Education Reform Faculty and Graduate
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Education Reform

8-1-2010

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Citation

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Abstract

In their now classic *Impossible Jobs in Public Management*, Hargrove and Glidewell (1990) argue that public agencies with limited legitimacy, high conflict, low professional authority, and weak "agency myths" have essentially impossible jobs. Leaders of such agencies can do little more than "cope," which is also a theme of James Q. Wilson (1989), among others. Yet in the years since publication of *Impossible Jobs*, one such position, that of police commissioner has proven possible. Over a sustained 17-year period, the New York City Police Department has achieved dramatic reductions in crime with relatively few political repercussions, as described by Kelling and Sousa (2001). A second impossible job discussed by Wilson and also by Frederick Hess (1999), city school superintendent, has also proven possible, with Houston and Edmonton having considerable academic success educating disadvantaged children. In addition, Atlanta and Pittsburgh enjoyed significant success in elementary schooling, though the gains were short-lived for reasons we will describe. More recently, under Michelle Rhee, Washington D.C. schools have made the most dramatic gains among city school systems. These successes in urban crime control and public schooling have not been widely copied. Accordingly, we argue that the real conundrum of impossible jobs is why agency leaders fail to copy successful innovations. Building on the work of Teodoro (2009), we will discuss how the relative illegitimacy of clients and inflexibility of personnel systems combine with the professional norms, job mobility and progressive ambition of agency leaders to limit the diffusion of innovations in law enforcement and schooling. We will conclude with ideas about how to overcome these barriers.

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**Cops, Teachers, and the Art of the Impossible: Explaining the lack of diffusion of
impossible job innovations**

In *Impossible Jobs in Public Management*, Hargrove and Glidewell (1990) suggest that some

public posts are simply too difficult to succeed at. If an agency has clients that are perceived by

the public as illegitimate it will be difficult to garner the resources to serve those clients, and may

in fact be difficult to motivate employees to serve them well (also Lipsky 1980). If an agency

has high conflict among its constituencies, it may face difficulties in initiating and implementing

new policies, and indeed may not agree on either its means or ends. If an agency profession has

limited respect from the public, it may well be micromanaged (also Warwick 1975). Similarly, if

an organization has a weak "agency myth," leaders will have trouble recruiting employees and

gaining resources.

For the most part Hargrove and Glidewell present a political theory of public

administration, in which the low status of an organization, its professionals, and its clients

prevents it from gaining the respect and resources to succeed. Wolf (1993) similarly found that a

"Political Theory of the Firm" best explained variation in the effectiveness of federal government

agencies, as agencies with competitive mission environments, strong presidential support,

political autonomy, a strong sense of mission, and operational adaptability were associated with

higher levels of effectiveness.

In contrast, James Q. Wilson's *Bureaucracy* offers a more managerial theory of

organizational success (Wilson 1989). Wilson categorizes organizations based on the

measurability of their outputs and procedures. "Production" organizations like the Social

Security Administration have measurable goals and optimal procedures, what Wilson calls "known technologies," and thus can be controlled and ultimately improved. In contrast, "coping organizations" have immeasurable goals and processes with no known or knowable connection to outputs (i.e. "unknown technologies") and therefore are unlikely to succeed. Coping organizations, according to Wilson, include police departments and school systems.

A third cut at organizational success and failure is the hybrid model of Hult and Walcott (1990). They argue that an organization's goals and technologies can be characterized by consensus, by uncertainty (under which actors are not sure), and/or by controversy (under which different actors *disagree* on desired goals or appropriate techniques). Technical and particularly goal controversy make public management more difficult. Different organizational governance structures are suited to different policy settings. When goals and techniques are certain, conventional bureaucracies are suitable and politics can be separated from administration, with politicians making policy and career bureaucrats carrying out policy. When goals and technologies are uncertain, Hult & Walcott suggest allowing decisions to emerge from the decentralized, unguided interplay of actors, in effect competition between government organizations free to experiment by emphasizing different goals and employing different technologies. As controversy (either goal or technical) rises and becomes polarizing, confrontational or quasi-judicial governance structures are needed for closure. Of course, such structures can delay implementation, particularly if courts and legislatures take those roles. When goals or technologies are uncertain, Hult and Walcott advocate diverse teams to develop and explore alternatives. The teams should be dominated by career technical experts if technologies are uncertain, by politicians or group representatives if goals are uncertain. In this

regard, it is notable that political appointees in government increase in number as missions become more controversial (Maranto 2005).

