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Building Civic Capacity: The History & Landscape of NYC Integration Activism 2012–2021 [post-print]

Mira Debs

Molly Vollman Makris

Elise Castillo
Trinity College, Hartford Connecticut, elise.castillo@trincoll.edu

Alexander Rodriguez

Ayana Smith

See next page for additional authors

Trinity College
HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

Authors

Mira Debs, Molly Vollman Makris, Elise Castillo, Alexander Rodriguez, Ayana Smith, and Josephine Steuer
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"Building Civic Capacity: The History & Landscape of NYC Integration Activism 2012–2021"

Mira Debs, Yale University

Molly Vollman Makris, Guttman Community College

Elise Castillo, Trinity College

Alexander Rodriguez, Pitzer College

Ayana Smith, Cornell University

Josephine Steuer Ingall, Yale University[1]

Abstract
Background: New York City is one of the most segregated school districts in the country, but in the last nine years, school integration has moved from being marginal to a central education policy. Existing narratives have emphasized parents, school and political leaders, downplaying the significance of citywide coalitions of activists, especially youth activists.

Purpose: We examine how grassroots activists contributed to transform school integration policy, and the opportunities and challenges as a result through urban regime theory and specifically *civic capacity*, which highlights how various constituencies build a shared agenda for policy change.

Research Design: Working in partnership with four youth interviewers at two integration activist organizations, we conducted 72 semi-structured interviews with New York City student, parent and community activists. We also observed 36 hours of public meeting observations and

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collected publicly available documents, including 360 newspaper articles and policy documents in order to triangulate our findings.

Conclusions: We find that activist coalitions made progress in developing *integration civic capacity* through increased collaboration among diverse stakeholders, notably youth, toward a shared definition of integration. However, growing tensions with rival coalitions and the fragmented political landscape of NYC limited the strength and durability of civic capacity.

Introduction[2]

In May 2020, as New York City (NYC) was the global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, more than 200 teenagers and adult supporters met online to celebrate the 66th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The teenagers had been planning an in-person rally following the school walkouts they had mobilized in 2019, but public health conditions made it impossible. Still, despite lockdown and school closures, they gathered virtually to demand that NYC respond to its status as the most segregated school district in the country. Their adaptive activism and their mobilization of a broad range of grassroots organizations during the pandemic continued their leadership at the front of NYC's integration movement.

Despite recent scholarly appraisals of national desegregation efforts as "severely-eroded" (Ladson-Billings, 2004) and "stagnated" (Rooks, 2017), the youth-led events and policy changes in NYC suggest otherwise. Recent decisions by the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) to modify its middle and high school admissions processes and gifted and talented test in response to the pandemic (Shapiro, 2020) reflects in part the influence of demonstrations like these over nine years of organizing, bringing integration from the margins to the center of the education policy agenda. Importantly, these activists emphasize *integration* as encompassing enrollment changes and the structural and cultural changes necessary to support marginalized students, rather than *desegregation*, which solely focuses on the composition of students in the school building (IntegrateNYC, 2020).

Youth activists have been at the vanguard of these integration efforts, adding new momentum and urgency to the call to integrate NYC schools. As a white activist father in Queens told us, teenagers are "the leaders when it comes to a lot of this movement… pushing the envelope and making sure that things are getting done." While researchers and journalists have examined how parents, school, and political leaders advocate for integration in NYC (Freidus, 2019; Garinger-Sameth, 2019; Malone, 2021; Roda, 2015, 2020), there is limited research on citywide coalition-building among stakeholders, particularly the role of youth in such efforts. This project asks: How has school integration advocacy in NYC evolved between 2012 and 2020 to become a central education policy, and what have been the opportunities and barriers along the way?

Framed by urban regime theory (Stone, 1998) and using interviews with 72 integration activist leaders, meeting observations, and publicly available documents, including newspaper articles and policy papers, this qualitative study demonstrates that activists made notable

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progress toward developing *civic capacity*, or "the mobilization of varied stakeholders in support of a communitywide cause" (Stone, p. 15). Reflecting Stone's definition, we argue that, between 2012 and 2021, activists progressed toward mobilizing civic capacity, yet also encountered challenges. First, from 2012 to 2016, stakeholder coalitions began to form, centering integration as a shared policy goal. Second, from 2016 to 2018, coalition-building continued with the creation of shared frameworks and community district-level changes, but coalitions remained fragmented across neighborhoods, rather than coherent across the city. Finally, from 2019 to the present day, coalitions maintained momentum, yet growing tensions from rival coalitions undermined civic capacity. This account of school integration advocacy in a school district of 1.1 million students is admittedly incomplete and still developing. However, this study makes an important contribution in documenting NYC school integration activism, the opportunities and challenges inherent in coalition-building on a divisive issue and in a politically complicated city. In addition, this study advances the literature on urban regime theory by highlighting the role of youth in mobilizing civic coalitions and pushing toward policy change.

Theoretical Framework

To frame our analysis of school integration activism in NYC, we employ concepts from *urban regime theory,* a framework for understanding how a city's political authorities and various constituency groups work together to craft a shared agenda to generate policy and political change (Stone, 1998). At the heart of urban regime theory is the concept of *civic capacity*, or "the mobilization of varied stakeholders in support of a communitywide cause" (Stone, 1998, p. 15). Robust levels of civic capacity require resources to mobilize actors from both the public and private sectors into unified and stable *coalitions*, or new political arrangements. While coalition members may have divergent beliefs, they must share a common agenda and policy goals. In short, the sustainability of a coalition hinges upon its members' ability to cooperate and compromise.

Scholars of the politics of education have employed urban regime theory and, specifically, the notion of civic capacity, to examine how elected officials, policymakers, school reformers, interest groups, and other stakeholders work together to advance a shared education reform agenda. In a seminal study, Stone and colleagues (2001) examined school reform across 11 urban districts and identified the conditions that facilitate "weak," "loosely connected," and "high" levels of civic capacity for school reform. Cities had weak or loosely connected civic capacity when racial or social class tensions and distinct interests divided stakeholders. In contrast, cities had high levels of civic capacity when convening organizations lent resources and infrastructure to coalition-building efforts.

Across Stone's work and other scholars' work, research illustrates the challenges inherent in mobilizing unified and sustained coalitions, particularly amid racial and social class divides. This work attends to the role of public schools in a city's political economy, highlighting how challenges to mobilizing coherent civic coalitions often stem from divergent political and economic interests among racially and socioeconomically diverse stakeholders (Gold et al., 2007; Henig et al., 1999; Hernández, 2017; Shipps, 2003). Yet despite such barriers to coalition-building, Warren (2011) highlights how grassroots community groups can be critical levers to mobilizing high levels of civic capacity, "particularly when they ally with other reform agents," including educators and policymakers (p. 506).

