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This paper retains the authors' use of American English.

Abstract

Despite the ways that schools are deeply tied to local conditions, we know less about how school change interacts with neighborhood change. This study asks: How does a major investment in school facilities materially affect lived experiences in neighborhoods? Using a case study approach, we present findings from a study of the policy apparatuses and impacts of Baltimore's school closures, rehabilitation, and construction vis-à-vis patterns of uneven urban development and change in three Baltimore neighborhoods that have each seen new school construction as part of the 21st Century Schools Buildings Plan (21CSBP): a cross-agency investment of nearly US $1.1 billion to build or renovate 28 public schools in some of Baltimore's most neglected neighborhoods. We argue that different agency stakeholders articulate competing operational theories of community development, which hinders collaborative efforts and creates obstacles to realizing deep impact of these school facilities investments on neighborhood outcomes.

Keywords: community development, public education, school facilities, neighborhood change

School-Centered Neighborhood Revitalization in Baltimore

The 21st Century Schools Buildings Program (21CSBP) was an unprecedented state and local investment to Baltimore City's public schools' infrastructure. The State of Maryland's 2013 Baltimore City Public Schools Construction and Revitalization Act authorized the Maryland Stadium Authority (MSA) to leverage $60 million into bond money, providing $1.1 billion in funding to support the renovation and/or replacement of 28 Baltimore City schools in 25 neighborhoods. The Act authorized the collaboration of the City of Baltimore (the City), Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS), the Maryland Interagency Committee on School Construction (IAC), and the MSA to:

> Design schools that allow for recreational opportunities for the community, combined with other cooperative uses and school partnership programs… [and] be good stewards of Maryland taxpayer dollars and champions for education, economic development and neighborhood revitalization in the City of Baltimore (Maryland Stadium Authority, n.d.).

Other key partners included the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks (BCRP) and the Department of Planning (Planning), city-wide non-profit organizations, and philanthropy.

Baltimore is a majority Black city, where the legacy of racist housing and education policies and structural inequities have limited largely Black residents' opportunities and laid the groundwork for the city's current hyper-segregation (Baum, 2010; MacGillis, 2016; Rothstein, 2015; Theodos et al., 2019). In 2019, Baltimore's population stood at 593,490, a 4.4 percent decrease from the 2010 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). BCPSS is experiencing steady declines in enrolment across schools (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Today, BCPSS serves 79,187 PreK-12 students, the majority of whom are Black (76 percent) and half of whom are from economically disadvantaged households (Baltimore City Public Schools System, 2020). Recently, BCPSS has closed and merged schools to manage declining enrolment and underutilized school buildings. The 21CSBP initiative is notable not only for its expansive vision of school buildings in communities and the significant level of public investment, but also because of the coupling of mass closures and school construction in BCPSS's school facilities management plan (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2018).

Introduction

This study situates 21CSBP and other school facilities management decisions in light of more traditional efforts in place- and people-based community development efforts. We focus on meso-level community development actors (city agencies and the school district) and their roles in facilitating community development activity in neighborhoods.

City agencies responsible for planning, housing and community development, and parks and recreation have obvious involvement in community development activities. But what happens when a school district enters the fray of neighborhood change through significant investment in school facilities

and an aggressive vision for community schools? What are the possibilities and the pitfalls of cross-sector collaborative governance for school and neighborhood change? How does this effort challenge and extend our understanding of both community schools and community development?

What is community development and where do schools fit?

Community development is the process of place- and people-based initiatives that aim to provide resources to economically disadvantaged and disinvested communities (Wolf-Powers, 2014). Place-based community development strategies expand affordable housing, create business improvement districts, and establish community land trusts. People-based strategies focus on improvements to the built and natural environments and connections to social services, housing opportunities, jobs, and increasing engagement in political processes with the goal to improve residents' lives.