We suggest that while these typologies are useful, they are static and operate at too high a level of generalization. They leave out the incentives faced by organization leaders and employees. They leave little room for innovations in an organization's professions and technologies, nor in the political environment supporting an organization. After all, what if an agency with controversial goals gained strength as through social learning and political entrepreneurship, and thus its goals became more consensual? What if clients were redefined, proactively by the agency, in such a way as to increase their legitimacy? What if managerial entrepreneurs brought personnel and technologies together in such a way as to "create public value?" (Moore 1995) And what if success for a government organization can be as close as a failure which subsequently ushers in new leadership and a new organizational ideology?

We draw upon the example of military counterinsurgency to make our point here. Counterinsurgency strategy and tactics date back (at least) to the ancient Romans. Yet the U.S., largely for internal political reasons, failed to embrace and implement counterinsurgency tactics in Vietnam until political will to fight the war had waned---nearly five years into large scale conflict (Krepinevich 1986; Maranto and Tuchman 1992). In contrast, in part because of the relatively recent Vietnam failure, the U.S. military embraced counterinsurgency tactics after only three years in Iraq, and those tactics have apparently led to military success in that country (Petraeus et al 2007; Brooks 2009).

In part, the impossible jobs literature reflects the administrative pessimism of the 1970s and early 1980s. In contrast, since the era of Reinventing Government a series of works have

examined the ability of entrepreneurial leaders to change organizational culture in ways that lead to profound improvement in public service, typically by selling their policies to existing staff and using an improved "agency myth" to recruit new staff and gain support from outsiders. Numerous case studies of such institutions as the military, FEMA, Veterans Administration, and local organizations such as individual public schools fall within this category of successful organizational turnarounds (Abramson and Bacon 2001, Khademian 2001, Barzelay and Armijani 1992, Sullivan and Harper 1996, Maranto 2005, Kelman 2005, Osborne and Gaebler 1992, Osborne and Plastrik 1998). The mission and operational environments of agencies may be structural forces that limit the actions and effectiveness of agencies (Wolf 1997); nevertheless, such factors are not necessarily permanent and are the proper targets of any truly transformation organizational leader (Bass 1998, Bass and Avolio 1994).

We argue that new political conditions created by political entrepreneurs and new managerial strategies created by administrative entrepreneurs have made possible two impossible jobs, police commissioner and city school superintendent. We will detail how policing succeeded in New York City, and how various big city school districts had considerable success. We will then explain why these victories remained local. In other words, why have other police and school bureaucracies in other cities failed to copy the seemingly successful policy innovations of the NYPD and various school districts?

The real conundrum of impossible jobs, we contend, is not their impossibility, but rather their spread ability: When new political and bureaucratic entrepreneurs find ways to make impossible jobs possible, why don't other leaders do likewise? We suggest that personnel practices and political and professional ideologies play key roles, as Teodoro (2009) finds.

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Teodoro argues that the policy innovation literature has focused too much on the need for policy changes (demand) and not enough on "the incentives for individuals to become policy entrepreneurs (supply)" (2009, 175). Bureaucratic labor markets can in no small part determine the supply of policy entrepreneurs:

> Local governments' hiring and promotional practices determine the paths by which bureaucrats may advance. Agencies and professions that feature diagonal advancement (via movement from one organization to another) select executives based on their reputations for policy innovation. Agencies that promote leaders vertically from within do not rely so heavily on professional reputation, but rather select bureaucrats based on familiarity and adherence to standard organizational norms…hiring practices affect policy outcomes (176).

Agencies that hire from within frequently have only one serious candidate for leadership positions, making policy innovation particularly unlikely. Notably, in both diagonal and vertical agencies ambitious officials are likely to copy the behavior of those earning promotions. Using a data set of police chiefs and water utility directors, Teodoro finds that agencies which hire leaders from the outside are more likely to innovate, and to innovate in ways that accord with prescriptions of the national policy community. We further suggest that ambitious officials will use terminated agency heads as negative role models, and not replicate actions which have proven hazardous to careers. Accordingly, the most innovative officials may in fact turn out to be what Downs (1967) terms zealots, who have the dedication to create new policies, rather than climbers, who being more self-interested, are more likely to adopt policies deemed desirable by the national professional community, or by local informal networks within the organization.

This dynamic has important implications for how police chiefs and school superintendents may embrace or eschew specific innovations, regardless of the efficacy of said policies.