Only a few studies have applied urban regime theory to school integration (DeBray & Grooms, 2012; Finnigan & Holme, 2018; Loder-Jackson, 2015) even though it serves as an ideal framework for analyzing the mobilization of diverse stakeholders and the political dynamics underpinning the coalition-building process. Despite research demonstrating integration's academic and social benefits for all students (Johnson, 2019; Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016), integration has long been a highly contested issue that has politically divided communities, often along race and social class lines (Ladson-Billings, 2004). For example, following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, some Southern states used taxpayer funds to establish private "segregation academies" (Henig, 1994), while visible and often violent white opposition in Northern cities prevented the implementation of comprehensive desegregation plans (Erickson & Morell, 2019; Delmont, 2016; Sugrue, 2008). More recently, some white communities have seceded from their racially-mixed school districts (Richards, 2020; Siegel-Hawley, Diem, & Frankenberg, 2018). Amid such opposition, some African American educators and scholars have critiqued desegregation efforts for putting Black children in hostile environments (Horsford, 2011; Walker, 2009).

Given the politically divisive nature of school integration, legal scholar Derrick Bell (1980) famously developed his theory of "interest convergence," claiming that the promise of *Brown* can be fulfilled only when the interests of Black and white people overlap. Indeed, Bell argues that the success of some desegregation efforts, including the *Brown* decision, is due to how such initiatives met the interests of both Black and white stakeholders. Bell's theory has been widely influential in explaining the legal and political opportunities and barriers to school desegregation and other civil rights issues, such as affirmative action (Park & Liu, 2014; Thompson Dorsey & Venzant Chambers, 2014).

However, interest convergence theory does not explain the *political processes* by which racially diverse stakeholders build a common policy agenda across racial, social class, and other differences. Following the rollback of many federal desegregation court orders in the late 1990s, and the 2007 Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* that school districts could no longer use race as an enrollment criteria, the federal role in school desegregation efforts has been minimal. Instead, school integration has advanced through community efforts in predominantly urban school districts (Diem & Frankenberg, 2013; Potter, Quick, & Davies, 2016). Thus, urban regime theory, and specifically civic capacity, facilitates examining how these diverse urban stakeholders—ranging from elected officials to grassroots community activists—negotiate among their various interests in order to develop a shared policy agenda. Urban regime theory also illuminates the dynamics underpinning the development of new political arrangements, or coalitions, that advance and sustain a shared agenda. Finally, whereas interest convergence theory neglects to account for how local contexts shape stakeholders' interests, urban regime theory centers local political contexts as key determinants of coalition-building efforts. As Stone (1998) explains, coalitional politics are deeply intertwined with city politics.

Thus, in employing urban regime theory, this study expands upon the notion of interest convergence to more deeply examine the political processes and conditions that both foster, and impede, coalition-building for school integration in NYC. We pay particular attention to the

work of youth-led groups in advancing civic capacity, and thus make an important contribution to the extant research on civic capacity for school integration (DeBray & Grooms, 2012; Finnigan & Holme, 2018; Loder-Jackson, 2015). We also highlight points of convergence and tension across coalitions, and the emergence of opposing coalitions who critique these school integration efforts. Finally, our analysis highlights NYC's evolving local political context and how such contextual factors shaped civic capacity.

The New York City Context

NYC is the nation's largest school district, serving 1.1 million students across over 1,800 schools. Students of color comprise the majority: Over 40 percent are Hispanic and 25 percent are Black, while 16 percent are Asian and 15 percent are white. Nearly three-quarters of all students are "economically disadvantaged," qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch (NYCDOE, 2020). NYC's public schools are among the most segregated in the nation, both by race and socioeconomic status (SES), and segregation increased between 1990 and 2010 when roughly three-quarters of Black students attended an "intensely segregated" school with under 10% white enrollment (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014). This segregation emerges from both residential segregation and a complex choice system beginning in elementary school that concentrates poor students and English learners in schools with the fewest resources (Beveridge, 2019; Mader, Hemphill, & Abbas, 2018). Many schools of choice have selective admissions requirements, or "screens." These include admissions tests, standardized test scores, and academic, attendance, and behavior grades; as well as auditions, essays, demonstrated interest, and interviews. This complicated choice system privileges students with the social capital necessary to navigate the admissions process (Pérez, 2011; Roda, 2015).

Addressing the persistent segregation of NYC schools largely rests in the hands of one person: the Mayor, ever since Mayor Bloomberg established mayoral control of education in 2002 (Lewis, 2013). Mayoral control effectively abolished democratically elected school governing bodies relying instead on mayoral appointees including the schools chancellor and an advisory body the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP). Elected parent leaders, appointed community members, and high school students serve on Community Education Councils (CECs) across NYC's 32 Community School Districts (CSDs), roles that were initially symbolic but have gained greater power overseeing CSD diversity plans. These CECs have become critical public spaces to debate school integration policy (Shapiro, 2018). Together, the contexts of segregation and school governance in NYC underpin the political dynamics of coalition-building for school integration policy.

Methods & Analysis

This project examining the recent history and policy evolution emerged from a broader project examining the impact of Covid-19 on NYC school integration activism. Data collection took place between August and December 2020, and comprised 72 semi-structured interviews with grassroots activists, including 26 parents, 6 community members, and 40 students. Interviewing remotely via Zoom enabled us to collect data safely during the pandemic. We supplemented interviews with observations of virtual public meetings and analysis of policy documents and newspaper articles.

To capture the nature and scope of civic coalitions, we derived our adult interviewee sample via snowball sampling, beginning with initial contacts in the New York City Alliance for School Integration and Desegregation (nycASID), Teens Take Charge, IntegrateNYC, and NYC-based education researchers. Snowball sampling enabled us to capture the connections and coordination among integration activist organizations, which was key to our examination of civic capacity. Given the role of youth organizations to school integration advocacy, our interview sample includes 40 youth organizers between the ages of 14 and 20. Four student interviewers from IntegrateNYC and TTC served as paid research assistants and conducted these interviews with a strategically diverse sample (by race/ethnicity, gender, borough, age, years of involvement) from each organization using a script we developed collaboratively. The adult and student interview questions were similar overall, focusing on how interviewees got involved in integration work, their organizing before and during the pandemic, and the opportunities and barriers to mobilizing for citywide policy change. Based on the youth interviewers' suggestion, youth interviewees received a $25 gift card for participation.

Table 1 includes the interconnected network of organizations whose members we interviewed or referenced in the paper, with year of founding and the number of interviews related to each organization in parentheses. In some cases, interviews are counted multiple times, as some interviewees worked with multiple organizations. Given NYC's size, this list is not comprehensive, nor does a comprehensive list exist, but it provides a sense of the complex, layered network of coalitions in the school integration landscape.