Although schools are a vital component of community development efforts (Good, 2019; Patterson & Silverman, 2013; Taylor et al., 2013), school and neighborhood improvement have been viewed as distinct processes. School districts implicitly enter the realm of planning and community development when they make decisions about school facilities, including the closure of school buildings (Bierbaum, 2018). Additionally, schools are sites of social capital and leverage community development efforts to increase civic participation and build community ties (Brownlow, 2013; Joseph & Feldman, 2009; Nast & Blokland, 2013; Warren, 2013). Schools and school improvement may also catalyze economic growth and stabilize and/or enhance local housing markets (Horn, 2015; Steif, 2015).

Studies of school closures have underscored the influence of schools on communities, particularly communities of color, disproportionately negatively affected by closures (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Good, 2016; Green, 2017; Kirshner et al., 2010; Research for Action, 2013; Sunderman et al., 2017; Weber et al., 2016). These communities' resistance to closures emphasizes how schools are experienced and understood as core neighborhood public infrastructure and linked to legacies of racial oppression and continued disinvestment of particular Black neighborhoods, even while school district management does not necessarily consider these metrics (Bierbaum, 2018; Ewing, 2018; Good, 2017, 2019; Green, 2017; Nuamah, 2020).

Methods and Data

We used Wolf-Powers' (2014) framework for community development's theories of action and, based on prior research that establishes schools and education as important to a lot of local level community development practice, extended it to incorporate the role of schools (Table 1). Our usage is described in the Findings section.

Table 1

Theories underlying U.S. community development and the role of schools (adapted from Wolf-Powers 2014)

	Diagnosis	Theory of action	Tools	Roles of Schools
Norms	Disorganisation Lack of social control	Social capital-building Better coordination Comprehensivity	Comprehensive community initiatives	Schools as service providers and community 'hubs'
Markets	Lack of functional market institutions for physical and human investments	Activation of markets	Poverty de-concentration Market-building Choice (vouchers)	Schools as neighborhood amenities
Justice	Lack of access to power Historic exclusion and exploitation Inequity of metro resources	Community control Intermediaries to government Redistribution of wealth and opportunity	Indigenous leadership development Political organizing Alternative institutions	Schools as catalysts for community organizing and parent leadership

Norm-centered theories of action focus on building social capital, including community trust, and the coordination of social services. Market-centered theories of action purport that a lack of public and private capital investment is the driver of neighborhood disadvantage. Justice-centered theories of action identify structural inequity as the root cause of neighborhood disadvantage, and consequently argue for more political and structural interventions. This framework, with the addition of the role of schools in each theory of action, helps us make sense of 21CSBP's impact on the social fabric, economic growth and stability, and power/justice within communities.

This study situated the 21CSBP schools and their promise as community schools in light of more traditional efforts in place- and people-based community development efforts. The Maryland Philanthropy Network (MPN) funded our research team to conduct an initial analysis of 21CSBP. Between fall 2018 and spring 2020, we conducted a review of documents, participant observation, and 42 semi-structured interviews (Table 2).

We analyzed these data using inductive and deductive coding schemes. Throughout the data collection and analysis phases, our team met to debrief and discuss emerging themes. We delivered memos to MPN staff and presented emerging findings to key stakeholders to ground-truth our analysis iteratively.

Table 2

Interview Respondents

Role	Number
Community-based organization staff	6
Community school coordinator	2
Community-based leader and/or organizer	2
City agency staff	15
School district staff	8
State agency staff	2
Philanthropic partner	5
Other	2

Findings

We found that the inclusion of school districts complicates the implementation of community development efforts by requiring cross-sector collaboration in policy making and practice. Ambiguous legislative directives, hierarchies, and limited integration among multiple agency partners can challenge implementation and cause disruption, competition, and/or conflict with their existing priorities and processes.

The 21CBP policy design process engaged diverse coalitions of advocates, community-based organizations, and local and state governmental actors. A coalition (Transform Baltimore: Build Schools. Build Neighborhoods.) formed in 2010 and worked for three years to identify innovative solutions to publicly finance capital improvements to city school buildings. Philanthropy provided funds for high-capacity community-based organizations to educate and mobilize neighborhood associations and residents in support of proposals to fully renovate and modernize all public school buildings in Baltimore City. Grassroots organizing efforts gave way to city and state policy action. Advocacy was grounded in the belief that new and renovated schools had the power to transform learning and neighborhoods, and in 2013, the Maryland General Assembly passed the 21st Century School Buildings legislation.

