “critique, re-imagine, strategize, design, and re-make” in order to transform values and power relations to work towards more just educational systems (Curnow & Jurow, 2021, p. 14).

### **Continuing the Struggle**

I have argued for both the theoretical and practical relevance of Kristie Dotson’s (2012, 2014, 2018) account of EO to teacher praxis, particularly in contexts like SJTE that seek to disrupt and replace oppressive systems. The first part of the paper outlined Dotson’s three types of EO and the types of changes that need to occur within/between epistemic resources and epistemological in order to address them. I argued that EO, along with the concepts of epistemic power and epistemological resilience, have theoretical and explanatory value for understanding why and how systems of inequality are perpetuated in teaching and teacher education, in both good and bad faith efforts towards social justice. However, a lot of work remains to be done in understanding the affordances and challenges in having educators engage in an inquiry and action (i.e., a praxis) that aims to study and disrupt EO within and across different educational contexts. Such a praxis requires not just difficult cognitive work, but deeply relational and political work. I also proposed epistemic resistance (Medina, 2012) and epistemic reflexivity (Berenstain et al., 2021; Dotson, 2011) as both aims and ongoing practices that may support educators in working to resist EO, with the ultimate goal of supplanting oppressive and dominant epistemological systems.

In the second part of the paper, I argued for the practical relevance of EO to teaching and SJTE. I highlighted EO’s interpersonal, systemic, and multilevel dimensions and how this

creates a paradox where educators can simultaneously be victims, bystanders, and perpetrators of EO. This paradox motivates non-binary thinking and multilevel analysis, which may support teacher politicization. Lastly, I used examples from the teacher education literature to outline how EO and epistemic resistance can be used as a lens to analyze day-to-day practice and support collective action.

Ultimately, this paper prompts more questions than it answers. My primary aim was to increase awareness of social epistemology in educational research and argue for its theoretical and practical relevance for SJTE. Perhaps these ideas will pique educators' curiosity in how EO and other related concepts may support, expand, and challenge their current frameworks and practices for SJTE. This paper is one small step to bridge these fields, and I hope that much more theoretical, practical, and collective work remains to be done.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS**

Social justice and equity will continue to gain prominence in educational policy, practice, and research. This will likely exacerbate ideological contestations over what these words mean as well as what a just and equitable future looks like and requires. What is at stake is not merely theoretical, but the material conditions of our schools and society. How these contestations play out in policies, teacher education, classrooms, and collective social action will impact whether/how existing power relations and oppression are recognized and disrupted, and whether/how they are obscured, normalized, and reproduced. In hopes of moving social justice towards collective action that aims to disrupt and dismantle hierarchical and oppressive power relations, I offer a few insights and questions related to engaging with social justice (projects), ideology & epistemology, and multilevel analysis.

### **5.1 Implications for Social Justice (Projects)**

There are a multitude of definitions and visions of social justice. This is not a problem in and of itself. In fact, I believe, along with many others (Anderson, 2006; Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Grande, 2018; Medina, 2012), that dissonance, dissent, contradictions, resistance, refusal, and tensions have generative potentials and are necessary for a just democracy. For this reason, I believe solidarity must be a sustained, ongoing commitment among individuals and groups that recognize and work through difference to imagine and work towards liberatory futures for ourselves and for others (Martinez et al., 2016; Mayorga & Picower, 2018). In this way, what Tuck

& Yang (2018) call an *ethic of incommensurability* seems like both a moral aim and a practical necessity:

Rather than a goal of political unity with commonly shared objectives, an ethic of incommensurability acknowledges that we can collaborate for a time together even while anticipating that our pathways toward enacting liberation will diverge. Incommensurability means that we cannot judge each other's justice projects by the same standard, but we can come to understand the gap between our viewpoints, and thus work together in a contingent collaboration. (p. 1-2)