Table 1: New York City school integration organizations included in our study 2012-2021

Year of founding is listed in parentheses, alongside the number of members we interviewed.

Integration activist organizations	Related education organizations	Integration-supporting organizations	Government Organizations
Student activist groups Teens Take Charge (TTC) (2017, 21 iv) IntegrateNYC (2014, 22 iv) **Parent & community citywide groups** Appleseed (2 iv) nycASID (2016, 6 iv) Integrated Schools New York Chapter (2020, 2 iv) New Yorkers for Racially Just Public Schools (2020) **District-level/Neighborhood parent groups** D30 Equity Now (2020, 1 iv) D28 Equity Now (2020, 5 iv) Jackson Heights People for Public Schools (2012, 1 iv)	**Groups organizing around education** Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (1986, 1 iv) NAACP (1909) Latino Justice/Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) (1972) Advocates for Children (1971) Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) (1974) **Rival coalitions opposing Groups arguing against DOE diversity plans** PLACE NYC (2019, 4 iv)	NYU Metro Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (1978, 1 iv) The Bell (hosts TTC) (2017, 1 iv) Century Foundation (1919, 1 iv) New York Appleseed (1993, 1 iv)	New York State Department of Education New York City Mayor New York City Council **NYCDOE** Chancellor Bureaucrats 4 Black Lives (2020) SDAG Advisory committee (2017, 6 iv) Community Education Councils (CEC) (7 iv) D28 Diversity Working Group (2019, 3 iv) PTAs (4 ivs), School Leadership Teams (1 iv)

D15 Parents for Middle School Equity (2014) Live Here Learn Here, Friends of District 17 (2017, 1 iv)	Queens Parents United (2019, 2 iv)		

Our interview sample includes a racially diverse group of parents and students, as shown in Table 2, and we monitored the sample for representation by race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, school district, and borough. We then conducted purposive sampling to include additional working-class parents, residents of the Bronx and Staten Island, and Asian and Latinx parents. Overall, there were a higher proportion of students of color interviewed than adults, and more women than men, reflecting the composition of activist groups. Our parent interviews reflected the concentration of activism in Queens, Manhattan, and Brooklyn, while student interviewees were more widespread throughout the city.

Table 2: Interviewee Demographics (n=72)

Demographic Categories	Parent & community activists	Student activists	Total
Total	32	40	72
Race/Ethnicity[3]			
Black	9	12	21 (29%)
Latinx	5	11	16 (22%)
White non Latinx	11	5	16 (22%)
Asian	5	4	9 (13%)
Multiracial	2	8	10 (14%)
Gender Identity			
Female	20	25	45 (63%)
Male	12	10	22 (31%)
Non-binary		5	5 (7%)
NYC Borough			
Brooklyn	8	15	23 (32%)
Bronx	1	15	16 (22%)
Manhattan	10	3	13 (18%)
Queens	11	6	17 (24%)
Staten Island	1	1	2 (3%)

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[3] We are using race/ethnicity categories from the US DOE, with a recognition that "multiracial" includes interviewees who self-identify as Afro-Latinx.

| Other | 1 | 0 | 1 (1%) |

Although some parents and organizers shared that they had grown up in poverty, most of the adult interviewees self-identified as lower- to upper-middle class. In contrast, our student interviewees were more consistently from poor families and most qualified for free and reduced lunch at school.

We worked collaboratively throughout the interview process and with the youth interviewers, meeting regularly and conducting initial interviews in pairs, using the joint interview to give feedback to each other and make slight modifications to the script. We recorded and transcribed all interviews, and wrote field notes after each interview to document emerging themes. We also developed differentiated tools (such as memos with guiding questions) in order to support the youth interviewers as they learned qualitative research methods.

We triangulated our interview data with observations, publicly available documents, and member checking. We conducted 36 hours of observations, recording field notes of virtual public meetings, including TTC and IntegrateNYC meetings, press conferences, panels, and CEC meetings for five Community School Districts, where integration efforts or discussions were taking place. We also collected publicly available documents, including NYCDOE policy documents and reports; and 360 articles from the *New York Times, New York Daily News* and *New York Magazine* published between 2012 and 2020. In our findings, we only name interview participants in public leadership roles who agreed to speak on the record.
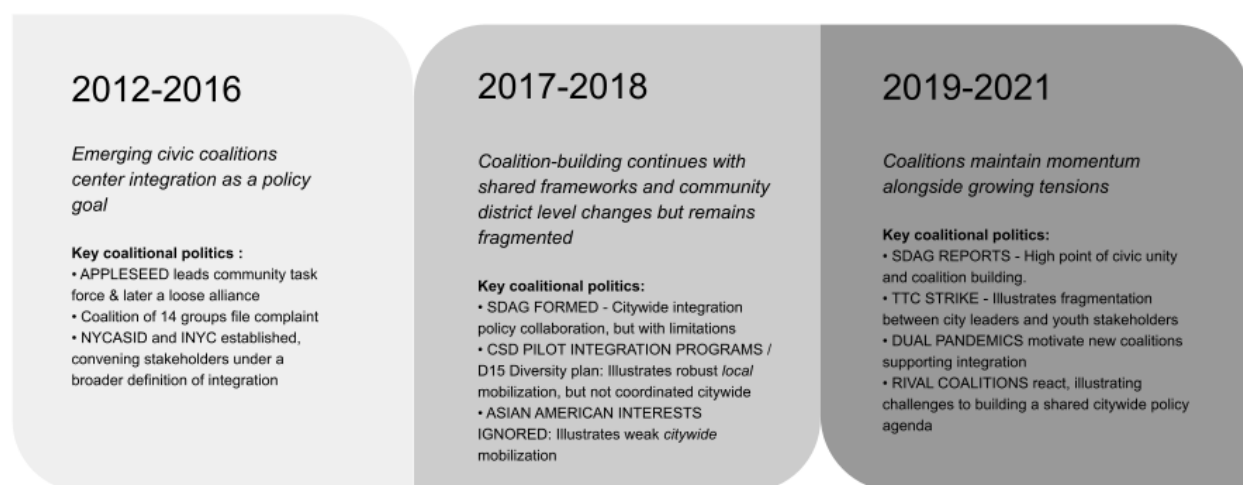
To analyze our data, we created inductive codes, which emerged from key themes in the data, and deductive codes related to urban regime theory. Once we had completed an initial code book, we practiced coding until we developed intercoder reliability, and then coded all interview transcripts, field notes, and documents (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The themes of coalition building, challenges to coalition building, and youth leadership are frequent and resonant codes throughout the data (see Appendix 1 for examples of codes, frequency and examples).