I. Urban Policing: Doing the impossible.

After homicide rates tripled in the 1960s, albeit from historically low levels, urban policing was considered an essentially impossible job. Liberals typically argued that crime could only be decreased when its root causes, poverty and discrimination, were eliminated (*e.g.*, Orfield and Ashkinaze 1991). Similarly, many conservatives believed that crime could be defeated only by pulling up its roots, though for them the root cause was welfare dependency and family breakdown (*e.g.*, Murray 1984). Neither broad ideological current had much faith in policing; nor seemingly did criminal justice academics, who also saw crime as linked to root causes rather than weak policing (Kelling and Sousa 2001). Analysts who did study policing more typically took the approach that crime rates influenced police culture, rather than that policing tactics could seriously cut crime (Wilson *e.g.*, 1978; for a more recent version ignoring the lessons of NYPD, see Moskos 2008).

In 1993 New York City had 1,946 homicides, down slightly from its all-time high of 2,245 in 1990. In response to this stubbornly high murder rate and the subsequent image that New York City was too dangerous a place to live in or visit, Mayor David Dinkins began to increase the number of police officers. When Rudy Giuliani defeated Dinkins, he immediately appointed William Bratton police commissioner. Bratton, a Bostonian, had previously served as chief of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority Police, the Metropolitan District

Commission Police, the New York City Transit Police, and briefly the Boston Police---all in a ten year span. In each job, he had performed as a change agent, upsetting routines and traditional networks and also attracting new resources in order to improve performance and cut crime. In each, Bratton started out by spending considerable time on the front lines with street level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980), focusing on ways to fundamentally change their behavior. Bratton (1998) also worked at public relations and at building relationships with unconventional allies, such as Boston's gay and lesbian community. In short, in sharp contrast to police traditions, he was a zealot out to reform organizations rather than a more traditional loyal, "conserver" police functionary seeking to maintain his post and relationships (Downs 1967). Bratton could adopt policies which might make traditional police leaders uncomfortable since he was a cosmopolitan rather than a local, his advancement tied to regional or national job markets rather than to insider status or local political connections. Traditionally, it makes sense to appoint an outsider when an organization is under-performing (*e.g.*, Maranto 2005; Hamidullah et al 2009; Heifetz 1994).

With Giuliani's focus on law and order, Bratton received more resources and support, and used this over a frenetic three year period to reshape NYPD. Bratton brought in a team of reformers, who looked for ways to change street level behavior. Influenced by Wilson and Kelling (1982), Bratton focused on minor crimes such as subway turnstile jumpers, to send a message that the police controlled the streets and would not tolerate crime. New technologies enabled officers to immediately check the criminal history of arrests. This allowed officers to make many "good collars" of serious crimes, building support among the police and taking more criminals off the streets. Bratton also used new equipment and more attractive uniforms to gain support from officers.

Bratton gained public acclaim for his use of COMPSTAT, a new data tool delivering (almost) real time reports of crimes committed and arrests, and thus enabling central leaders to manage policing resources as never before. Bratton's team held weekly COMPSTAT meetings with precinct commanders, pushing them to find innovative ways to cut crime---or else. Reflecting the "macho" nature of police culture (e.g. Moskos 2008; Bratton 1998; Wilson 1978), COMPSTAT meetings were often unpleasant for precinct commanders, who would be sharply questioned by superiors *in front of their peers*. Less often remarked are four additional factors. First, even before Bratton, the NYPD was an organization with substantial talent, in part since it recruited nationally rather than just locally and had significant barriers to entry (such as requiring prior military service or two years of college). Accordingly, NYPD had the talent to change. Second, COMPSTAT yielded relatively honest numbers since the street level cops who reported the numbers had no incentive to lie to make their precinct commanders look better; indeed many probably wanted to see more vacancies at the top to increase their possibilities for promotion.

Third, in COMPSTAT meetings and at other opportunities Bratton and his deputy chiefs would not only criticize poor performance; they would also point to precincts whose leaders used innovative techniques to drive down crime They pushed others to follow suit, turning NYPD into a learning organization. But why should the police learn? Of course one would like to think that police officers want to reduce crime, but unfortunately, this is not always a sufficient motive to convince experienced officials to change practices which have worked for them, if not for the public. As Downs (1967) writes, administrators often prefer to justify a lower level of performance rather than undertake the changes needed to improve. This leads to an often overlooked but vital fourth factor.   Commissioner Bratton had unusual power over personnel.