Yet, at the same time, I also wonder the extent to which our visions and ethics must converge to make progress towards liberation possible. I wonder if productive deliberations and collaborations can be had when people and groups are on highly divergent paths, particularly if many are unwilling to engage and listen to each other. For instance, in both the NYC DOE and PPS cases, the groups whose policies aligned with the dominant ideology and epistemology (and who generally had more power) did not seriously take up and/or did not have the epistemic resources to properly hear the arguments of the other groups. Meanwhile, the youth activist groups (NYC) and the remove police group (PPS) explicitly counter the arguments and logic of the other groups. Given Dotson's (2014, 2018) account of epistemic oppression, this inability and/or unwillingness of the dominant and powerful groups to listen to alternative assumptions, evidence, and reasoning is not a rare or aberrant case, but a pervasive problem in society due to the epistemic power and resilience of the dominant epistemological systems. To "understand the gap in our viewpoints" and work towards an ethic of incommensurability requires deliberation and a sustained effort to understand and willingness to learn and be moved by the experiences and ideas of others. If people and groups on certain paths put in no sustained effort to deliberate with people on other paths, then

it eliminates the possibility of contingent collaboration and an ethic of incommensurability. This lack of effort in engaging with alternative knowledge systems may also explain why more powerful groups tend to co-opt and appropriate terms like “social justice” and “equity” in ways that perpetuate and reinvent processes (rather than disrupt) the dominant system.

As a result, the epistemic power, resilience, and the unreflexiveness of the dominant epistemological system remains a persistent challenge. Given the need to build solidarity, it does not seem like alternative epistemologies can wholly disregard those on more dominant paths. To be sure, more productive collaborations will likely occur between and among people on critical paths, and these collaborations could/should be foregrounded for that reason. But, I also wonder how the gaps between the traditional and critical epistemologies can be bridged. Are there opportunities where particular groups and particular conditions may make contingent collaborations more possible? For example, perhaps “non-reformist reforms” are one way that the youth activist groups could work in contingent collaboration with the NYC DOE.<sup>14</sup> Non-reformist reforms reduce the power of an oppressive system while also building grassroots power in support of alternative systems (Akbar, 2020; Berger et al., 2017). It seemed that the SDAG (2019a; 2019b) and their reports may have been heading in this direction with their inclusion of IntegrateNYC 5R’s of Real Integration framework. Given the NYC DOE’s (at least nominal) commitment to desegregating schools, the adoption of their framework makes sense. Yet, I was surprised to see the (SDAG, 2019) follow the ethic of the framework and suggest, in their second report, to phase out G&T programs and to eliminate all middle school admission screens. At the same time, these suggestions remain purely suggestions because Mayor de Blasio never officially responded to them. There was the removal of middle school screens (e.g., attendance, state test scores) (Gould

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<sup>14</sup>Although given the current mayoral control system, this will greatly depend on who the new mayor and chancellor are after the November 2021 elections.

& Chang, 2020) and a G&T lottery instated for the 2021-2022 school year (Shapiro, 2021a), but these are only temporary changes due to the pandemic.

Still, it seems spaces like contingent collaborations between the youth activists groups and the NYC DOE may be possible, whereas it seems much more unlikely to occur between the youth activists groups and groups like PLACE NYC and EEC. Similarly, how the Keep and Remove groups within PPS could contingently collaborate is also unclear to me. Based on the public hearing testimonies, there is very little convergence in their views of safety, policing and racism, and thus, their demands are almost entirely contradictory. This high level of epistemological and ideological divergence is probably part of the reason the Reimagine School Safety Task Force is still ongoing when it was scheduled to present a report in March 2021.

## **5.2 Implications Ideology and Epistemology in Policy and Practice**

In discussing the dynamics of epistemic power and first-order epistemic oppression (EO), Dotson (2014) explains how it will be difficult to convince some people that their privilege is unwarranted, so that it is “difficult to see what would motivate relatively epistemically powerful populations to alter their credibility judgments of relatively epistemically powerless populations and, if necessary, lower their own default credibility” (p. 126). Similarly, she claims that viewing the limits of one’s epistemological system and changing those limitations—a requirement for addressing third-order EO—“may be impossible for many” (p. 132). In making these claims, Dotson (2011; 2014) is not arguing against the ethical imperative of trying to resist and lessen EO, but is trying to paint an accurate picture of the pervasive and persistent nature of EO and how difficult (and in some cases, impossible) addressing EO is/will be.

I believe educational contexts provide opportunities for studying and better understanding the challenges of addressing EO within/between individuals and systems. For example, as I suggested in the third paper, there are opportunities within teacher education to study the micro-processes of (un)learning different ideologies and how people can learn to toggle between different epistemological systems. This learning occurs and should be studied not only in teacher education classrooms, but within and between contexts like K-12 classrooms, professional development spaces, and organizing spaces. In K-12 classrooms, it is also important to think about how the teachers' epistemological awareness and reflexivity contributes to the types of learning that they are able to promote among students and the extent to which these learning environments resist and reproduce EO for students.

