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# Has the Elite Foundation Agenda Spread Beyond the Gates? An Organizational Network Analysis of Nonmajor Philanthropic Giving in K–12 Education

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Previous research focusing on major philanthropic foundations suggests that these actors have collectively converged around a set of jurisdictional challengers promoting market-based education reforms. Using correspondence analysis, network analysis, and geographic information science, this article empirically tests whether this convergence has permeated to less prominent foundations and their grantees, or if these foundations are pursuing alternative organizational strategies to shape K–12 outcomes. The analysis draws from a sample of 15 nonmajor foundations and their 1,069 grantees serving some aspect of K–12 education in 2010. We find that nonmajor foundations have adopted some elements of major foundations' organizational strategies to influence K–12 education but that their strategies are heterogeneous and reflect both challenges to—and opportunities for—a more varied and democratic structure of policy making.

Elite (or major) foundations involved in education—those who wield disproportionate influence through their financial and social capital—have received substantial attention in research literature and popular media in the past decade. The heightened attention is, in part, driven by the amount of influence these foundations (e.g., Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) are perceived to have over education policy. Yet, this is not explicitly about dollars and cents. Although the amount of foundation dollars flowing into the realm of K–12 education has been increasing, philanthropic funds still provide only a small sliver

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of total spending in education when compared to state budgets. Instead, the influential power of foundations arises from their ability to create, sustain, and transform networks of organizations that can collectively mobilize the resources needed to shape education policy across local, national, and international scales (Ball and Junemann 2012; Scott and Jabbar 2013).

Collective action among philanthropic foundations has an extensive history. Between 1920 and 1940, for instance, a coalition of major foundations led a coordinated effort to bring structural changes to higher education. Consistent with the broader trend of social efficiency at the time, these foundations—which included the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations—worked to transform institutions of higher education through the implementation of a corporate model of governance (Barrow 1990). Today these types of coalitions remain actively involved in shaping all levels of education policy. For example, in Washington State’s 2012 general election, a national network of philanthropists, corporate executives, and nonprofit organizations collectively worked to narrowly pass a statewide charter-school initiative that had been rejected by voters in three consecutive elections (Au and Ferrare 2014). In fact, research suggests that major foundations are strategically converging on (i.e., cofunding) a limited group of organizations across the United States—called *jurisdictional challengers*—that offer alternative educational services (e.g., credentialing, school management, teacher training) long controlled by traditional institutions such as public school districts and colleges of education (Mehta and Teles 2012; Reckhow 2010; Reckhow and Snyder 2014). Prominent jurisdictional challengers such as Teach For America, New Schools Venture Fund, and Knowledge Is Power Program have been direct beneficiaries of these networks and have had a profound impact on the national conversation about school reform (Kretchmar et al. 2014; Scott and Jabbar 2014; Zeichner and Pena-Sandoval 2015).

The existing evidence makes it clear that elite foundations are collectively acting through a network of jurisdictional challengers to shape specific education policy outcomes, but it is not clear whether these same strategies extend to less influential foundations. The primary objective of this study is to empirically test whether less prominent (or nonmajor) foundations have converged on the same types of grantees, or if these foundations’ giving patterns represent competing organizational strategies of K–12 education policy and reform. To test our hypothesis we replicate and extend portions of the organizational network analysis

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design used by Reckhow and Snyder (2014). Whereas their study examined the top 15 giving foundations in K–12 education, we focus on 15 foundations that were substantially less prominent but still engaged in similar domains of education policy in 2010. Thus, unlike Reckhow and Snyder’s longitudinal analysis, here we focus solely on giving patterns at one point in time (in 2010). Yet, with the insights from their findings, we are able to assess whether the giving patterns among major foundations in 2010 had permeated into less prominent positions within the philanthropic field and to consider the implications these forms of giving have on recipient organizations and the broader realm of education policy in which they are situated.

In addition to our network analytic approach, we use basic techniques from geographic information science (GIS) and cartography to examine the distribution of these foundations’ funding and network patterns. The geographic dimensions to these practices are important to investigate so we can determine whether nonmajor foundations are engaged in national efforts or are primarily seeking to build local networks of organizations to shape education. Further, these illustrative techniques allow us to assess whether substantial interstate gaps exist in philanthropic funding flows that may leave some states and their resident nonprofit educational organizations without access to the vital funds provided by philanthropic foundations. In this sense, our analysis opens the door to understanding forms of geographic stratification that emerge through philanthropic involvement in education.

At a more general level, our work contributes to a long tradition of scholarship that has raised important questions from a wide range of perspectives concerning the role of private wealth in shaping the direction of public education and social policy in the United States (e.g., Arnove 1982; Faber and McCarthy 2005; Lagemann 1983; Reckhow 2013; Saltman 2010). In fact, the use of network analysis has been a crucial tool in this tradition, dating back to at least the mid-1970s and including Mary Anna Culleton Colwell’s (1980) “The Foundation Connection: Links Among Foundations and Recipient Organizations.” Colwell’s rich empirical account found a tightly connected foundation “club” linked directly to the policy-making process. As a result, Colwell called into question whether these networks of foundations and nonprofits actually constitute a viable alternative to businesses and government bodies working to advance education and social policy.

Nearly all of the work in this tradition has focused on foundations whose endowments were derived from prominent wealthy elites—such as Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Gates—who captured public attention with their success in the private sector. In recent years this conversation has gained momentum with the proliferation of venture philanthropic practices and the availability of data to analyze these patterns. Yet, missing from this discussion is the role of less prominent foundations whose financial contributions to education are smaller

than those of their elite counterparts but in the aggregate constitute a sizeable portion of the total funds given to organizations that serve public education. Gaining a deeper understanding of nonmajor foundations' organizational strategies vis-à-vis elite philanthropic actors extends our understanding of how foundations shape education and informs the debate over whether and how private power can be used to service the public good. Thus, while our primary objective is to test the hypothesis described above, we also intend for this work to contribute to the broader conversation concerning the role of philanthropic involvement in shaping education policy in a democratic society.

### Philanthropic Foundations and Education Policy Networks

The scholarly literature focusing on philanthropic involvement in education policy has been quite prolific in recent years. Although the active role of philanthropists in education is certainly not a new phenomenon, some have argued that the strategy of venture (or “strategic”) philanthropy has become a dominant practice within the philanthropic field (Reckhow 2013; Scott 2009). Venture philanthropy is an approach to philanthropic giving that closely follows the principles of venture capital investment. Similar to venture capitalists, venture philanthropists seek to maximize returns on investments (e.g., as measured by achievement growth or graduation rates), expand educational markets, and fund advocacy organizations that promote a market-oriented policy agenda (Cohen 2007; Lipman 2011; Scott 2009). Venture philanthropy represents a departure from the strategies of traditional philanthropists (e.g., Carnegie, Rockefeller) who, in addition to sheltering their endowments from taxes, framed their efforts in terms of the public good and widening access to public institutions (Scott 2009).