The stakeholders engaged in policy design were absent from the implementation process. Transform Baltimore advocates who designed 21CSBP and legislators who crafted its final parameters receded once the legislation passed. Responsibilities were transferred to the partners named in the bill: MSA, IAC, BCPSS, and the city (through its departments of Planning and BCRP), without the benefit of advocates' relationships and deep local knowledge.

Ambiguous directives, legacies of mistrust, and limited resources challenged cross-sector collaboration. In one implementing agency director's words, "Once [the legislation] passed, it

was overwhelming". This was the first time some agencies involved in implementation had worked together or considered school construction a priority. Ambiguous legislative directives allowed discretion in how to administer the program, causing confusion, competition, and conflict among implementers. The urgency to begin construction prevented the possibility of a slow, structured implementation process. Partnering agencies shared little trust, culture for collaborative governance, understanding of decision-making rules of implementing agencies, hierarchical integration within and among implementing agencies, language or values, and few metrics of success. The spirit of collaboration and transformative investment embodied in the legislation was "often sidetracked by turf battles and micro-legal battles", especially around shared community use of facilities.

Divergent and often competing theories of action undergirded the disconnections between implementing agencies. MSA, the financing arm of 21CSBP, managed from an operating philosophy of buildings on time and under budget. Their approach and metrics of success focused on cost effectiveness and efficiencies of scale.

BCPSS managed from a philosophy of schools for our kids. They saw 21CSBP decisions as a way to meet BCPSS's commitment to racial justice and equitable education, prioritizing sites with the most need and that had been the most historically disadvantaged, and as a non-negotiable element of their planning. They did not consider neighborhood condition, other agencies' strategies, or broader market conditions when making their selections. 21CSBP schools were solely about improving equity for BCPSS students.

The City, through Planning and BCRP, prioritized community use of schools and approached 21CSBP efforts from a philosophy of schools for our neighborhoods and their residents. Planning staff promoted planning schools into already existing neighborhood plans (i.e., integrating 21CSBP designs into neighborhood traffic plans), rather than designing schools independently and addressing links to the neighborhood through a secondary design process. To that end, Planning staff facilitated neighborhood planning processes for the quarter-mile radius area surrounding each school and helped implement community improvement and beautification projects. The Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) staff suggested that 21CSBP school siting decisions were not part of broader citywide development discussions and as a result, site selection sometimes missed the mark. BCPSS's decisions to place many 21CSBP schools in deeply distressed communities limited how they and other community development actors could leverage school investments with market forces to support neighborhood stability and growth.

The competing theories of action described above also lead to an emphasis on quantitative measures of success. These metrics are not unusual in community development efforts that focus on economic development, housing markets, and household stability (Baum, 2001; Galster et

al., 2004; Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2017). They are also common in school facilities and school construction programs, which consider student achievement, faculty or student absenteeism, or health outcomes (Neilson & Zimmerman, 2014). But less easily measured factors such as the experience in and of these new schools is central also mattered.

A photograph taken at the opening of a new 21CSBP school shows a third-grade student with a huge gaping smile on his face. "This. Happy children. The awe," a BCPSS staff member said in answer to a question about metrics for success. Her colleague added, "They're awestruck...the little ones ask, 'Is this for me?'" (personal interview, school district, February 13, 2019). Others echo these emotional responses, and call for joy, awe, and connection as measures of success. One philanthropic leader commented, "We can put up all the new buildings you want, but you have to change something within people. They have to feel hopeful; they have to feel that they are valued" (personal interview, foundation, January 15, 2019). Likewise, improvements to neighborhood social and organizational connections and local pride were also desired outcomes of 21CSBP.