There will likely be a multitude of challenges and complexities in designing, implementing, and studying such programs and learning. I want to be clear that the goal of engaging concepts of EO and epistemic resistance is less about instilling particular political ideas and agendas (as the word "ideology" often suggests), but highlighting how dominant epistemological systems--along with social, political, and economic systems--often normalize oppression and violence. There is not one alternative set of epistemic resources or a particular epistemological system that I believe teachers should take up. Instead, I imagine teachers and teacher educators working together to deconstruct the dominant epistemological system so that it can be an object of study, rather than assumed a fact. Teachers and teacher educators would also learn alternative epistemic resources and systems to analyze their local teaching contexts in order to iteratively reconstruct a theory and practice of teaching that seeks to resist and lessen epistemic oppression. Regardless of where on the political spectrum teachers fall, their epistemic resources and epistemological systems can become calcified or they can become reflexive and responsive. The latter is ultimately the goal.

However, assuming that third-order epistemological shifts may be “impossible” and that some people and groups in the dominant epistemologies/ideologies will be unwilling or unable to deliberate with alternative epistemologies/ideologies, I wonder if/how this should impact gatekeeping functions of teacher education. Picower (2021) and Picower & Mayorga (2018) discuss how active solidarity with racial justice movements and protecting students from future harms requires that people who hold deficit and racist ideologies not be permitted to become teachers. Instead, programs should recruit and admit critical students of color and critical white students who are prepared to address racial injustice and antiblackness. In this way, they portray the gatekeeping of the teaching profession as an ethical responsibility (in addition to an act of solidarity).

Ethically, I agree that reducing the harm and suffering of students should be a key focus of teacher educators and teacher education programs. Dotson’s account of EO also provides further evidence of how people who are inflexible in their use of dominant ideologies and epistemologies will likely perpetuate more harm and suffering. From a practical perspective though, the difficulty is in the details. As Picower (2021) discusses, a supportive leadership team is absolutely essential to counsel out students who repeatedly engage in deficit perspectives and practices that devalue and harm students. But even with institutional support, creating practices of recruiting, admitting, and counseling (out) teacher candidates (and teacher educators!) presents the challenges of determining whether contingent collaboration and an ethic of incommensurability can occur. Is the bar for contingent collaboration higher in teacher education (among pre-service teachers and/or teacher educators)? How much common ground and convergence is necessary and how do we assess it? When and how is it determined whether certain harmful ideologies/epistemologies of

teachers and teacher educators can(not) be unlearned? These are challenging questions, both ethically and practically, that teacher education must address.

### **5.3 Implications for Multilevel Analysis and Collective Action**

One of the main reasons I was drawn to the two case studies in NYC and Pittsburgh was because they were examples of collective action for social change. In addition to studying their policy texts and arguments, I also engaged in historical analysis of each local context to situate the current debate within a longer struggle for a more just and equitable school system. From these studies, I reconfirmed how the study of history can destabilize and challenge the dominant discourse and ideologies by illuminating the racialized and oppressive histories of seemingly “neutral” or “good” structures (e.g., Bell, 1992; Grande, 2004; Hall, 1996; Nasir et al., 2016; Sojoyner, 2016). In these two cases, the structures were admissions screens and school policing.

The third paper on epistemic oppression posits two ways to extend multilevel analysis, particularly for the purposes of solidarity and collective action. The first suggestion is to study concepts from the epistemic injustice literature in philosophy (and perhaps the field of social epistemology more broadly) in order to (re)theorize and apply them in educational contexts and research. Currently, there is minimal research on the microprocesses of how ideology and different epistemologies can inform learning and/or may shift or solidify in particular learning environments (Curnow et al., 2019; Philip, 2011; Philip et al., 2018). Such processes are important to understand in order to disrupt oppressive epistemologies, both interpersonally and structurally. Philosophers like Kristie Dotson, José Medina, Linda Martín Alcoff, and Elizabeth Anderson have examined the interconnections between social, political, and epistemic structures, institutions, and the

cognitive-affecting functioning of individuals. Some have even thought about these ideas in the context of education (e.g., Alcoff, 2010; Anderson, 2012; Medina, 2012), but their accounts lack practical and contextual specificity. This is precisely the knowledge and experiences that teachers, teacher educators, students, families, and community organizers can offer to (re)theorize these ideas into classroom practice and collective action.