Venture philanthropic practices have accelerated the construction and complexity of policy networks in the realm of education. At the most general level, policy networks are self-organizing sets of interconnected actors (organizations, individuals, agencies, etc.) who exchange a variety of resources to achieve desired policy outcomes (Davies 2005). In this sense, policy networks operate as a form of “government without governing” (Rhodes 1996, 2006). Such networks have come to play an influential role in multiple policy-making realms as social democratic contracts have eroded in the context of advanced deregulation, trade liberalization, and other neoliberal reforms (Harvey 2005; Jones 2012).

Policy networks have become an important form of governance among reformers working to advance market-based policies in education (Au and Ferrare 2015; Ball and Junemann 2012). Bureaucratic bodies such as the US Department of Education, for example, are using policy networks to mobilize juris-

dictional challengers to push policy initiatives at state and local levels (Mehta and Teles 2012). Similarly, and often in concert with federal and state actors, major philanthropic foundations have found policy networks to be an efficient means of influencing education policy and reform movements. Scholars have argued that philanthropists and their foundations serve as central nodes in these networks that channel resources to a wide variety of think tanks, media, school reform organizations, charter management organizations, and advocacy groups (Scott and Jabbar 2014). At the same time, the informal nature of policy networks allows foundations to maintain a cautious and incremental stance toward their (potentially risky) engagement in the policy realm (Ferris et al. 2008).

The existing literature on philanthropic foundations and education policy networks suggests that these networks have converged on a policy agenda that emphasizes market-based interventions (Ball and Junemann 2012; Reckhow and Snyder 2014; Saltman 2010; Scott 2009) through discourses of entrepreneurship, innovation, and enterprise (Anderson and Donchik 2014; Ball and Exley 2010; Bell 2015; see also McShane and Hess 2015). A network analysis conducted by Kretchmar et al. (2014), for example, found that major foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, Walton Foundation, and Fisher Foundation were the primary financiers of policy networks working to shape K–12 reform through the proliferation of charter schools, charter management organizations, and alternative teacher and leadership certification. Similar networks have been observed in the United Kingdom (Hogan et al. 2015; Olmedo 2014; Santori et al. 2015), China (Liu 2015), and Chile (Campos-Martinez et al. 2015), suggesting a certain degree of similarity in education policy networks across national contexts (Ball 2012; Rizvi and Lingard 2010).

Although the previously cited studies provide significant support for the thesis that major philanthropic foundations—and the policy networks in which they are embedded—share a relatively homogenous policy agenda, they do not demonstrate the extent to which this policy convergence has taken shape over time. The most compelling evidence for the latter can be found in the work of Reckhow and Snyder (2014; see also Reckhow 2013). In their longitudinal study, Reckhow and Snyder demonstrate that since 2000 the top 15 philanthropic foundations in education have dramatically increased the amount of money they have given to national advocacy and research organizations while simultaneously converging on a select set of jurisdictional challengers. For example, between 2000 and 2010 these major foundations doubled the amount of money donated to national advocacy and research organizations from \$56.3 million to \$110.6 million. In addition, in 2000 the top 15 foundations primarily gave their money to traditional institutions such as public schools, state departments of education, and universities, but in 2010 their giving patterns shifted dra-

### *Nonmajor Philanthropic Giving in K–12 Education*

matically toward jurisdictional challengers including charter schools, alternative teacher training, and venture capital (Reckhow and Snyder 2014).

Another striking finding from Reckhow and Snyder's study is the extent to which this policy shift has coincided with organizational convergence (i.e., multiple foundations funding the same grantees). In 2000, not a single pair of grantees received at least \$2 million from three or more of the top 15 education funders. That number climbed to 10 in 2005 and ballooned to more than 40 by 2010 (Reckhow and Snyder 2014). At the center of this affiliation network in 2010 are the same organizations that have been prominently observed in the recent case studies noted above, such as Teach For America (TFA), Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), and New Schools Venture Fund (Kretchmar et al. 2014; Zeichner and Pena-Sandoval 2015).

When taken together, the evidence is clear that elite philanthropic foundations have come to prefer awarding jurisdictional challengers and other organizations that promote the deregulation of teaching and the adoption of charter schools and strict accountability measures. Key questions remain, however: To what extent have these organizational funding strategies permeated into the philanthropic field outside of widely recognized major foundations? Are less prominent philanthropic foundations giving to the same types of organizations as major foundations, or are their giving patterns reflective of alternative organizational strategies for shaping education policy and reform? We address these questions directly in our analysis. Before we do, however, we ground our analysis in a theoretical perspective that anticipates both strategic conformity and divergence in the philanthropic field.

### *Modeling Philanthropic Involvement in Education Policy Networks*

A compelling way to explain the dynamics shaping philanthropic involvement in education policy is through the concept of institutional isomorphism as developed by new institutional theorists in organizational studies (e.g., DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The central premise of new institutional theory is that, in the face of uncertainty, organizations tend toward similarity through three processes of isomorphism: coercive, mimetic, and normative. For instance, a philanthropic organization looking to award grants in education may follow the giving patterns of an established and respected organization such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (mimetic isomorphism). Alternatively, a foundation may follow certain patterns because of pressure from other organizations or from cultural expectations circulating through a given domain (coercive isomorphism). In the second instance, a foundation situated in a locality with a strong teachers' union may face pressure to maintain funding to a local public



school district rather than a competing charter management organization. Finally, a philanthropic organization may implicitly follow funding patterns because it tends to hire senior staff that has recognizable experiences or affiliations with other foundation executives (normative isomorphism).

Institutional theory has proved to be a productive line of research in organizational studies in general and in the realm of education in particular (Meyer 1977; Meyer and Rowan 1978). However, although institutional theory has been successful at explaining conformity in educational organizations, it has not been able to adequately explain the emergence and transformation of organizational fields and the extent to which even stable fields are shaped by power relations (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012). In light of these shortcomings, the organizational strand of field theory (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012; Mohr 2013) is better equipped to assist analysts in understanding the contentious and dynamic nature of philanthropic giving in the realm of education policy.