As qualitative researchers studying racial integration, we acknowledge our own positionality as middle-class and cis-gendered women who are white (Author 1 & 3) and Asian American (Author 2), and former public school teachers, with Authors 2 & 3 teaching in NYC public schools. While Author 3 currently works in a NYC college, none of us are current NYC residents. In contrast, our student interviewers identified as Latinx and Black and are NYC public school alumni. Thus, even as we saw a benefit to having our research combine outsiders and insiders, we continuously interrogated our racial and class positionality. During the course of our research, we heard about racial power imbalances among organizing groups, and we reflected on how we might avoid these patterns as researchers. While our study is not a random sample of all integration activism in NYC, it captures a diversity of activism in the continually evolving integration landscape.

Findings

In this section, we discuss the progress and barriers activists experienced in their efforts to mobilize civic capacity for school integration. First, from 2012 to 2016, stakeholder coalitions began to form, centering integration as a shared policy goal. Second, from 2016 to 2018, coalition-building continued with the creation of shared frameworks and community district-level changes, but coalitions remained fragmented across neighborhoods, rather than coherent across the city. Finally, from 2019 to the present day, coalitions maintained momentum with, yet growing tensions from rival coalitions undermined civic capacity. We summarize these three phases, and the coalitional politics that took place during each, in Figure 1.

Figure 1: An Overview of New York City integration coalition building

2012–2016

Emerging civic coalitions center integration as a policy goal

Key coalitional politics :
• APPLESEED leads community task force & later a loose alliance
• Coalition of 14 groups file complaint
• NYCASID and INYC established, convening stakeholders under a broader definition of integration

2017-2018

Coalition-building continues with shared frameworks and community district level changes but remains fragmented

Key coalitional politics:
• SDAG FORMED - Citywide integration policy collaboration, but with limitations
• CSD PILOT INTEGRATION PROGRAMS / D15 Diversity plan: Illustrates robust *local* mobilization, but not coordinated citywide
• ASIAN AMERICAN INTERESTS IGNORED: Illustrates weak *citywide* mobilization

2019-2021

Coalitions maintain momentum alongside growing tensions

Key coalitional politics:
• SDAG REPORTS - High point of civic unity and coalition building.
• TTC STRIKE - Illustrates fragmentation between city leaders and youth stakeholders
• DUAL PANDEMICS motivate new coalitions supporting integration
• RIVAL COALITIONS react, illustrating challenges to building a shared citywide policy agenda

2012–2016: Emerging Civic Coalitions Center Integration as a Policy Goal

Advocacy efforts between 2012 and 2016 demonstrate how formerly fragmented groups of stakeholders began to coalesce into diverse civic coalitions that centered school integration as a policy goal. Despite encountering uneven support from policymakers, stakeholders mobilized into coalitions that shared several policy priorities: advancing racially equitable admissions in traditional and selective public schools, and implementing a comprehensive integration plan that encompassed both equitable enrollment and cultural shifts inside schools. Notably, youth activists were key to coalition-building efforts.

These nascent civic coalitions initially prioritized two issues: addressing the racial composition of neighborhood public schools and of NYC's selective enrollment schools. For the first issue, parents, educators, and the education advocacy nonprofit New York Appleseed developed a community-led task force in 2012 that designed a new admissions preference for PS 133, in Brooklyn's gentrified Park Slope neighborhood. This set aside a portion of seats for free and reduced-lunch eligible students and English language learners, a policy that became a model for developing non-race based measures that could still address segregation (New York

Appleseed, n. d.). Inspired by PS 133's diversity plan, seven NYC principals, "holding the line" against gentrification in their schools, expressed interest in developing similar plans (Roda, 2020), alongside parents in Manhattan's CSD 1 who had advocated for decades for school enrollment changes. Second, in order to address segregation in NYC's selective enrollment schools, a separate multiracial cross-sector coalition of 14 education, civic, and civil rights groups, including the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (NAACP LDF) and Latino Justice PRLDEF, filed a federal complaint in 2012 about the under-representation of Black and Latinx students at NYC's eight specialized public high schools (NAACP LDF, 2012). Both the Brooklyn PS 133 set-aside effort and the specialized high school complaint represented cross-sector coalition building with a shared policy agenda - two critical components for mobilizing civic capacity (Stone, 2001).

As increasing numbers of stakeholders around the city prioritized equitable admissions and school diversity, both at regular public schools and elite schools between 2013 and 2014, New York Appleseed began convening a "loose [citywide] alliance." In an interview with us, Executive Director David Tipson recalled that the initial group included "anyone we could find who seemed to be touching on these issues in any way," although the group initially used the language of "racially inequitable access" instead of segregation to match stakeholder's diverse priorities. This alliance included City Council Member Brad Lander and his staff, educators, and parents, as well as education and civil rights organizations such as Advocates for Children, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), and the NAACP LDF. Together, they agreed on the need to remedy racially inequitable access. In identifying a common policy priority, stakeholders took a critical step toward coalition-building (Stone, 2001). Importantly, the broad emphasis on racial equity, rather than school integration alone, brought integration advocates in coalition with a range of other stakeholders.

These initial integration civic coalitions had the potential to be boosted by the election of Mayor Bill de Blasio in January 2014, given the power of mayoral control over education. In contrast to his billionaire predecessor, de Blasio ran as "a public school parent," vowing to address NYC's status as a "tale of two cities," and highlighting his sympathy for Black New Yorkers via his own Black biracial family (Walker, 2013). Despite this public advocacy, once elected, de Blasio moved cautiously on school integration, leaving the leadership to come from the grassroots up (Shapiro, 2019; Stone, 2001).

Absent mayoral leadership, researchers and journalists contributed to existing coalition efforts by helping to raise public awareness of segregation as a key challenge to equity. Two months after de Blasio's inauguration, the scope of NYC's school segregation was brought into stark relief by a UCLA Civil Rights Center report, composed with research assistance from NYC parent leaders and advocates, which documented the city's schools as some of the most segregated in the country (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014). In addition, reporting on segregation via *This American Life* and *The New York Times* by journalists such as Nikole Hannah-Jones (2015, 2016) was critical in developing a number of our interviewees' understanding of contemporary segregation and desire to participate in burgeoning civic coalitions.

For some activists, the UCLA report and related reporting sparked their organizing efforts, bringing youth into organizing coalitions. Organizer Matt Gonzales joined the effort after hearing Nikole Hannah-Jones' *This American Life* story. In an interview with us, he recounted

that his initial reaction was "holy shit! *This* is the issue*"* that connected his own education to the present day landscape. Soon after, he took a job as the Appleseed program director, at the time the only full-time integration organizing role in the city. Similarly, teacher Sarah Medina Camiscoli told us she read the UCLA report and "started organizing" in her school. Beginning with an advisory program with six of her South Bronx high school students who were concerned about school resource inequalities, over the next several years, Medina Camiscoli turned the "IntegrateNYC4Me" club into a class, which evolved to become IntegrateNYC, a non-profit run equally by youth and adult organizers (Klein, 2016).[4] As IntegrateNYC developed and expanded, it became a key presence in burgeoning citywide integration coalitions.