I also think Curnow and colleagues' (2019) idea of politicization offers a helpful framing to understand epistemological (un)learning, especially for the purpose of collective action. As discussed prior, *politicization* is a sociocultural learning process, "not merely a process of conceptual development or cognitive change, but simultaneous development of concepts, practices, epistemologies, and identities" (Curnow et al., 2019, p. 717). Also important to politicization is its "collective nature" and "the dialectical process through which some participants become iteratively more immersed" (p. 720). The pervasiveness of EO and the difficulty of addressing it highlights the need for understanding teacher education and teaching as politicization processes. How does the teaching and learning that (pre-service) teachers do in various places and spaces develop their political concepts, practices, epistemologies, and identities?

Politicization is not a process with a particular direction or political ideology in mind. Rather, Curnow and colleagues (2019) discuss how people within one student-led activist group came to form two different ideological groups over time and the ways in which these subgroups changed the participants (e.g., their identities, epistemologies, practices and participation) as well as each subgroup's approach to collective action. At the same time, there was also a third group of "moderate" students whose concepts, epistemologies, identities, and practices varied, but never aligned with the two subgroups or changed alignment multiple times. Given the political nature of education, politicization processes are certainly taking place in teacher education programs,

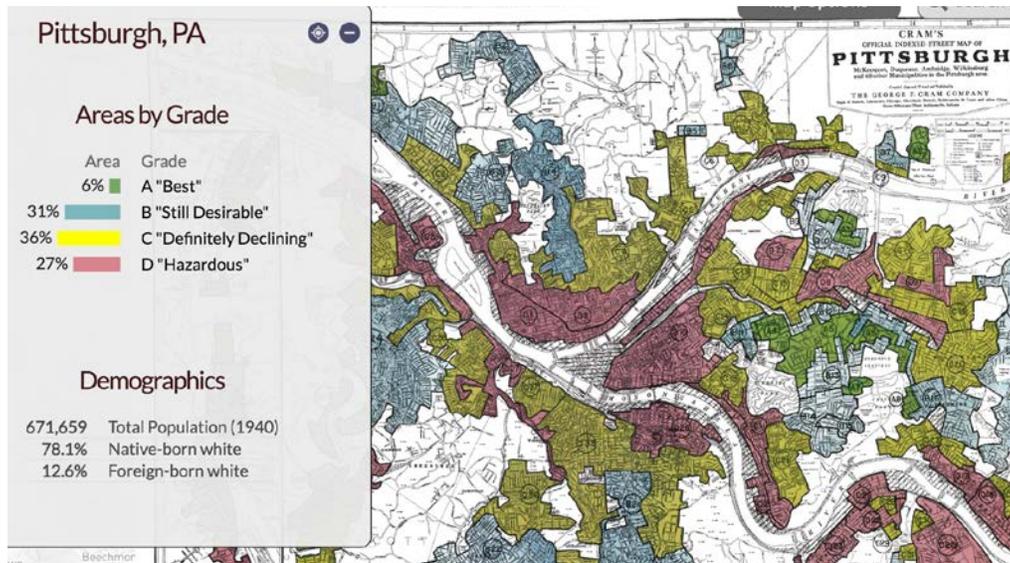
schools, professional development, and organizing spaces, though they may be more or less explicit. When, how, and in what ways do teachers become politicized? What types of politicization exist within/between contexts and what are the implications for teaching and learning? Such questions intersect with determining what social justice projects to engage in and how we might (not) be able to form an ethic of incommensurability across them.