Organizational field theory shares much in common with institutional theory in the assumption that “strategic action fields are the fundamental units of collective action in society” (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 3). Whereas institutional theory emphasizes stability and conformity among actors in organizational fields, organizational field theory understands these fields as relatively autonomous domains of action constituted by positions of incumbents and challengers (and sometimes governance units; Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Incumbents are those organizations that wield disproportionate influence in the field. A clear example in the present context is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as it donates the largest sums of money, captures extensive media attention, and is routinely invited to weigh in on education policy issues with elected officials and other policy elites. Challengers, meanwhile, are those who occupy less prominent positions vis-à-vis incumbent actors and thus typically exert little influence over the direction of the field. Nevertheless, challengers may advance alternative visions while conforming to dominant strategies. For example, in 2010 the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation donated to jurisdictional challengers such as charter schools, but it gave its largest sums of money to state departments of education<sup>2</sup>—which were then marginal recipients among incumbent actors (see Reckhow and Snyder 2014). Thus, even during times of relative stability and apparent homogeneity, organizational field theory assumes that there are always competing visions of education within the philanthropic field.

Organizational field theory’s emphasis on differential power relations means that it is also well equipped to explain change. For example, education policy analysts often cite the perceived failure of the Annenberg Challenge as a turning point in the philanthropic field (Colvin 2005; Reckhow 2010) that effectively created space for organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to

try new forms of strategic action (e.g., venture philanthropic strategies). Yet it was not simply the widespread perception of failure that led to change but also the social skill (Fligstein 2001) possessed by then challengers such as Gates to read the situation and engage other organizations toward collective action. In addition, such dramatic changes to strategic action fields are only possible if alternative visions are present within the field during times of apparent stability. In this way, field theory anticipates that change is always a possibility given the right conditions.

Organizational field theory is used in the present context to position a sample of less prominent organizations as challengers within the strategic action field of philanthropic organizations in K–12 policy. We test whether these challengers are conforming to the market-based funding strategies of incumbent actors (i.e., major foundations) or pursuing alternative organizational strategies to influence K–12 education. Our theoretical approach generates a number of hypotheses. First, we anticipate that in 2010 our sample of challengers primarily exhibited funding patterns that diverged from those of their incumbent counterparts. Second, we hypothesize that our sample of challengers did not act as a homogeneous group but instead was comprised of factions as reflected in their patterns of giving to K–12 education. That is, we expect some challengers to have behaved more like incumbents and others to have followed patterns of giving that reflect alternative visions of education policy. Further, we hypothesize that these expected behaviors hinge, in part, on the geographic scale and proximity in which challengers act in the philanthropic field vis-à-vis other foundations engaged in similar activities. Intuitively, our theoretical perspective expects that nonmajor foundation dollars flowed at primarily local scales where these organizations believed they could have the greatest impact. Yet, the convergence of grant funding—multiple foundations donating funds to the same organizations—primarily hinged on the proximity of other foundations. Each of these hypotheses has important implications for the broader role that foundations play in shaping K–12 education policy.

## Sampling, Data, and Method

The sampling strategy in this study was to identify foundations outside of the top 15 in 2010 (in dollars given) that had similar giving profiles to the top 15 foundations across a range of K–12 policy domains. The primary reason we chose to focus on 2010 was so that we could make a direct comparison between our sample and the sample of top 15 foundations used by Reckhow and Snyder (2014). Although more recent foundation data are available, we cannot assume that the giving patterns of the top 15 foundations remained the same.

This direct comparison allows us to assess the similarities and differences between incumbent and challenger foundations as they occurred in 2010.

The first step in our sampling procedure was to draw from the Foundation Center's 2010 Top 50 Foundation Funding lists<sup>3</sup> for 11 domains of elementary and secondary education policy: accountability, arts education, college and career preparation, early learning, standards, literacy and reading skills, low-performing schools, out-of-school and summer, rural education, STEM, and teacher quality and leadership. These lists produced a total of 230 philanthropic foundations. A foundation-by-policy domain matrix was then created in which each cell illustrates the percentage of total dollars that foundation *i* awarded to policy domain *j*. The next step was to identify 15 of the 230 foundations whose award patterns across the 11 policy domains were most similar to those of the top 15 foundations identified by Reckhow and Snyder (2014). To select the subset of foundations in a nonarbitrary way, we used correspondence analysis (CA) to position and subsequently select the foundations relative to the top 15 foundations' patterns of K–12 giving. As a data reduction technique, the goal of CA is to represent dissimilarities between objects (in this case, organizations and policy domains) in a contingency table as Euclidean distances in a multidimensional space (Greenacre and Blasius 2006).

The CA (principle coordinates method) resulted in 10 dimensions that together accounted for 100% of the variation in the original matrix. The 10 dimensional coordinates for each foundation were then sorted in descending order by the factors explaining the greatest amount of variance. Each of the top 15 foundations was then located in the list, and the foundation outside the top 15 with the closest coordinates was selected for inclusion in the sample. In some cases the closest foundation was another top 15 organization, and these foundations were treated as a cluster and the nearest foundation was chosen based on the closest distance to the cluster of top 15 foundations. The result was a sample of 15 foundations that had the most similar giving profiles to the top 15 foundations in 2010 across the 11 policy domains.

As shown in table 1, the foundations in our sample are primarily engaged in funding education, arts and culture, and a variety of issues dealing with community vitality. The average market value of the foundations in our sample was slightly more than \$596 million in 2010, with a minimum of \$49.9 million (Ford Motor Company Fund) and a maximum of \$1.9 billion (Kauffman Foundation). Most of the foundations derived their assets from the wealth of business moguls. Many of these foundations were started and led by widows, such as Minnie K. Grable (wife of Errett, founder of Rubbermaid) and Grace A. Dow (wife of Herbert, founder of Dow Chemical). These foundations typically (though not exclusively) focus on funding local and regional programs in Pennsylvania and Michigan, respectively. Many other foundations, such as Bradley and Kauffman, are focused on local, state, and national scales, particularly through programs

TABLE 1

*Sampled Foundations as Derived by Correspondence Analysis of Giving Profiles across 11 Policy Domains in K-12 Education*