Representation and resource disparities across schools were key motivators for youth who joined the group. A South Asian male student shared that he hoped to expand "how south Asian students can be included in curriculum in Stuyvesant [High School]" to the entire district. A non-binary Latinx student organizer described how learning about segregation explained what they "always knew" that "I didn't have the resources that a lot of other schools had, or I didn't feel as safe as other schools did, or my history wasn't being taught properly. It was so normalized for me that I thought it was just like what every kid had to go through." And a female South Asian American student got involved after being "appalled" by the "stark contrast" in resources between her "predominantly Black and brown middle school at Canarsie Brooklyn" and her "predominantly Asian and white [high school]." Amina, then a high school junior, highlighted the importance of youth voice to *The Huffington Post*: "We are the ones being affected by the decisions that are made…We are starting a revolution. We want to change the way New York City Schools are run" (Klein, 2016). Two important policies sustained IntegrateNYC as it brought youth together in coalition: students were paid for their labor, supporting their mobilizing efforts, while adult leadership like Medina Camiscoli and IntegrateNYC policy coach Gonzales proved critical in providing durable organizational infrastructure as students graduated and went off to college.

In 2015, IntegrateNYC brought together students from across the city in their first youth council, illustrating the expansion of their coalition-building efforts. Ideas generated during the youth council further informed policy priorities, specifically IntegrateNYC's development in 2016 of "The 5Rs of Real Integration," a vision that recognized the limitations of past desegregation efforts that focused only on enrollment and responded to the history of educational activism by New Yorkers of color. The 5Rs called for: 1) revising race and school enrollment policies, 2) equalizing school resources, 3) building strong relationships through culturally responsive curricula, ethnic studies courses, and designating all school buildings ICE sanctuaries, 4) restorative justice to reduce racially disproportionate discipline, and 5) representation through hiring more teachers of color (Gonzales, 2018; IntegrateNYC, 2018). The final 2 Rs were added at the request of Black student activist Dekaila Wilson and Black teacher Maurice Blackmon to address how desegregation in the past had contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline and the historic firing of Black educators.

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[4] Though IntegrateNYC centered student voice from the get-go, its evolution to a co-leadership model developed after students staged an intervention in a local diner with the adult directors demanding executive leadership roles in the organization and pay equity. As Medina Camiscoli remembers, the students gave her an ultimatum: "pay us the same hourly wage as adults and promote us to executive roles, or we're out."

This expansive definition of integration furthered coalition-building. In an interview, New York Appleseed Executive Director David Tipson recalled to us that defining integration as such "built a bigger tent," drawing diverse stakeholders and organizations who were attracted to a "definition of integration that didn't exclude what they wanted." Indeed, by fall 2016, New York Appleseed, NYU Metro Center, and City Council Member Brad Lander formalized informal lunch meetings, which began in 2013, to create the Alliance for School Integration and Desegregation (nycASID), a coalition of parents, educators, and community stakeholders.

Simultaneously, however, other activists worried that the students, in enlarging the goals of integration, were undermining their longtime efforts around school enrollment. IntegrateNYC's policy coach Matt Gonzales remembered in an interview with us how some white adult activists expressed to students, "You're actually not advocating for integration. And you either need to align with us or get out of our space." Such critiques demonstrate tensions among integration advocates and the fragility of burgeoning civic coalitions. Nevertheless, the 5Rs would become the dominant framework for conceptualizing integration throughout the city.

Policymakers at various levels of government helped add momentum to these emerging civic coalitions, in some cases working around the NYCDOE. Starting in 2014, the New York State Education Department (NYSED), under the leadership of future federal Education Secretary John King, responded to the UCLA report with a new socioeconomic pilot program to fund integration initiatives in 25 school districts, providing critical resources (NYSED, 2017). In addition, the NYC Council requested annual reports on school diversity data (Max, 2015). Eventually, these efforts appeared to push the NYCDOE to begin to take remedying steps. In October 2015, the NYCDOE removed a rule preventing enrollment decisions based on race, paving the way for further set-aside admissions plans resembling PS 133 (Wall, 2015). By May 2016, four years after seven principals requested it, the NYCDOE funded a pilot desegregation program, which allowed them to modify their school admissions to support diversity.

As we explain in the next section, student activists continued to push the DOE to take broader steps towards school integration. In the next phase, students' broader vision of the 5Rs of real integration were officially adopted by the NYCDOE's School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG), other advocacy organizations, and eventually, the Mayor and schools chancellor.

2017–2018: Coalition-Building Continues with Shared Priorities and Community District Level Changes, but Remains Fragmented

The second phase, 2017 to 2018, continued a process of coalition-building, as new advocacy organizations increasingly collaborated, strengthening integration civic capacity. Yet barriers to strong civic capacity remained, including the NYCDOE leadership's continued reluctance to institute top-level policy change, the fragmented nature of integration pilot programs across the city and their dependence on temporary grant funding in the absence of business and philanthropic support, and uneven attention to Asian American communities' perspectives.

Building on the momentum started by IntegrateNYC, in 2017, Bronx teenagers Nelson Luna and Whitney Stephenson launched Teens Take Charge (TTC), which used storytelling via the podcast *The Bell* and at public events to share students' experiences of attending segregated

schools. Like the IntegrateNYC students, TTC students leveraged the impact of students' personal experiences. A Latinx female organizer pushed for better arts resources at her arts school with limited success until she ultimately "realized that I have to go outside of the institution." An Asian American male attending a specialized high school explained how "you don't really see a lot of people who look like me in any form of activism" and by "sharing my voice… I can then showcase that school integration does impact everyone in a positive way." Student testimony in front of DOE officials linked segregation to IntegrateNYC's 5Rs, discussing how enrollment impacted resources and relationships at their school. While the two groups had varying organizing strategies, as we discuss later, they also planned collaborative events, and some students were involved in both organizations. A Black female student noted the power of being part of a coalition of other like-minded students: "Honestly, it just felt really nice to be in a space of people that actually cared about these issues and actually had a plan about what they were going to do about them." These events illustrate youth-led efforts to build coalitions with each other and with policymakers, a critical step toward advancing civic capacity.

As youth mobilization increased the pressure, the NYCDOE began to react. In June 2017, the NYCDOE released a plan for *school diversity*, reflecting de Blasio's longstanding preference for avoiding "segregation." While some stakeholders praised the Mayor and the DOE for setting goals after 50 years of inaction, to others, it failed to address selective middle and high schools admissions (Harris, 2017). Others argued the plan only addressed desegregation, or, as Matt Gonzales termed it to us, "moving bodies," rather than a more expansive idea of integration.