## Appendix A Texts Reviewed for Three Groups in NYC

| Groups                               | Sample Organizations               | Materials Reviewed  |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Youth activism organizations         | Teens Take Charge                  | <p><b>Website materials</b> (<i>as of April 15, 2021</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About Us (Our Team; Our Story); Campaigns (Project 14 24; Education Unscreened; Repeal Hecht-Calandra; Save SYEP); Statements (Title VI Complaint; Breonna Taylor and Black Lives Matter; Statement on 2020 NYC Budget)</li> </ul> <p><b>State Bills &amp; Federal Litigation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senate Bill S8847 and Assembly Bill A10731 to repeal Hecht-Calandra Act (July 2020)</li> <li>Complaint Pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (filed November 16, 2020)</li> </ul>  |
|                                      | IntegrateNYC                       | <p><b>Website Materials</b> (<i>as of April 15, 2021</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homepage; About (Our Team; Mission; Programs; History); Campaigns (Admission Screens; Segregation Kills; Retire Segregation; Still Not Equal; D15 Diversity Plan); Legal; Resources (Teach-In of 5Rs)</li> </ul> <p><b>State Litigation:</b> Lawsuit filed against the State of NY and the NYCDOE at the NY State Supreme Court (filed March 9, 2021)</p>  |
|                                      | Mayor and/or Chancellor(s) Office) | <p><b>District Plans or Proposals</b> (<i>from NYC DOE website</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools (2017)</li> <li>Specialized high school proposal (2019)</li> <li>Adoption of School Diversity Advisory Group Recommendations (June 2019)</li> </ul> <p><b>Op-Eds</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>de Blasio: “Our specialized schools have a diversity problem. Let’s fix it” (June 2018); “Our new push to diversify NYC schools” (June 2019)</li> </ul> <p><b>State Bills:</b> Assembly Bill A02173 &amp; Senate Bill S1415 to change specialized high school admissions criteria (June 2019)</p> |
| NYCDOE                               | Advisory Groups                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School Diversity Advisory Group’s “Making the Grade I: The Path to Real Integration and Equity for New York City Public School Students (February 2019)</li> <li>School Diversity Advisory Group’s “Making the Grade II: New Programs for Better Schools” (August 2019)</li> </ul>   |
|                                      | Education Equity Campaign          | <p><b>Web(site) materials</b> (<i>as of April 15, 2021</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homepage; Take Action; Free Test Prep</li> <li>Campaign videos on YouTube (n=3)</li> </ul> <p><b>City Council Bill:</b> Intro No. 1924-2020</p>  |
| Traditional policy & advocacy groups | PLACENYC                           | <p><b>Website materials</b> (<i>as of April 15, 2021</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homepage; About Us (Our Mission; Our Community; Our Team); Our Work (Statements &amp; Publications (n=27)); Resources (Legislation); Take Action</li> </ul> <p><b>State and City Council Bills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support: Intro No. 1924-2019; A4818; A2240; A8435</li> <li>Do not support: S8847 &amp; A10731 to repeal Hecht-Calandra</li> </ul>  |

## Appendix B Redlining, Residential Segregation, and School Enrollments in Pittsburgh

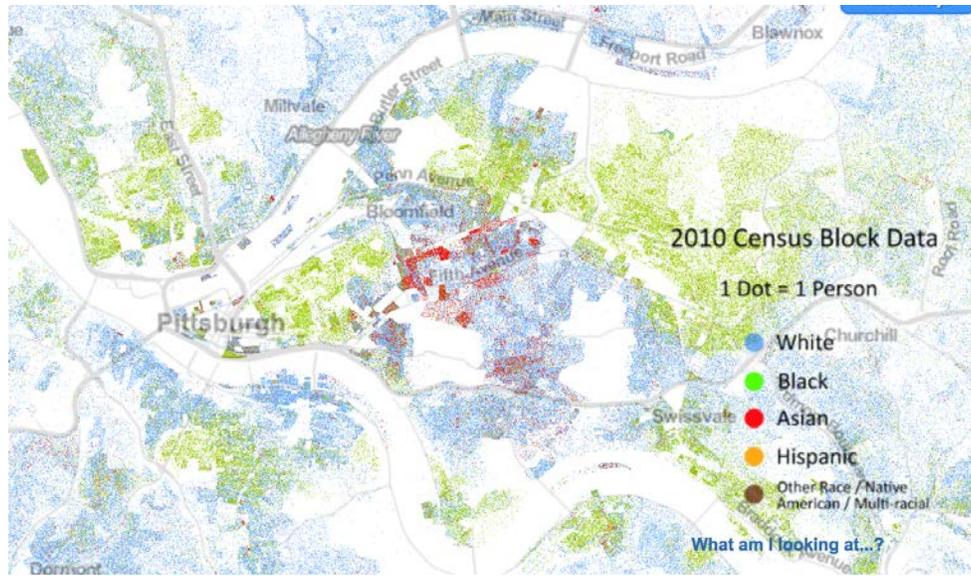
The three maps below demonstrate the persistent connections between redlining, residential segregation, and school enrollments in Pittsburgh.