Sampled Foundation (Closest Top 15 in 2010 <sup>a</sup> )	Area of Emphasis	2010 Market Value (\$)
1. The Grable Foundation (Gates)	Early childhood, school systems, out-of-school time, community vitality	257,236,911
2. The Herbert H. and Grace Dow Foundation (Walton, Carnegie)	Education, science, arts and culture, community vitality	434,609,837
3. Barr Foundation (Kellogg)	Arts and culture, education, climate, global	1,134,513,133
4. Druckenmiller Foundation (Dell)	Education, poverty	864,200,491
5. Open Society Institute (Silicon Valley)	Education and youth, governance and accountability, health, media and information, rights and justice	1,141,004,097
6. The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Inc. (Robertson, Comm. Fnd. of Texas)	Democratic capitalism, limited government, defending American ideas, supporting markets, enlightened citizenry	561,556,697
7. Ford Motor Company Fund (Carnegie)	Community vitality, education, driving safety	49,885,020
8. Altman Foundation (Hewlett)	Education, health, community vitality, arts and culture, nonprofits	246,129,529
9. The Noyce Foundation (Broad)	Teaching math and literacy, school leadership, science education, education policy	143,727,641
10. Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation (GE)	Education, entrepreneurship, Kansas City	1,892,243,801
11. Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation (James Irvine)	Education, economic development, health and human services, community vitality	366,704,435
12. W. M. Keck Foundation (Fisher)	Research, undergraduate education, southern California	1,167,429,096
13. Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation (Comm. Fnd. of Texas)	Community vitality, education, arts and culture	23,007,901
14. The Charles Hayden Foundation (Daniels)	Education, children and youth	281,953,712
15. The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation (Ford)	Social impact, health, higher education, civic and cultural development	388,666,935

NOTE.—In 2 instances a selected foundation had coordinates positioned between 2 of the top 15 foundations. In these instances, we listed both of the top 15 foundations.

<sup>a</sup> The top 15 counterparts were taken from Reckhow and Snyder (2014).

that promote free enterprise and limited government. The Open Society Institute, on the other hand, founded by the hedge-fund manager George Soros, is active in more than 70 countries around the world.

Following the sample construction, we entered all K–12 education-related grants for each of the 15 nonmajor foundations into a database. Grant information for the foundations was gathered from 2010 Form 990s as provided by the Foundation Center’s 990 Finder.<sup>4</sup> Building from Reckhow and Snyder’s thematic scheme (see 2014, app. B, 195), each recipient organization was then coded based on the type of organization (e.g., national advocacy, public school, state department of education). In the data set, then, each foundation has as many row entries as grants given, where the row indicates the recipient organization, state of residency, organization type, and amount of the award. In the aggregate, our sample of foundations awarded 1,549 grants and \$162.5 million (inflation adjusted) to 1,069 organizations serving some aspect of K–12 education across the United States. In comparison, their top 15 counterparts awarded 2,600 grants totaling more than \$843 million (Reckhow and Snyder 2014).

### *Affiliation Network Analysis and GIS*

We use a combination of three analytic strategies to test our research questions: descriptive statistics, affiliation network analysis, and geographic information science (GIS). Unlike traditional network graphs, which depict direct connections between actors, an affiliation network graph depicts relations between qualitatively different sets of actors or events (Wasserman and Faust 1994). In the present case, we examine a set of foundations and their giving patterns to a set of recipient organizations. In doing so, we are able to explore the full duality of these sets of organizational actors (Breiger 1974; Mohr and Guerra-Pearson 2010). That is, affiliation graphs allow us to examine the degree of (dis)similarity between foundations by virtue of the types of organizations they cofund as we investigate the types of organizations that become affiliated through the funders they share in common.

We also use directed affiliation network graphs to assess the degree of convergence among our sample of foundations. Reckhow and Snyder (2014) used a similar approach to measure convergence in multiple ways. The authors began by identifying the percentage of awards that were convergent grants; that is, the total dollars given to organizations that received awards from two or more foundations (see also Reckhow 2010). Reckhow and Snyder then raised the threshold of convergence by analyzing affiliation graphs consisting of pairs of organizations that received grants from three or more of the same foundations with a minimum of \$2 million in total awards.

### *Nonmajor Philanthropic Giving in K–12 Education*

Our approach begins in a similar fashion by identifying the proportion of convergent grants among our sample of foundations. From here, though, we depart from the approach used by Reckhow and Snyder (2014) in a few important ways. First, we use two-mode affiliation graphs rather than the one-mode (i.e., organization-by-organization) graphs used in Reckhow and Snyder's study. Although appropriate to the authors' research questions, the one-mode approach removes an entire set of actors (the foundations) from the data space, which means the graph is not able to identify potential variations in giving patterns among the foundations sampled. Our approach, in contrast, models the full duality of foundations and recipient organizations. In doing so we are able to examine the exact foundations that are converging on specific recipient organizations and to identify unique factions of giving within the network. Second, given that, by definition, our sampled foundations awarded substantially less money than those in the top 15, we decided the \$2 million threshold would exclude meaningful patterns of convergence in our sample. Thus, we examine convergence from the more general definition used by Reckhow and Snyder (2014) instead.

Finally, we use principles of GIS and cartography in combination with our network analysis to map the geographic patterns of overall funding and convergent giving among our sampled foundations. In particular, we use a choropleth map to show the distribution of funds by state and a flow map to overlay our affiliation convergence graph over the geographic space of the United States. A choropleth map uses shading to highlight geographic areas in relation to a variable—in this case, total funds awarded at the state level. A flow map simply shows the direction of flow of some variable over geographic space. These visualizations illustrate the foundations that are donating and converging in national scales versus those whose efforts remain on state or local scales. By recognizing that networks occupy social and geographic space, we can better assess the implications of nonmajor philanthropic involvement in K–12 education policy.

## Results

### *Nonmajor Foundations and Advocacy*

As federal and state roles in education policy have expanded in the past 2 decades, major philanthropic foundations have also shifted their focus away from local advocacy organizations toward national organizations that engage in lobbying, research, and other forms of advocacy. In fact, 13.1% of the total dollars awarded by the top 15 foundations in 2010 were given to national advocacy organizations (Reckhow and Snyder 2014). However, at smaller scales,

a similar emphasis on national over local advocacy can be seen among the non-major foundations in the present sample. For instance, national advocacy and research organizations focused on K–12 education received 9.5% of the total dollars given by our sample of 15 challenger foundations in 2010. The top three funded national advocacy organizations were the Hudson Institute, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, and the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. The amounts for state and local advocacy organizations, on the other hand, were considerably lower, at 4.4% and 2.2%, respectively. Thus, although these nonmajor donors in education awarded a somewhat smaller proportion of their grants to national advocacy than did the top 15 foundations, both followed a similar general pattern favoring national over local advocacy.