Even with these limitations, the most critical aspect of the plan was the creation of the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) to create a community consultation process. The SDAG comprised over 40 appointed members, including a racially diverse group of parents, students, teachers, principals, academic researchers, civic leaders, NYCDOE officials, and other stakeholders. Initially, the SDAG was charged with evaluating the existing diversity plan, soliciting community input, and making additional policy recommendations to the Mayor and NYCDOE regarding school diversity (SDAG, 2019a). The SDAG's responsibilities reflected several key steps toward developing civic capacity, including engaging diverse stakeholders and developing a common policy vision (Stone, 2001). Youth representation was critical. As a Latinx high school organizer who served on SDAG remembers, the several youth organizers in the group were positively received: "Everyone loves when young people are taking over. Everyone loves when a young person is speaking up or making change or making shit happen." Moreover, spending time together was transformative. An Asian American mother who served on SDAG described how convening brought together groups that had "always worked in parallel, but not very closely" to "develop real personal relationships," a critical feature in building civic capacity.

Despite the diversity among SDAG members and the planners' efforts to engage diverse stakeholders, group members began with a consensus of supporting integration. In retrospect, Richard Kahlenberg, Senior Fellow at the Century Foundation and SDAG Executive Committee member, remarked to us that it might have been better to include some integration skeptics in the group: "I don't know if anyone was in the group who is not '*already on the team*.'" The absence of critics may have made it harder for group members to anticipate and plan for public opposition and the emergence of rival coalitions once the SDAG reports were released.

While stakeholders debated the ideal scope of citywide integration policy, parent leaders in several Community School Districts (CSD) began to pilot school integration programs, illustrating the development of civic capacity at the neighborhood level. For example, in CSD 1 on Manhattan's Lower East Side, parents and community members built off their decades of activism to apply for and receive a state diversity grant to create a controlled choice admission plan that set aside kindergarten and pre-K seats for students who are poor, homeless, English learners, or students with disabilities (Veiga, 2017). Across the bridge in Brooklyn's CSD 15, principal Jill Bloomberg, students and D15 Parents for Middle School Equity designed a middle school diversity plan replacing competitive admissions with a set-aside lottery similar to that in CSD 1 (Shapiro, 2018). A critical feature of CSD 15's redesign came through a year-long community engagement process directed by the urban design firm WXY, following the template of grassroots community engagement. Two years later, middle schools in CSD 15 are more racially diverse, and the process has proceeded without significant resistance, serving as a model for the city (Veiga & Zimmer, 2019). Notably, civic capacity for integration in CSDs 1 and 15 was boosted by robust resources, such as grant funding and outside facilitators.

However, not all stakeholders supported these pilot integration programs, illustrating uneven civic capacity. In CSD 1, where the elementary school controlled choice plan was implemented, one Latinx parent activist was frustrated that after decades of work, the 18 month consensus building process "took forever" and resulted in a "glorified set aside plan." In addition, public reception to CSD-level integration efforts differed widely across the city. While the Latinx parent viewed a set-aside plan as a conservative step, to parents in Manhattan's CSD 3 on the Upper West Side, a middle school set-aside plan was too radical. A video of angry white parents venting to school leaders went viral online. Notably, newly appointed Chancellor Richard Carranza got embroiled in the controversy just one month into his tenure, facing a swift backlash for retweeting the video and accompanying headline "WATCH: Wealthy white Manhattan parents angrily rant against plan to bring more black kids to their schools" (Hu, 2018). The following week, Carranza publicly apologized for his retweet, yet defended his position on desegregation, saying, "Here I am in my first month, actually engaging in this conversation" (Chapman, 2018). Carranza's willingness to participate had several impacts. To activists such as Matt Gonzales, Carranza's arrival "motivat[ed grassroots activists] to act more boldly," as he shared in an interview with us. Yet disagreements among CSD 3 parents regarding the appropriate nature and scope of integration policy and the backlash to Carranza's position illustrated challenges to building cohesive and durable civic capacity. In addition, the politically fragmented nature of NYC's public school system, comprising 32 CSDs, illustrates a key barrier toward developing citywide civic capacity for school integration.

Another challenge to coalition building was proposed reforms that marginalized the Asian American community. In June 2018, Mayor de Blasio announced his support for eliminating the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT), the sole criterion for admissions to the city's eight specialized public high schools, and favored a new process to ensure the schools were representative of the city's racial and ethnic demographics. Targeting the SHSAT mobilized opposition, especially among Asian Americans, who represented 16% of NYC students but were disproportionately enrolled in the exam schools. Arguing that de Blasio's announcement was discriminatory, the Chinese American Citizens Alliance Greater New York

(CACAGNY) filed a lawsuit against the Mayor, and some Asian American parents held protests throughout the city, starting a parallel grassroots coalition opposing city diversity measures (Chin, 2019). A consensus among our Asian American interviewees and several Asian American civic organizations, who varied in their support of the city's diversity efforts, was a feeling of being excluded from the process. One Asian American parent leader argued to us that de Blasio's proposal would "limit Asian access to quality education," and the mayor "never bothered or cared to learn" that Asian students comprise the highest share of those living in poverty in NYC. Because robust civic capacity requires mobilizing all constituencies, failing to adequately consult the diverse Asian American community undermined existing coalition-building efforts.

In sum, 2017 and 2018 were marked by effective cross-sector mobilization efforts, particularly in the SDAG process and community district level changes. However, debates regarding the appropriate approach to integration at the CSD and citywide levels, fragmented efforts among geographically disparate CSDs, and the mobilization of opposition groups illustrate the unevenness and fragility of civic capacity for school integration.

2019–2021: Coalitions Maintain Momentum Alongside Growing Tensions

To some extent, 2019 to 2021 marked progress toward meaningfully integrating NYC's public schools. The SDAG released two reports, a notable example of cross-sector collaboration on a shared policy goal. And, in late 2020 and early 2021, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Mayor de Blasio announced several temporary diversity reforms. Yet civic capacity for school integration remains fragile, as youth have demanded more radical change and some rival parent groups have mobilized to counter diversity planning processes and reforms. These patterns highlight tensions across disparate stakeholders that have been exacerbated by Covid-19 and school closures in 2020.