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In his first year he replaced *two-thirds* of NYPD's precinct commanders with younger officers who shared his vision. The commissioner has the power to reduce a precinct commander's rank by two grades, a very substantial loss in income, pension benefits, and prestige. Though there have been no studies, sources at the Police Executive Research Forum say that few if any large police departments invest so much personnel power in the commissioner. Further, given the power of police unions, it seems unlikely that a commissioner who sought such power could attain it. Power over high level personnel gave Bratton the leverage he needed to remake a relatively conservative organization in a short period of time (Bratton 1998; Moffit 1996; Behn 2007; Kelling and Sousa 2001; Maranto 2006b, 2008). Of course, widespread public and elite concern about crime was a precondition for many of the changes that Bratton brought.

Most importantly, Bratton's changes brought immediate results. Homicide began to decrease more rapidly than it had been prior to his appointment (Table 1), building support among both police officers and the general public for the reforms to continue. (We use homicide statistics since measures of lesser crimes are easier for po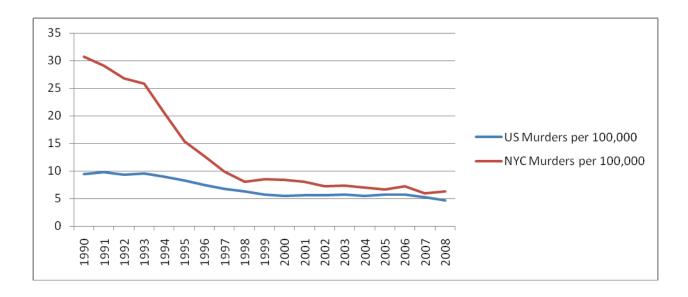lice and prosecutors to manipulate.) Further, despite two notorious cases of brutality, statistics show that the number of civilians killed by NYPD declined even more rapidly than the homicide rate, suggesting that police really did not have to be brutal to be effective. Bratton's reforms continued after his "resignation," but the reasons for his short tenure explain why other cities have not adopted similar reforms, at least not to the depth practiced by NYPD.

Table 1. Homicides in New York City, 1990-2008

Year	Homicides (NYC)	Rate of Change	Homicides (USA)	Rate of Change
1990	2,245	NA	23438	NA
1991	2,154	-4.1%	24703	5.4%
1992	1,995	-7.4%	23760	-3.82%
1993	1,946	-2.5%	24526	3.22%
1994	1,561	-19.8%	23326	-4.89%
1995	1,177	-24.6%	21606	-7.37%
1996	983	-16.5%	19645	-9.08%
1997	770	-21.7%	18208	-7.31%
1998	633	-17.8%	16974	-6.78%
1999	671	+6.0%	15522	-8.55%
2000	673	+0.3%	15586	.41%
2001	649	-3.6%	16037	2.89%
2002	587	-9.6%	16229	1.2%
2003	597	1.7%	16528	1.84%
2004	566	-5.19%	16148	-2.3%
2005	539	-4.77%	16740	3.67%
2006	596	10.58%	17034	1.76%
2007	496	-16.78%	15707	-7.79%
2008	523	5.44%	14180	-9.72%

Source: FBI (2006-2009)*"Crime in the United States"* http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm

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Figure 1- Homicide Rates

As Bratton (1998) details in discussions of Boston and New York police politics, police commissioners are for the most part fired for scandals and for political reasons, not for high crime rates. Though more sophisticated analyses are needed, commissioner tenure does not seem to be affected by crime. Four NYPD commissioners served in the 1994-2008 era of declining and low crime rates, as compared with five serving in the 1980-94 period of high and stable crime rates. Similarly, in the low crime 1950-65 period NYPD had five commissioners, as compared to six in the high crime 1965-83 period. The primary research organization for police commissioners is the Police Executive Research Forum. A PERF researcher states that there is no large scale research on why police commissioners are fired, though scholarly case studies (Rainguet and Dodge 2001) suggest that Bratton is correct. Any police commissioner operating as a change agent will accumulate internal enemies likely to leak embarrassing information to the media and to politicians. Further, as in Bratton's case, if a police commissioner grows too popular he or she can become a political threat to the mayor. Indeed shortly after Bratton polled

as more popular than Mayor Guiliani (and rumors said that Bratton was interested in running for mayor), Giuliani fired him, ostensibly for concerns about the propriety of his book deal. After Bratton and his closest confidents were dismissed, NYPD's new leadership kept his policies in place. Homicides continued to fall substantially until 2000. Since then the crime rate has remained low, and stable.