Although it is clear that the 15 challenger foundations all emphasized national advocacy and research at state and local scales, it would be a mistake to assume that these 15 challenger foundations acted in unison. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the differentiated structure of advocacy giving at the scalar and organizational levels, respectively. It can be seen, for example, that Parsons focused exclusively on the national level of advocacy and research but that Keck and Benedum gave to state and regional organizations (see fig. 1). Others focused on two scales. For instance, Noyce and Druckenmiller gave to national and to state and regional organizations, Dow gave to state and regional and local organizations, and Hayden and Deutsche Bank gave to national and local organizations. The organizations positioned toward the center of the graph—Bradley, Ford Motor Company Fund, Altman, Kauffman, and Barr—spread their awards across all scales (though not necessarily in equal amounts).

Figure 2 illustrates that the organizational structure of these patterns is sparse and varied, with most foundations focusing on their own unique sets of advocacy organizations. Several foundations, it turns out, awarded few grants to advocacy organizations. Keck and Parsons each awarded grants to only one advocacy and research organization, and an additional six foundations awarded grants to between two and five of these organizations. The story is different for the remaining seven foundations, however. Barr gave at all scales but focused its awards on a mutually exclusive set of organizations. The Open Society, Ford Motor Company Fund, and Noyce and Altman Foundations followed a similar pattern, but they are linked to a larger structure via individual bridge organizations such as the Afterschool Alliance, Lulac National Educational Service Centers, and the Aspen Institute. Kauffman and Bradley emerged as unique in this graph for their convergent funding to five conservative think tanks, the National Council on Teacher Quality, and the RAND Corporation. This structural and substantive variation in giving suggests that, in terms of advocacy grants, some challenger foundations behaved more like incumbent, or major, foundations, and others used contrasting strategies to develop and promote their educational policy agendas.

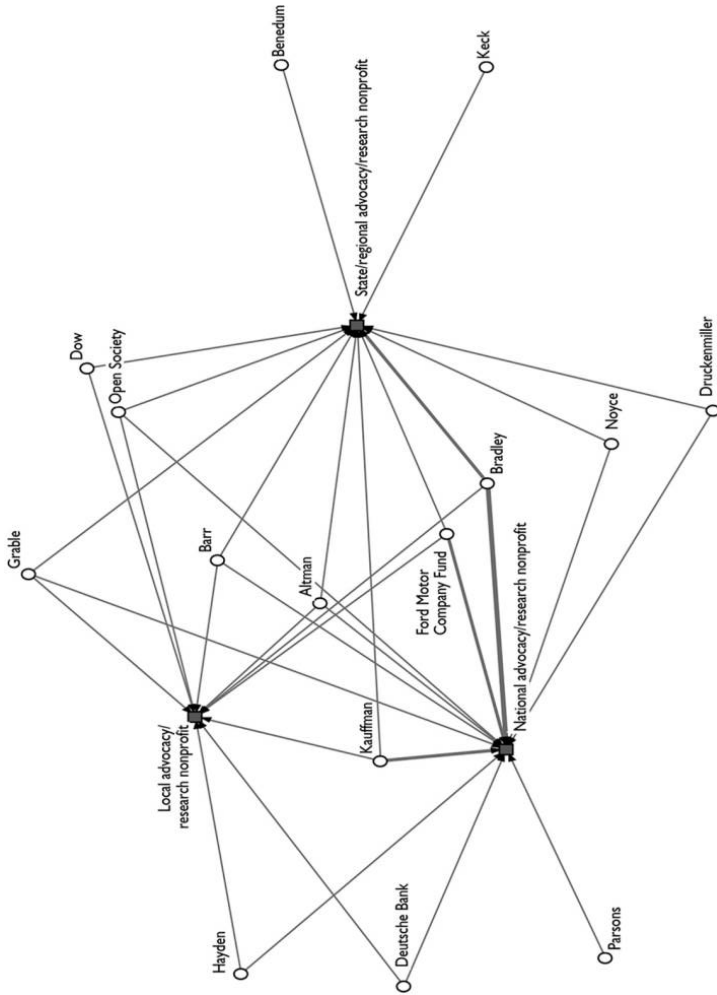


FIG. 1.—Directed affiliation graph of scalar funding patterns to nonprofit advocacy and research organizations. A thicker line represents a higher frequency of grant awards.



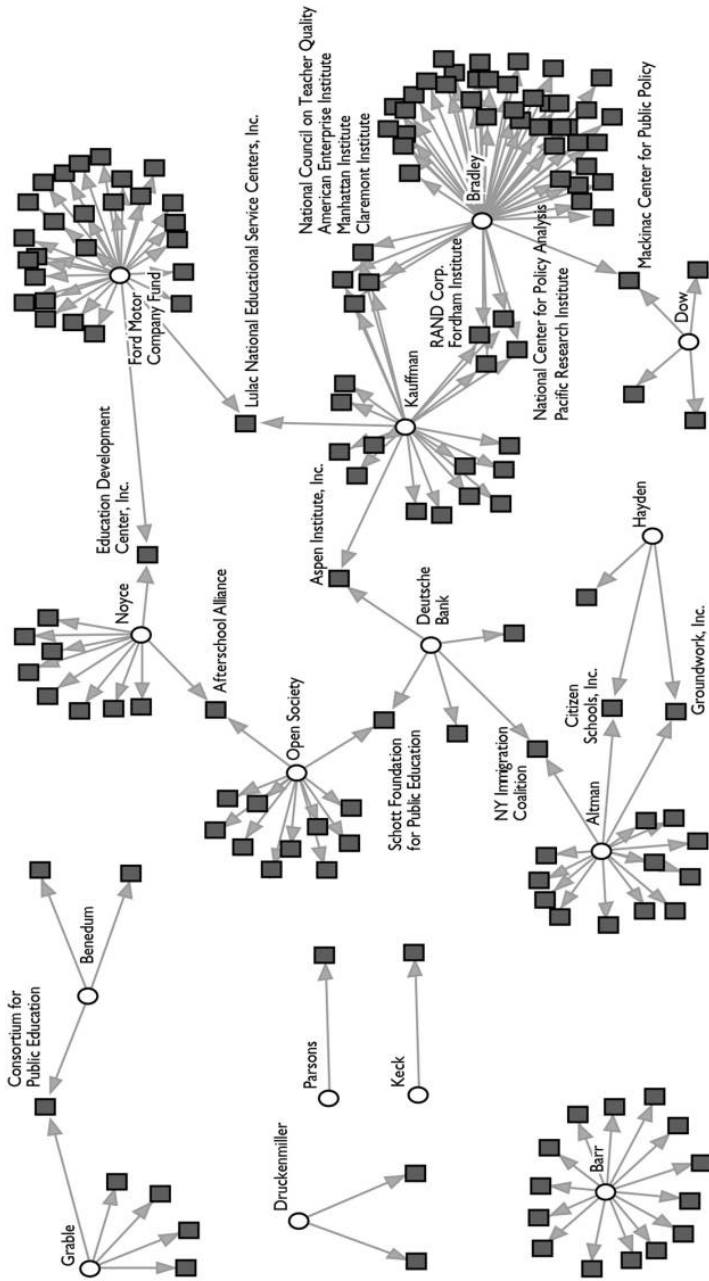


FIG. 2.—Directed affiliation graph of organizational funding patterns to nonprofit advocacy and research organizations. Only foundations and cofunded organizations are labeled.