A critical moment in advancing policy consensus was the 2019 release of SDAG's first report with recommendations structured around IntegrateNYC's 5Rs of "real integration," illustrating how youth created a shared language for cross-sector stakeholders that in turn drove policy. IntegrateNYC's adult co-founder Sarah Medina Camiscoli recalled the magnitude of this adoption to us: "We got 70 nonprofits who historically couldn't agree on a definition of integration to agree on this." Similarly, in a *New York Daily News* editorial, Mayor de Blasio praised the students and their 5Rs framework: "When I grew up, it took a judge's ruling to diversify classrooms. Now our kids steer those decisions… Our students remind us that real *integration* starts with *integrating* resources and creating a system that serves everyone" (de Blasio, 2019, emphasis ours). The NYCDOE publicly embraced the first report, committing to adopting 62 of 67 of the resolutions, including city diversity grants to five CSDs using a community-engagement process similar to CSD 15 (de Blasio, 2019; NYC.gov, 2019). Following the February report, the SDAG continued to meet, releasing its final report in August 2019, which recommended ending gifted and talented programs, freezing the number of public schools with admissions screens, and eliminating residential priority in admissions (SDAG, 2019b). In contrast to the first report, which was publicly heralded by both de Blasio and Carranza, the second report garnered no official response (Veiga, 2019b). Even without a public response to the second report, the SDAG reports represent a significant effort among stakeholders in building consensus and developing a plan for policy change.

Yet not all stakeholders felt the new integration coalitions represented their interests, illustrating the challenges inherent in creating a shared policy agenda. One Latinx organizer, referring to New York Appleseed, complained about "organizations that kind of parachute… into our work" hoping to gain credit: "Where were you a year ago or five years ago, 10 years ago? You weren't here." Other groups debated the scope and the speed of integration. While IntegrateNYC students collaborated on the SDAG reports, TTC youth activists withdrew their names from the final report. They were dispirited by the NYCDOE's slow pace of change and consensus-building process which TTC's adult advisor, Taylor McGraw, described in our interview as "meeting to death." To push for change, TTC began using public protest instead.

TTC's strategy shift from collaborating with the DOE to protesting against them garnered media attention, but it also risked undermining the cross-sector coalition-building that had been ongoing for over one year (Cheng, 2020). Two weeks after a May 2019 meeting between Chancellor Carranza and youth activists at City Hall, TTC held a five hour sit-in at Tweed Courthouse. One Black parent activist remembers how "[taking her] kids" and "listening to the students...sealed the deal for me" in getting involved in integration activism. TTC continued weekly strikes throughout the fall of 2019 until they were interrupted by Covid-19 and school closures in March 2020 (Cheng, 2020). Their advocacy challenged political leaders and other integration activists by pushing for a faster pace of change. Other parents heeded the call for urgency. Parent leaders at PS 9 in Brooklyn voted to eliminate gifted and talented in 2020, a contentious process one white mother described as "try[ing] to stand up out of the force of the current...of a hard-flowing river...and do something different."

Yet alongside youth and parent activists pushing for rapid change, other rival coalitions argued that changes were too fast and too radical, illustrating challenges to building a shared city-wide integration agenda. In fall 2019, parents formed Parent Leaders for Accelerated Curriculum and Engagement (PLACE) to maintain the SHSAT and G&T programs, although they still linked their efforts under the framework of school integration (PLACE NYC, 2019). As one white mother explained, PLACE was created "because parents who think that more G&T, leaning into the strengths of students in every district who can do accelerated work is a path towards not only academic excellence, but greater integration and diversity in our schools." In contrast, other members claimed that maintaining accelerated programs was incompatible with school integration. An Asian mother whom we interviewed decried that "integration ideology" meant that "meritocracy is under attack." Similar opposition to existing diversity efforts emerged in Queens CSD 28, one of the five districts to receive a NYCDOE diversity planning grant. Similar to CSD 15, CSD 28 started a parent-led diversity task force with the support of WXY consultants. These efforts were stymied, however, by counter-groups such as Queens Parents United, which opposed the diversity task force process, which one white father described as "window dressing to make it look like it's somehow coming from communities." Pro-integration groups like District 28 Equity Now emerged in response, and today, CSD 28's stance on integration (and the future of its diversity plan) remains highly contested. In short, as rival coalitions mobilize, civic capacity for school integration remains fragile.

Yet despite such opposition, school integration advocates have also expanded their coalition-building efforts. For example, IntegrateNYC and TTC reported a spike in membership amidst racial justice protests following George Floyd's murder. This growth, however, was

tempered by concerns that TTC might become "a white-centered space," as one Black student activist described it. New Yorkers for Racially Just Public Schools (RJPS), a coalition of 30 citywide organizations, whose policy platform maps closely onto IntegrateNYC's 5Rs, launched in November 2020 to influence the next NYC Mayor's education agenda. A third group, the NYC chapter of the grassroots national parent group Integrated Schools, was founded by 3 white mothers in May 2020. And NYCDOE employees convened several multiracial equity-focused coalitions, including one called "Bureaucrats for Black Lives," which called upon the Mayor and Chancellor to commit to anti-racist policies, including additional diversity efforts (Bureaucrats, 2020).

For some stakeholders, Covid-19 furthered a policy consensus that the pandemic magnified existing structural inequities. IntegrateNYC and Territorial Empathy organized an online event, "Segregation is Killing Us," illustrating the connections between the concentration of segregated schools in predominantly Black and Latinx neighborhoods which ran eerily parallel to rates of Covid-19 (Territorial Empathy, 2020). The intersection of these "dual pandemics" was clear to our interviewees. As an Afrolatinx student activist explained, "I think racial discrimination in this country is also a pandemic…that's been going on for longer." Through this growing consensus, students and educators pushed to make bold changes. TTC and IntegrateNYC each held online press conferences in fall 2020, advocating for an end to admissions screens. Similarly, principals from CSD 2's four coveted high schools called for eliminating residential preferences for students in their wealthy Manhattan neighborhood (Veiga, 2020).

In December 2020 and January 2021, Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza appeared to respond to stakeholders' calls for ending selective admissions. The NYCDOE announced changes to enrollment policies, including suspending middle school screens for one year during the pandemic, removing residential preferences for high school admissions, and suspending the gifted and talented test starting in 2022 (Shapiro, 2020; Cruz, 2021). Many integration advocates applauded the decisions, while noting it should not have taken a global pandemic. An Afrolatinx student organizer criticized the link to Covid-19: "The fact that we have to go through a pandemic for you to be like, 'Maybe Black and brown kids do deserve an education,' that's devastating." However, PLACE members criticized the changes, arguing that gifted and honors programs were even more necessary given that "remote learning has widened the education gap" (PLACE NYC, 2020). Despite policy advances, tensions regarding screened admissions during the pandemic and disagreements regarding the necessary reforms limited the durability of citywide civic capacity for school integration.