This is the area description of Pittsburgh done by the federal government’s Homeowner’s Loan Corporation in 1940 to determine who should receive loans. Areas with Black, immigrant, and working class residents were deemed “hazardous,” so banks often refused to give mortgages in these areas (Nelson et al., n.d.).



This map shows enrollment demographics for PPS in 1969. Each circle represents the Black/white racial demographics at that school (Box 155, Folder 3 in the Heinz History Center archives).



**This is a Racial Dot Map of Pittsburgh that uses 2010 Census data.**  
*Image Copyright, 2013, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia (Dustin A. Cable, creator)*

## Appendix C Survey for PPS Stakeholders

### Survey on School Safety and School Discipline Policies in the Pittsburgh Public Schools

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#### Start of Block: Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey on **School Safety and School Discipline in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)**! This survey is part of a research study being conducted by Emily Howe, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. The goal of the survey is to understand stakeholders' views on current policy and practice in PPS as well as their hopes for future policy and practice.

In this short, 10-minute survey, you will share your views on the current policy and practice of school safety and school discipline in PPS, their relationship to race and racism, and a few proposed changes to these policies. You must be over 18 to take this survey and a stakeholder (broadly defined) of the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Participation in the survey is voluntary. You can quit the survey at any time, but the responses you entered might be retained for analysis. Survey responses are anonymous, confidential, and will be stored securely online. There are no anticipated risks or benefits to participating in this survey.

After completing the survey, you are eligible to be randomly selected for one of two \$25 Visa gift cards. At the end of the survey, you must provide your name and either your email address or phone number to enter the drawing. This information will be collected via a separate link in order to maintain anonymity; the separate link assures that your name and contact information are *not* attached to your survey responses.

Please contact Emily Howe at [emily.howe@pitt.edu](mailto:emily.howe@pitt.edu) if you have any questions.

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Q1 Are you at least 18 years old?

Yes

No

*Skip To: End of Survey If Are you at least 18 years old? = No*

---

Q2 What is your **current relationship** to Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)?  
(Select all that apply.)

- Current employee of PPS
- Caregiver of PPS student(s)
- Work at an organization that partners with PPS
- Work in educational advocacy or activism in Pittsburgh
- Elected official in the city of Pittsburgh
- Community member who lives in the Pittsburgh School District
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- No affiliation with Pittsburgh or PPS

*Skip To: End of Survey If What is your current relationship to Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)?  
(Select... = No affiliation with Pittsburgh or PPS*

Q3 What are the **past relationships** you have had with Pittsburgh and PPS? (Select all that apply.)

- Employed within PPS
  - A caregiver of a former PPS student
  - Worked at an organization that partners with PPS
  - Worked at an educational advocacy or activism in Pittsburgh
  - Was an elected official in Pittsburgh
  - Used to live in the Pittsburgh School District
  - Former PPS student
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - None of the above
- 

Q4 How long have you lived (or did you live) in the city of Pittsburgh?

- Less than 2 years
  - 2-5 years
  - 5-10 years
  - 10-20 years
  - Over 20 years
  - I haven't lived in the city of Pittsburgh
-

Q5 Did you ever attend the Pittsburgh Public Schools as a student?

Yes

No

End of Block: Introduction

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Start of Block: Views on Current School Safety and School Discipline Policies

Q6 How do you define **school safety**? What do you think a safe school and school system look like?

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Currently, there are 64 School Security Aides and 20 School Police Officers in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) who are part of the School Safety Team. All School Security Aides are assigned to a particular school. 11 School Police Officers are assigned to a particular school, while 9 roam between all PPS schools.

People may confuse these two different positions because both groups patrol school grounds, monitor students, and coordinate with school administration and emergency services. However, one key difference between these jobs is their authority to arrest students. School Police Officers **can arrest** students, which can lead to students being issued citations, charged with criminal offenses, and/or entered into the juvenile justice system. School Security Aides **cannot arrest** students, though they may still coordinate with School Police Officers, city police, and emergency services.

---

Q7 Were you aware of the differences between School Police Officers and School Security Aides? (See description above.)