*Traditional Actors versus Jurisdictional Challengers*

In addition to advocacy and research, the funding of jurisdictional challengers has become a dominant policy network strategy among incumbent foundations to facilitate market-oriented reforms (Mehta and Teles 2012; Reckhow and Snyder 2014). Table 2 provides mixed evidence for this strategy among the present sample of nonmajor foundations. Following Reckhow and Snyder (2014; see fig. 1), we consider public schools and districts, universities, and state departments of education as traditional institutions, and charter schools and networks, teacher training and recruitment, and venture capital firms as jurisdictional challengers. We also added school leadership training as a category under jurisdictional challengers.

As illustrated in table 2, charter schools and organizations (e.g., charter school networks) received 5.7% of the total foundation awards in 2010, which is more than twice the amount given to public schools (2.2%) and four times the amount given to universities (1.4%). Training and recruitment organizations for teachers (2.6%) and school leaders (2.3%) and venture capital organizations (3.0%) also received small but nontrivial portions of total grants. In fact, three of the top five funded organizations in the sample—Harlem Children Zone, Charter Growth Fund, and New Leaders for New Schools—are jurisdictional

TABLE 2

*Percentage of Total Grants and Funding Given to Traditional Institutions, Jurisdictional Challengers, and Top 5 Organization Types Overall (by Funding)*

	% of Grants	% of Funding
Traditional institutions:		
Public schools and orgs	5.1	2.2
Universities	.7	1.4
State departments of education	.5	.8
Jurisdictional challengers:		
Charter schools and orgs	4.4	5.7
Venture capital	.5	3.0
Teacher training and recruitment	1.0	2.6
Leadership training and recruitment	.6	2.3
Top 5 organization types (by funding):		
College access and scholarships	2.8	17.6
National advocacy and research	10.7	9.5
Arts education	12.2	8.8
Afterschool, tutoring, mentoring	9.5	8.2
Other student enrichment	11.3	7.2

SOURCE.—Authors' own data compiled from foundations' Forms 990.

challengers, with the other two being a private school (Spence School) and scholarship fund (Kauffman Scholars) that partners with Kaplan K12 Services and Tutor.com to provide academic support. Even though traditional education institutions received a meaningful percentage of foundation dollars from this sample, none of these institutions received as much as any category of or individual organization within the jurisdictional challengers.

Figure 3 illustrates that, yet again, important variations exist among our sample of challenger foundations. Starting at the left side of the graph, we can see that Druckenmiller and Noyce gave almost exclusively to jurisdictional challengers, with the exception being Noyce's awards to universities. In contrast, Dow and Deutsche Bank gave exclusively to traditional institutions falling under the categories of public schools and universities. Positioned in between are those foundations that spread their awards across jurisdictional challengers and traditional institutions, although as indicated by the line weights, some (e.g., Bradley and Hayden) clearly placed substantial emphasis on the former over the latter in the number of grants awarded. The most striking feature of the graph, though, is the positioning of public schools and charter schools. The central position—and close proximity—of these organizations stems from the fact that 11 of the 15 foundations gave to both types of organizations. That these ostensibly competing organizational forms hang together in the network suggests that, in terms of awards received from nonmajor foundations, they are quite similar. Yet, as we saw in table 2, the amount of money given to charter schools is more than twice that given to public schools. Thus, although our sample of foundations gave more total grants to public schools (79) than to charter schools (68), the average size of the grants to charter school and network grants was about three times that of the mean grant given to public schools and districts.

Examining the organizational structure of giving to jurisdictional challengers versus that of traditional institutions (see figs. 4 and 5) sheds additional light on how nonmajor foundations pursue their educational objectives. Figure 4 illustrates that many challenger foundations funded their own networks of jurisdictional challengers but became affiliated through the cofunding of prominent national organizations. For example, Bradley, Parsons, Kauffman, and Druckenmiller each gave grants to Teach For America but otherwise funded their own isolated (at least from the sample) set of jurisdictional challengers. Kauffman, Keck, and Hayden are similar in their affiliation in giving to KIPP. On the other hand, foundations such as Deutsche Bank, Noyce, and Ford Motor Company Fund are completely disconnected from any organizational affiliations. The graph of traditional institutions in figure 5 is quite different. Here we can see that nearly every foundation funds its own network of public schools and districts, with the exceptions of Benedum and Grable, which share the Allegheny Intermediate Unit in common, and Deutsche Bank and Altman, which cofunded Teachers College Columbia University.