Tellingly, despite his outstanding record, it took Bratton six years to land another commissioner post, this time in Los Angeles. Crime steadily declined during Bratton's first six years in Los Angeles (Rubin and Winton 2009), before he announced his intention to retire in 2009. Interestingly, a source close to Bratton suggests that he was somewhat disappointed with his record in Los Angeles. Los Angeles has 413 residents per officer compared to 233 officers per resident in New York. Bratton had expected to expand LAPD by roughly 30%, promising that with more officers he could make Los Angeles the safest city in North America. Political support for additional resources was not forthcoming, however, and within two months of his appointment Bratton scaled back plans for expansion (Garza 2002; Nash 2002).

In short, as Downs (1967) and Teodoro (2009) warn, innovators cannot be separated from their job markets. The clear lesson to Brattonesque reformers is that too much success can lead to career failure. In addition, as Bratton (1998) and Kelling and Sousa (2001) point out, traditional criminal justice academic programs do not believe that police can effectively fight crime, and so have avoided studying NYPD's success. Notably, the academics who have studied NYPD's success (Robert Behn and Robert Moffit) are political scientists rather than criminal justice professors; thus there is no institutionalized academic body to study and promote NYPD's success. Those who wish to succeed in academia may receive subtle messages that studying

NYPD is not a good idea (Maranto et al. 2009). Bratton style reforms are thus not part of the

standard playbook for criminal justice professionals.

II. The Trouble with Urban Schools

As Wilson (1989) makes clear, urban schooling is another area in which traditional public

organizations have had little success. As a vast literature shows, city schools need help. Urban

schools do not work well, largely because their clientele is disadvantaged. Spending about the

same as nearby suburbs, inner-city schools have a tough job educating the children of underclass

parents. Big city schools struggle with crime, racial and political divisions, and teachers unions

and entrenched bureaucracies that more often hinder than help learning. Further, a more difficult

clientele often makes it difficult for urban school systems to attract and retain talented teachers,

who can typically earn the same pay for easier work in suburban schools (*e.g.*, Portz et al. 1999;

Henig et al 1999; Hess 1999). This stands in contrast to policing, in which large urban districts

often offer more prestige and more money. Of the 60 urban school districts tracked by the

Council of Great City Schools for its *Beating the Odds* report, from 2006 to 2009 only 15

produced rates of student achievement gain that exceeded the average gain rate for their state in

both reading and math and for both 4th and 8th graders (Table 2).[1] Using the standard of student

rates of achievement gain over time levels the playing field for urban school districts, which tend

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[1] In other words, to qualify the urban area had to outperform the state average for all four populations --
4th graders in math, 4th graders in reading, 8th graders in math, and 8th graders in reading.

to enroll students with much lower levels of initial academic preparation than do public school districts in suburban or even rural areas of states.

Some urban school districts clearly have done better than others recently. The District of Columbia Public Schools has outperformed its "state" by the greatest magnitude of all the Great City Schools in 4th grade math, 8th grade math, and 8th grade reading. Of course, the District of Columbia (DC) is a special case, since the "rest of the state" that provides the comparison is DC public charter schools. The public school districts in Baltimore, Atlanta, and Newark also stand out for their recently-demonstrated ability to produce average student achievement gains that exceed the average gains for their respective states. Moreover, the public schools in Pittsburgh were widely viewed as a bastion of educational effectiveness in the 1980s, as were Atlanta schools in the 1970s and early 1980s. How do urban public schools produce impressive outputs and why haven't successful approaches been replicated across the country? We think that the answers to those questions largely mirror the story of Commissioner Bratton and crime reduction in New York City.

Table 2: Mean Tenure of Council of Great City Schools Superintendents

1997	2.75
1999	2.33
2001	2.5
2003	2.8
2006	3.1
2008	3.5

Source: Council of Great City Schools (2006) *Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure, and Salary*. Urban Indicator 8(1) 1-10

Table 4: Percent of Council of Great City Schools Superintendents by Tenure

	1 Year or Less	Between 1 and 5 Years	5 or More Years
1997	29	51	20
1999	36	52	12
2001	22	64	15
2003	31	54	15
2006	33	42	25
2008	33	49	18

Source: Council of Great City Schools (2006) *Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure, and Salary*. Urban Indicator 8(1) 1-10

Table 5. Urban Public School Districts with Student Annual Rates of Achievement Gain Consistently Above Average Gains for Their State