The disjointed nature of the implementation process at the meso-level of city public agencies results in a disjointed set of outcomes at the local, neighborhood level. Certainly, many of these communities have seen improvements such as parks, murals, and streetscape improvements, largely driven by the Planning Department's efforts and small capital investments. However, beyond these wins, systemic infrastructure for residents and neighborhoods remained ad hoc and highly uneven across the city.

Discussion

Baltimore's 21CSBP is an unprecedented investment, yet the material outcomes fell short of a transformed model of community development implicitly embedded in the 21CSBP legislative mandate. Deep-seated history of mistrust and the challenges of cross-sector collaboration challenged public agencies. In Baltimore, these challenges overwhelmed agencies' ability to work as collective stewards of a shared social agenda for school and neighborhood change through this massive school facilities investment.

This case affirms the ways that divergent theories of action can yield disjointed outcomes on the ground, as Wolf-Powers (2014) suggested. Following a theory of action for "restoration of norms", city agencies and philanthropic partners approached 21CSBP as one community development investment among many others that could help achieve comprehensive interventions, better coordination across sectors, and enhanced social capital through public engagement and community implementation. HCD strongly articulated an interest in "restoration of markets", explicitly questioning BCPSS's siting decisions and lamenting how 21CSBP investments in weak markets wasted the possibility of leveraging additional community development resources.

BCPSS staunchly defends their 21CSBP siting decisions, reflecting a commitment to a "restoration of justice". As a meso-level public agency, they are not calling for Indigenous leadership or political organizing (as in Wolf-Powers' original framework). Staff explicitly and passionately grounded their plans for the 21CSBP schools in the redistribution of resources and their commitment to students who historically have been the most disadvantaged by BCPSS and other public agencies.

While implicit in "equity" work across the city, BCPSS staff were the only respondents who consistently named and challenged Baltimore's racist history in public education and neighborhood planning and situated 21CSBP planning and implementation in this context. This framing and the current Black Lives Matter movement motivate questions about the deeper underlying infrastructure of legislative and budgetary systems that crafted and executed 21CSBP. The following questions arose: How have generations of racist perceptions of Baltimore's public school children and families shaped the ways that policies, budgets, and relationships are structured, and therefore constrain present-day efforts at cross-sector collaboration? How have decades of state-control of BCPSS and its operations likewise impacted this collaboration?

Placing schools in a framework of community development expands our understanding of "community schools". It suggests that beyond serving as a hub for bringing services into the school, the school building is situated in an ecosystem of a broader neighborhood that extends out from the school's walls. This understanding is especially acute amid the current COVID-19 crisis which lays bare the extent to which schools serve a critical role in the delivery of our social safety net. The void that closures have created is a testament to the reach, power, and efficacy of the community school approach. Community school coordinators and family engagement specialists employed by BCPSS and non-profit community-based organizations became a literal lifeline for so many families in the midst of this crisis. But community school coordinators arguably had more impact when their work was linked to other community development activities.

Although the community school model holds great promise, an extreme event like COVID-19 revealed some of the pitfalls that need further consideration and raised critical questions about what schools should or should not have to take on. For example: How can we extend the community schools' model of bringing services for students and their families into the school building to create a more porous boundary between the school and the neighborhood, linking students, families, and other community members to public libraries, health clinics, community gardens, recreation sites, and other community-based assets? How does this alternative model shift the onus of intervention to other public and non-profit organizations?

Conclusion

These questions, and more, reveal the gaps in community development practice and the limitations of schools filling those holes. The fabric supporting students, families, and other neighborhood residents is patchy. Our findings underscore the need for a re-examination of who plays a role in community development to include school districts as core meso-level actors and school sites as central neighborhood-level institutions woven into the fabric of more traditional community development activity. Meso-level actors' horizontal integration can support more seamless and effective cross-sector collaboration in design and implementation. Further, "vertical" integration should bridge the activities and wisdom of grassroots community-based organizations, school site leadership, and students and families with the policy structures and resources of meso-level public agencies.

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