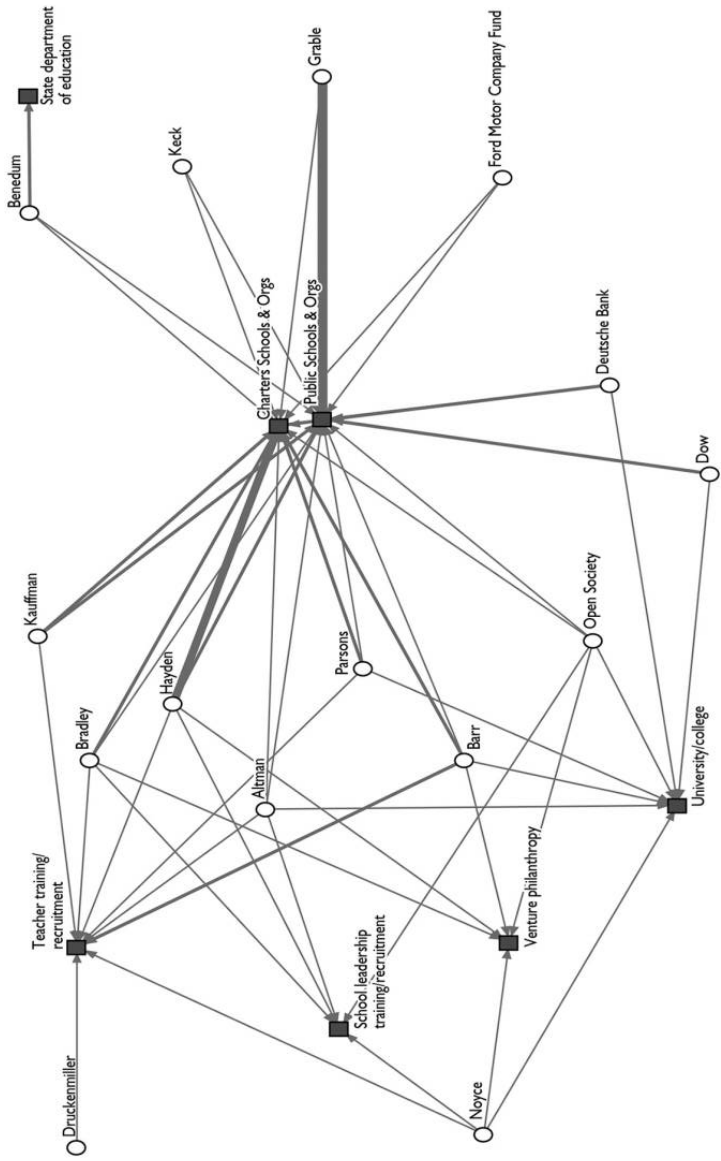


FIG. 3.—Directed affiliation graph of funding patterns to jurisdictional challengers and traditional institutions. A thicker line represents a higher frequency of grant awards.

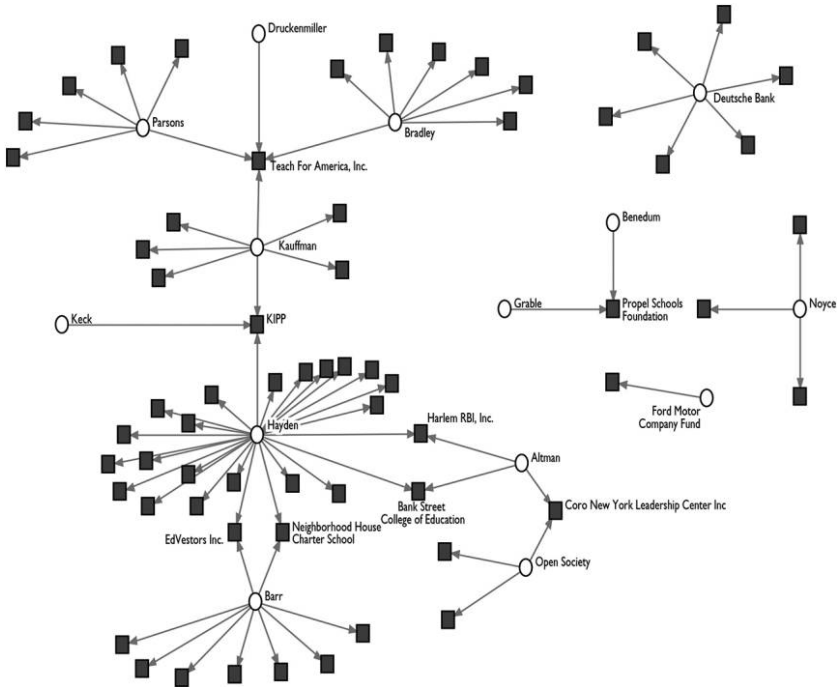


FIG. 4.—Directed affiliation graph of organizational funding patterns to jurisdictional challengers. Only foundations and cofunded organizations are labeled.

To this point we have seen some evidence that these nonmajor foundations are following the gravity of major foundations in the K–12 philanthropic field. They have a clear preference for funding national advocacy and jurisdictional challengers over local advocacy and traditional educational institutions. However, our sample of foundations did not act as a cohesive group in any of the contexts explored thus far. Rather, clear factions emerged in both of the organizational sectors we examined. In addition, as illustrated in table 2, many of the nonprofit organizational grantees in our sample could not be categorized as either traditional institutions (e.g., public schools) or jurisdictional challengers (e.g., charter schools). In fact, organizations offering college readiness services were awarded more of the total funding (17.6%) than any other type of organization in the sample. In addition, organizations offering arts education (8.8%), afterschool and tutoring programs (8.2%), and other forms of student enrichment (7.2%) received more funding than any of the traditional institutions and jurisdictional

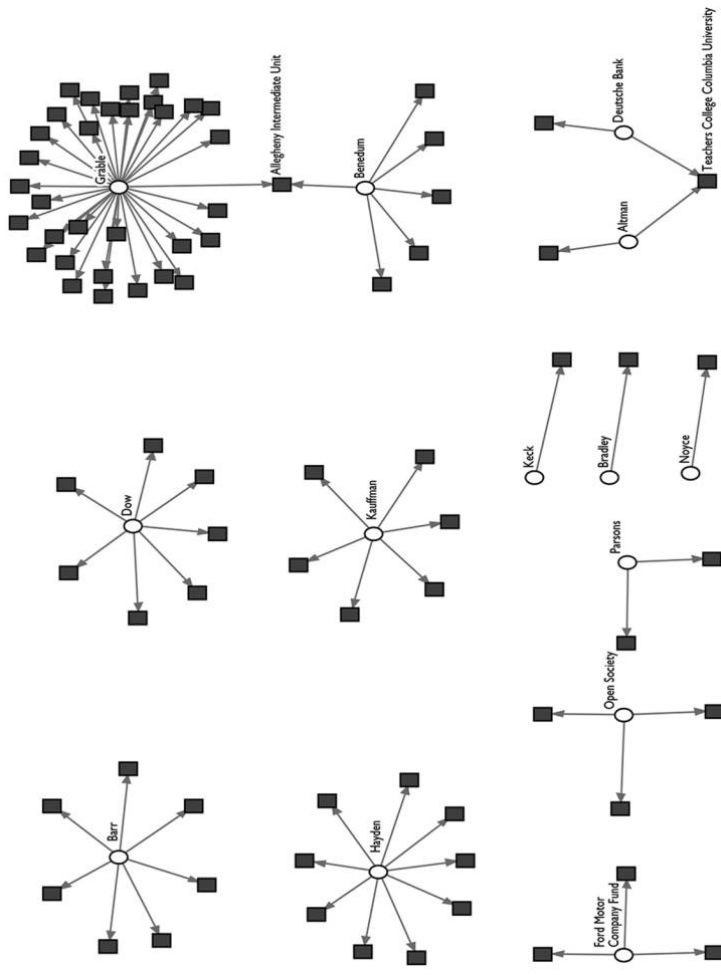


FIG. 5.—Directed affiliation graph of organizational funding patterns to traditional institutions. Only foundations and cofunded organizations are labeled.

challengers. Although these organizations are not directly challenging traditional governance structures in education, it is clear that they played a crucial role in the K–12 education objectives of these nonmajor foundations.