City	4th Grade Math Rank	4th Grade Reading Rank	8th Grade Math Rank	8th Grade Reading Rank	Average Rank
DC	1	4	1	1	1.75
Baltimore	2	2	4 (tie)	2	2.50
Atlanta	6 (tie)	1	2	4 (tie)	3.25
Newark	3	3	4 (tie)	6 (tie)	4.00
Indianapolis	4 (tie)	9 (tie)	3	6 (tie)	5.50
Philadelphia	7	5	6	4 (tie)	5.50
Dallas	11	6 (tie)	9 (tie)	6 (tie)	8.00
Richmond	9	11 (tie)	9 (tie)	3	8.00
Chicago	6 (tie)	11 (tie)	7	11 (tie)	8.75
Houston	4 (tie)	6 (tie)	14	13 (tie)	9.25
Palm Beach County	10	9 (tie)	9 (tie)	11 (tie)	9.75
Austin	13 (tie)	11 (tie)	8	10	10.50
Clark County (NV)	12	8	13	9	10.50
Miami-Dade	13 (tie)	11 (tie)	9 (tie)	13 (tie)	11.50
Duval County (FL)	8	11 (tie)	15	13 (tie)	11.75

Notes: Calculations derived from the data in *Beating the Odds: Individual District Profiles* (Council of Great City Schools, 2010). Ranks are based on average student achievement gains from 2006 to 2009 for each district net of the average student achievement gains over the same period in the district's state. Data for Newark only provided from 2006 to 2008.

Three years ago, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) were widely viewed as comprising one of the worst urban public school systems in the country. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 17 percent of the system's 4th graders were proficient or better at mathematics in 2007, and just 18 percent achieved that level in reading. The situation was worse for students who continued in DCPS through junior high school, as a measly 9 percent were proficient or better in math in 2007 and just 13 percent achieved that level in reading (NAEP State Profiles 2010). Record-keeping at DCPS was so poor that the Council of Great City Schools could not even include the district in its comparative reports prior to 2006, and a Freedom of Information Act request in 2004 revealed that over 25,000 DCPS work orders remained outstanding (Kronholz 2010). District enrollment had declined by 54 percent, from over 140,000 in 1970 to just 64,000 in 2006, as families fled the system by moving to area suburbs or enrolling their children in one of more than three-dozen public charter schools that opened in DC from 1997 through 2006 **(**Buckley and Schneider 2007). The public school system in the nation's capital was thought to be such a lost cause that Congress and President Bush established the first federal school voucher program in DC in 2004 to provide low-income families with an escape hatch to move their children to private schools (Wolf et al. 2010).

The state of public education in DC in 2007 was a crime, and recently-elected Mayor Adrian Fenty addressed the crisis in ways similar to how Mayors Dinkins and Guiliani addressed the 1990s crime spree in New York City: he took control of the school system out of the hands of the public school board, through a mayoral control initiative, and placed it in the hands of a new Chancellor of District Public Schools named Michelle Rhee.

DC Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee has a reputation as a blunt-speaking, impatient, ruthless, insensitive reformer. She pleads guilty to all charges. One of us, Wolf, has gotten to know Rhee somewhat through his work evaluating the DC voucher program and can't help but be impressed with her commitment, energy, and audacity. At the first meeting with Rhee that Wolf attended, the Chancellor began the discussion with the unprovoked statement: "DC public schools suck." Her vision to, ahem, improve upon that performance rating for the school system she controls is both ambitious and compelling. The recipe has involved repairing the disparate and dysfunctional DCPS information systems, focusing more attention on both accountability and formative assessments, evaluating and often firing school principals based on student achievement trends, renegotiating the teacher collective bargaining agreement so that some teachers can opt to surrender guaranteed tenure in exchange for the opportunity to earn large merit pay bonuses, closing under-enrolled and under-performing schools and publicly supporting parental school choice.

Like NYPD Commissioner Bratton, Chancellor Rhee has attracted a great deal of media attention (Kronholz 2010). She has been profiled on *60 Minutes* and other major news shows. Some observers suggest that she is more popular than Mayor Fenty, who is the target of an investigation into the propriety of contracts awarded to companies with close ties to the mayor (King 2010). Also like Bratton, evidence suggests that Rhee's reforms are improving educational outcomes. As one researcher put it in discussing city schools generally:

> Houston is one of those districts whose overall attainment is much better than you might expect if you look at poverty. The truth is most of the cities do a better job overcoming the effects of poverty than the average city and the average state, so the effects of poverty are less. Detroit is an [unsuccessful] exception. Washington DC is an [unsuccessful] exception, though [under Rhee] DC is improving to the point where it is up to its demographic expectations (phone interview, July 20, 2010).