- Yes
  - No
  - Sort of
- 

Below are statements about the **current** school safety and discipline policies in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). Please choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

---

Q8 School Security Aides are important to keeping students and staff safe at school.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

Q9 School Police Officers are important to keeping students and staff safe at school.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Q10 Having School Police Officers in schools often causes more harm than good.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

Q11 Even if School Police Officers are nice and well-meaning *individuals*, the police *system* can still be unjust.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

Page Break

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Q12 The current policies and practices of PPS keep all students safe, regardless of race, gender, religion, disability, and other student identities.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q13 Suspending students from school is an unfortunate but necessary punishment for certain types of offenses.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q14 The current school safety policies and discipline practices within the Pittsburgh Public Schools need to be reimagined.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The [American Civil Liberties Union](#) (ACLU) and the [Black Girls Equity Alliance](#) (BGEA) are organizations that have both released recent reports detailing the racially disproportionate discipline outcomes for the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). Here are a few pieces of information from these reports: PPS has some of the highest suspension rates for Black and Latino students in Pennsylvania as well as one of the largest Black-white suspension gaps in the

state (ACLU, 2015). Black girls in PPS are 13 times more likely to be arrested by the Pittsburgh police, 5 times more likely to receive a summary citation from the Pittsburgh police, and 10 times more likely to be referred to juvenile justice than white girls. PPS's referral rate of Black girls to law enforcement is higher than 99% of similar U.S. cities (BGEA, 2020). While there is little evidence that having full-time police presence has increased school safety, there is growing evidence that a regular police presence in schools leads to more police involvement in everyday school activities, which escalates low-level incidents into criminal matters (ACLU, 2015).

---

Q15 Were you aware of the reports discussed above?

- Yes
  - No
  - Maybe
- 

Q16 These reports mean that PPS needs to make major changes to their discipline policies and practices.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Q17 The current discipline policies and practices of PPS are racially and systemically biased against Black students.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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Q18 How do PPS's current discipline policies make schools more and/or less safe for students and staff?

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Q19 If you would like to explain any of your answers about current policies and practice, or if you have questions or concerns, please share here:

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Page Break

End of Block: Views on Current School Safety and School Discipline Policies

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Start of Block: Views on Proposed Reforms to School Safety and School Discipline Policies

Below are statements related to some of the **proposed changes** to school safety and school discipline policies in PPS. Please choose the extent to which you agree with each statement.

---

Q20 Ensuring that all PPS staff are trained in and use *restorative practices* and trauma-informed practices, rather than punitive practices, can create safer school environments for students and staff. (Hover over *italicized* terms for a description.)

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

Q21 Increasing support services for students at all PPS schools can create safer school environments for students and staff. (Hover over *italicized* term for a description.)

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Q22 Like the Philadelphia Public Schools, PPS should implement a *pre-arrest diversion program* where students and caregivers can choose to work with a social worker from the Department of Human Services instead of going through the arrest process.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree or disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

Q23 School Police Officers should be completely removed from schools.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 

Q24 The reforms above do not go far enough to eliminate unjust systems of punishment and surveillance in schools.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree or disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
-

Q25 If you would like to explain any of your answers in this section or if you have other suggestions for what kind of changes should be made in PPS, please share here:

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End of Block: Views on Proposed Reforms to School Safety and School Discipline Policies

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Start of Block: Demographics

The following demographic questions are optional. However, answering these questions will allow us to see whose perspectives are represented in the data set and what patterns may exist between people's identities, experiences, and views.

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Q26 What is your age?

- 18-24 years old
  - 25-34 years old
  - 35-44 years old
  - 45-54 years old
  - 55-64 years old
  - 65-74 years old
  - 75 or older
  - Prefer not to respond
-

Q27 With which gender(s) do you identify? (Select all that apply.)

- Woman
- Man
- Transgender
- Non-binary or Non-conforming
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to respond

Q28 With which races and/or ethnicities do you identify? (Select all that apply.)

- Asian
  - Arab or Middle Eastern
  - Black
  - Indigenous
  - Latinx or Hispanic
  - Pacific Islander
  - White
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - Prefer not to respond
-

Q29 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Elementary or middle school
- Some high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Some graduate school
- Completed graduate school
- Prefer not to respond

End of Block: Demographics

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