Discussion: Progress Toward Civic Capacity and Ongoing Challenges

Mobilizing broad stakeholder support for school integration--long a politically divisive issue--has never been an easy task. Doing so in the largest, and one of the most diverse, school districts in the nation is a monumental undertaking indeed. However, our findings reveal that, despite these challenges, stakeholders have made some promising steps toward mobilizing civic capacity for school integration since 2012. First, IntegrateNYC's five-part definition of integration brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including those concerned with enrollment changes and those interested in the cultural shifts needed inside school buildings to support marginalized students. Indeed, multiple stakeholder groups, including the NYCDOE's

SDAG, have referenced or adopted the 5Rs, illustrating movement toward a shared policy agenda. Second, and relatedly, youth have been critical to citywide mobilization efforts, raising awareness among adult stakeholders and NYCDOE leaders and pushing for more urgent change. Third, the implementation of several pilot integration programs at multiple CSDs reflects progress in mobilizing and sustaining local coalitions.

However, alongside this progress towards mobilizing civic capacity, our findings also reveal challenges. First, citywide coalition-building has been undermined by disagreements regarding strategy and changing student membership, reflecting challenges similar to those that integration activists encountered in the 1960s (Taylor, 2001). In addition, although SDAG's over 40 members represented dozens of stakeholder groups and engaged in numerous community listening sessions over one year, some stakeholders perceived that the SDAG did not represent their priorities. Second, and relatedly, uneven attention to, and inclusion of, diverse Asian American perspectives in coalition-building efforts not only undermines civic capacity, but also reinforces dominant patterns of Asian American invisibility in policy discourses (Tseng, 2021). Third, civic capacity remains fragile given the emergence of rival coalitions that outright oppose integration efforts or have adopted the language of integration to preserve and expand gifted programs and elite schools, despite research illustrating how these programs reinforce segregation (Roda, 2015).

The political context of NYC further complicates civic capacity for school integration. Despite progress made at the CSD level, the fragmented nature of the NYC public school system into 32 CSDs limits the potential for a shared citywide policy agenda. In addition, although CSDs 1 and 15 had access to critical resources to advance their pilot integration programs, thanks to grant funding and an outside consultant, it remains unclear whether other CSDs will be similarly resourced to implement their own plans. Indeed, the business and philanthropic communities, which have played critical roles in advancing civic capacity for other school reform efforts, have largely been absent in NYC's school integration arena. Finally, amid mayoral control, and absent a strong commitment for school integration from the mayor, civic capacity for school integration will remain fragile. With a mayoral election taking place in November 2021, it is unclear how future mayoral leadership will support integration efforts.

To build on existing coalitions and advance civic capacity, NYC stakeholders could focus on strengthening the infrastructure of convening organizations, such as New York Appleseed, NYU Metro Center, and The Century Foundation. These organizations have been critical to early and ongoing coalition-building efforts, providing key resources, such as meeting space and full-time staff engaged in school integration research and advocacy. However, additional resources will be necessary for enhancing and sustaining civic capacity. Taking a cue from cities where business involvement has boosted civic capacity (Shipps, 2003), convening organizations should cultivate ties with NYC's robust business and philanthropic community. To garner their support, stakeholders can amplify research demonstrating integration's long-term impacts on students, including their social and economic mobility and contributions to the economy (Johnson, 2019). Finally, given how mayoral inaction has constrained civic capacity-building, stakeholders might consider broadening their work to push for alternate forms of school governance, including a return to representative democratic control.

While we strove to create an inclusive narrative, it is by no means comprehensive. In particular, diversity efforts at the school and CSD level should be covered in greater detail, and our focus on parent and student activists limits the insights of other stakeholders, including policymakers and educators. Despite these limitations, this project makes an important contribution in documenting the possibilities for, and challenges to, mobilizing civic capacity for school integration in one of the most segregated and politically complex school districts in the country. In addition, in highlighting the centrality of youth in advancing civic capacity, our findings make an important contribution to urban regime theory and its application to school integration.

Although activists and other stakeholders have increasingly mobilized to support school integration, ongoing tensions and limitations remind us of the enduring fragility of these endeavors. The complex political context of NYC, including its fragmented governance structure and mayoral control, further complicate coalition-building efforts toward a shared policy agenda. In the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, we wait to see whether the crisis ultimately moves policy efforts forward or away from the goal of integration.

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Appendix 1: Thematic Codes and examples

Sample Code	Frequency	Example From Data
Cross-sector Coalition Building	32 interviews	"I got involved with with the help of [name] from Integrate, and [name] I think was involved at the time and maybe some other folks and others. I mean, it grew out of like [name] and a bunch of folks. There was this meeting that [name] called in the city council cafeteria. And I started going to that. And then it was like [name] was basically like, well, I've done enough here. Like, do we have a coalition? What's next? That was like, well, yeah, we have a coalition. So then, like a number of us pulled together, ASID New York City Alliance for School Integration and Desegregation."
Challenges to Integration Coalition Building	41 interviews	"I would say my biggest obstacle would just be trying to work with adults in the DOE. Because a lot of the time they always make false promises or they give tokens to students and I'm not really for that and I'm not really for compromising what I want, just for them to play politics just to satisfy a specific group."
Impact of Youth	13 interviews	"Like youth are always at the forefront of the. And, you know, I don't know. I haven't done the research on this. I don't know if this is accurate, but what I've heard is that the average age for a runaway slave was 13 to 19? And our age group is 14 to 24. And that just feels right."

Author Bios

Mira Debs is a sociologist and director of Yale's Education Studies program. Her research examines how parents create meaning around their choice and involvement in their children's schooling, and the implications of these decisions for creating racially diverse and progressive public schools. Recent publications include "Integration vs. Meritocracy: Competing Education Goals During the Covid-19 Pandemic" (*AERA Open* 2021) with Dr. Castillo and Dr. Makris and *Diverse Parents, Desirable Schools: Public Montessori in the Era of School Choice* (Harvard Education Press 2019).

Molly Vollman Makris is Associate Professor of Urban Studies at Guttman Community College, City University of New York. Her research interests include school choice, school segregation, gentrification, and the privatization of public education, housing, and space. Recent publications include *Gentrification Down the Shore* (Rutgers University Press, 2020) and "The Chimera of Choice: Gentrification, School Choice, and Community" (Peabody Journal of Education, 2018).

Elise Castillo is an Assistant Professor of Educational Studies at Trinity College, Hartford, CT. Her research examines school choice policies and their possibilities for, and limitations to, advancing racially equitable, integrated, and democratic public education. Recent publications include "More of the Diversity Aspect and Less of the Desegregation Aspect: Asian Americans and Desegregation in Metropolitan Hartford" (*Race, Ethnicity, and Education* 2022).

Alexander Rodriguez is a student at Pitzer College and serves as a board member and alumni coach at Teens Take Charge.

Ayana Smith is a student at Cornell University and serves as the Storytelling Programs Coordinator for Student Voice. She is also the former Director of Press at Teens Take Charge.

Josephine is an undergraduate at Yale in the Urban Studies and Education Studies programs.