More time will be needed to determine conclusively if Rhee has turned around DCPS; however, NAEP rates of proficiency or above for DCPS students increased for 4th graders, to 20 percent in math and 22 percent in reading, and also for 8th graders, to 13 percent in math and 15 percent in reading (NAEP State Profiles 2010). Not only has DCPS record-keeping improved to the point where the school system can be included in Council of Great City Schools reports, but DCPS actually is showing the largest student achievement gains relative to its state (Table 2). Not one to get ahead of herself, Rhee summarizes her achievements to date by saying, "'we have begun--begun--begun--to establish a culture of accountability'" (Kronholz 2010, p. 29).

Given Michelle Rhee's apparent success in turning around one of the worst public school systems in the country, one would think that her position as Chancellor is secure and urban school superintendents around the country will soon be emulating her approach. We wouldn't bet on either of those propositions. There is already substantial support for Rhee's ouster for not sufficiently respecting all players in the educational community (Chaltain 2010) and for paying too much attention to recruiting new middle class (and often white) students (Barras 2010). The experiences of previous successful urban school reformers suggest that neither continued employment nor replication of one's reform model tends to follow in school reform's wake.

In the 1980s Superintendent Richard Wallace had an unusual level of success in Pittsburgh. By partnering with the teachers union, bringing more resources, constantly testing children (more than a decade before NCLB), and constantly persuading and retraining teachers, Wallace was able to bring elementary school students to near national levels of achievement, though he had substantially less success for middle and high school students. Wallace was able to implement change in part since he had substantial and long standing support across sectors in

Pittsburgh. In addition, Pittsburgh schools were losing enrollment in the period, enabling

Wallace to reach an agreement with the teachers union to support data driven reform in exchange

for avoiding layoffs (Portz et al 1999; Wallace 1996; Maranto 2006a). In the 1970s, Alonzo

Crim had similar political support, employed similar tactics, and had a similar record of success

in Atlanta in the 1970s and early 1980s (Henig et al 1999). In both cases, over time teachers

unions, school board members, and other political leaders felt that too much power was

centralized in the hands of the school superintendent, and successors had far less success.

In the 1990s, Rod Paige pursued similar strategies in Houston with significantly more

success, perhaps in part since the local teachers union had little power and since Paige also gave

principals increased power over their staff and budgets, enabling them to lead. At the same time,

Paige, like Rhee, began to hold principals accountable for academic results in the manner that

Bratton held precinct commanders accountable (McAdams 2000). This is in fact what Ouchi

(2009) recommends, and what has made Edmonton the most successful urban school system in

North America under Superintendent Mike Strevitsky. As Ouchi argues, there is some evidence

that the Houston reforms have been institutionalized, perhaps in part since in the 1990s teachers

and educational leaders were more comfortable with data, in part due to changes in information

technology, and changes in ideology making decentralization of school decision-making more

acceptable. As noted above, Houston public schools still perform relatively well. Further,

Houston has played host to a large charter school sector including and indeed was the birthplace

of the famous KIPP academies, which Paige assisted (Matthews 2009). There is some evidence

that this has encouraged systemic improvement.

On the other hand, at the start of the new millennium, Alan Bersin substantially improved the performance of the San Diego Unified School District with a reform program that emphasized data-driven decision making and the role of school principals as instructional leaders, though he was fired once teachers union backers won control of the school board (Hess 2005). Similarly, Little Rock Superintendent Roy Brooks was fired almost immediately after his district posted the largest test scores gains in memory, in part since he had cut many politically important central office jobs. FIND CITATION

In effect, what these successful school leaders did for their school systems was very similar to what Commissioner Bratton did for his police force. Each had considerable political support, at least at the onset of their tenure, and used this to increase resources and to recruit and promote talented officials. Each sought to make their system a learning organization by stressing use of data and pushing subordinates to manage by data. Each made some efforts to replace ineffective middle level leaders -- for example, Michele Rhee fired one-third of the public school principals in DCPS after her first year as Chancellor. The wholesale replacement of ineffective managers may have been easier for Bratton, however, given the remarkable personnel power held by the commissioner.

Yet few educators have copied these field innovators. Why not? In part, until NCLB frequent testing was unfamiliar to educators, and stirred up considerable controversy. As the education researcher quoted above states:

> When Lonnie Crim was in Atlanta or Jefferson was in Detroit, those were different eras in that people didn't attend to the arithmetic of student achievement the way they do now or the way they always have in crime statistics. The [crime] metrics have been fairly stable over time. In education the metrics keep changing, and people look at them differently.

Simple unfamiliarity with data meant that until recently school superintendents could not rely on academic success to build political support. Accordingly educators might not want to emphasize such accountability unless they were able to win over the teachers union (as in the cases of Crim and Wallace) or faced weak unions (Paige). Bersin, notably, kept his job only so long as a pro-reform coalition held the school board and lost his job once a pro-union slate took charge.

Highly effective urban police commissioners and school superintendents also face the danger of becoming victims of their successes. If crime is low and test scores high in a city, politicians and the citizens who support them may provide less public support and fewer resources to the organizational leaders who helped to create such salient conditions. Squeaky wheels get the grease. If your job is to eliminate squeaks, and you succeed, you run the risk of being ignored or viewed as expendable, as political leaders look to solving the next urban problem on the horizon. Further, at this point actors left out may question the centralization of power which enabled success. This seemingly happened in both Pittsburgh and Atlanta, and while it did not weaken Wallace or Crim, it did affect their successors.

A second way that urban police commissioners and school superintendents can become victims of their own success is by becoming bigger than their britches in the eyes of their employers. In the case of police commissioners, this happens when a city's top cop becomes more popular than its mayor, or is viewed as a possible candidate for the mayor's job, or both, as was true in the case of Commissioner Bratton in the 1990s. While it difficult to think of a city school superintendent who became mayor or governor (and only one currently resides in the U.S. Senate), superintendents often get pink slips following turnaround successes when the political composition of the elected school board changes or the board views the superintendent as having

amassed too much power and independence. Often the effect of school reforms on powerful

political constituencies, like teachers, sets the stage for a superintendent's firing, as was the case

for Alan Bersin in San Diego. One of the authors of this paper predicts that Michelle Rhee will

face this fate in the coming months.

A final reason why successful models for squelching urban crime or turning around city

school systems are rarely replicated in their whole-cloth form is that high-level city officials have

a powerful incentive to personalize their management system. Because they could be fired at

any time, they want to maximize their ability to secure a similar position elsewhere by creating

the sense that their own personal artistry was central to their success. If any old police

commissioner could dramatically reduce crime by following the "Bratton model", then Los

Angeles would have no incentive to hire the actual William Bratton. If any former Teach for

America staffer could turnaround an urban school system by implementing the "Rhee approach,"

then no other cities would line up to hire Michele Rhee once the inevitable ax falls. In the wake

of the devastation from Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans wasn't just looking for a superintendent

to rebuild their public school system; they were looking for a little Paul Vance magic. This very

tendency to personalize systems of urban reform increases the future employability of reform

leaders even as it endangers their current employment tenure by making them potential threats to

their political bosses.

Toward Conclusion

In sum, case studies of Bratton, Rhee, Crim, Wallace, and Paige suggest that when

certain political and organizational preconditions are met, revolutionary improvements in crime

prevention and very substantial improvements in urban schooling can occur. These

preconditions include

1. Support from a powerful mayor, and other political actors.

2. Public and media recognition that the status quo is unacceptable.

3. Unusual power over personnel policy in the organization.

4. A reasonable level of talent within the organization, on which to depend.

5. Usable and timely data systems.

6. A capable bureaucratic entrepreneur, with a coherent vision for improvement.

Interestingly, Bratton seemingly had far more success in part since the street level bureaucrats

doing police work supported crime reduction, and thus could be motivated to support the

commissioner's efforts once they enjoyed initial success. Given the training of teachers, it is not

clear that education street level bureaucrats have the same motivations (Hirsch 1996; Chenowith

2007, 2009). Further, crime prevention does not require the cooperation of clients in quite the

same way as education.

Unfortunately, other leaders are unlikely to copy the successes of these successful

innovators until there are firmer relationships between demonstrated results and individual level

job security or advancement. This will require public education as to what actually is possible:

what works and why. Second, when reformers succeed, academic communities need to study

those successes and teach future innovators how to copy and refine those them, rather than

looking the other way as academics all too often do (Maranto et al 2009). Only then will there

be national communities of practice likely to bring substantial improvement in impossible work.

In future version of this paper we plan to quantify the relationship or non-relationship

between success and tenure, to better understand why impossible job leaders lose their posts, and

whether if over time data is having more impact on those fundamentally political hiring and

firing decisions.

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