*Assessing Network Convergence*

Between 2000 and 2010 the giving patterns of incumbent foundations in the realm of education policy converged dramatically (Reckhow and Snyder 2014). Recall that convergent grants are those dollars given to organizations from two or more foundations. Overall, 24% of the funds awarded from our sample foundations were convergent grants. This is nowhere near the 64% found by Reckhow and Snyder (2014) in 2010. Instead, it is much closer to the percentages they found among the top 15 in 2000 (23%) and 2005 (35%). Nevertheless, the top 5 convergent organizations in our sample—Harlem Children’s Zone, College Summit, Teach For America, the BELL Foundation, and Hunts Point Alliance for Children—do reflect the preference for jurisdictional challengers and college readiness found among the top 15. In other words, some of the challenger foundations in our sample behaved like incumbents, but many did not.

Figure 6 illustrates the full duality of convergent giving and receiving among our sample of foundations and their recipient organizations. At first glance, the interpretation of this graph may seem overwhelming. However, a closer inspection reveals a structure with clearly differentiated clusters. Benedum and Grable, for instance, form a distinct pair that converged on a variety of organizations in arts education and advocacy. Keck and Parsons formed a similar pair that converged on organizations offering arts, advocacy, mentoring, and other enrichment services. Moving clockwise, we next see that Kauffman and Bradley made another unique pairing. As we anticipated, these two foundations converged primarily on conservative think tanks and research organizations. Finally, Altman and Hayden make up a fourth distinguishable pair that cofunded a mix of organizations that span the spectrum of organizational types. The Barr Foundation also shares a strong affiliation with Hayden through the cofunding of jurisdictional challengers and other student enrichment services.

Beyond the distinct pairs of foundations and their networks of organizations, a variety of organizations occupy central positions in the graph. Their central positioning indicates that these organizations received multiple grants from many of the same foundations. These are the organizations that met a higher threshold of convergence, often receiving grants from three or four foundations in the sample. As anticipated, these organizations include many prominent jurisdictional challengers such as KIPP and TFA, but they also include long-standing community organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and the

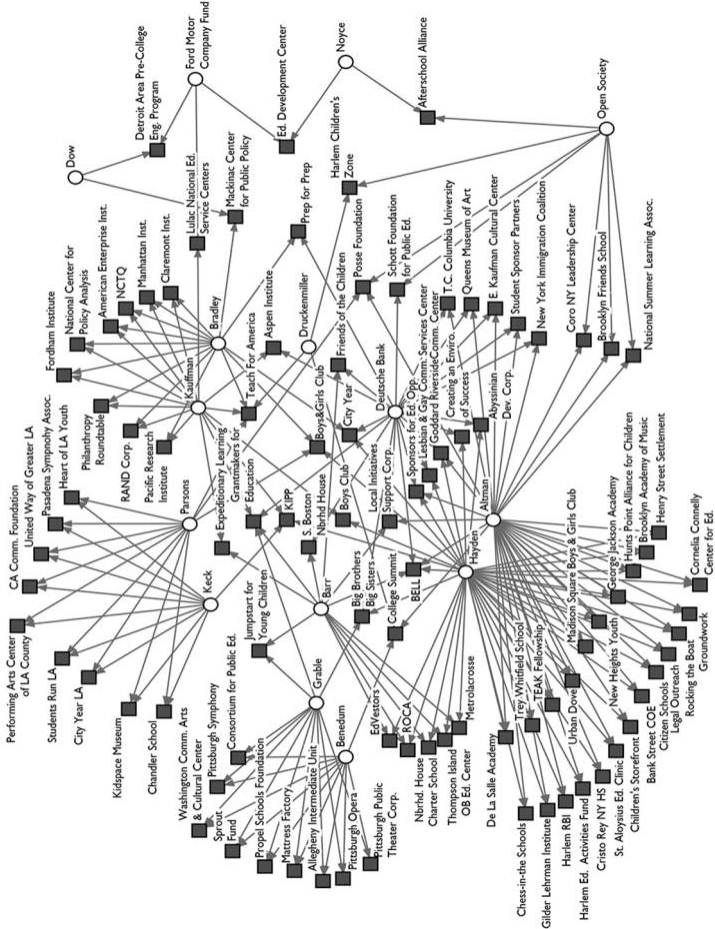


Fig. 6.—Directed affiliation graph of organizational convergence of grant awards



Boys and Girls Club. In addition, a number of newer organizations, such as the Posse Foundation, BELL Foundation, and City Year, support K–12 students and prepare them to enter college.

### *The Spatial Context of Nonmajor Foundation Funding*

In this final results section we situate our sampled foundations' gifts in a geographic context to gain a deeper understanding of overall patterns of giving and convergence. In total, 72.4% of funds were awarded to in-state organizations, and the remaining 27.6% were awarded out of state. The choropleth map in figure 7 represents the geographic distribution of the total funds given by our sampled foundations. Organizations in the darkest shaded states received the greatest amount of funding. Not surprisingly, the darkest shaded states (those receiving more than \$10 million)—California, Michigan, Missouri, New York, and Massachusetts—are those where 12 of the 15 foundations in our sample are headquartered. Although a number of funded organizations are located in states without a sample foundation's headquarters (e.g., Colorado, Iowa, and Virginia), there is a significant gap in grant funding between organizations in the darkest shaded states and those in the Mountain West states and many states in the South. This is not simply a feature of our sample, either. Of the 230 foundations from which we drew our sample, only 13 (5.7%) foundations are located in the 16 states (including Hawaii and Alaska, not shown) that received no funding from our sample.

The flow map in figure 8 allows us to examine the geographic dimension to the network convergence observed in figure 6. The thickness of lines running from the foundations' cities to the recipient organizations' cities corresponds to the number of recipient organizations in the latter city. The reflexive arcs represent awards given to organizations located in the same city as the granting foundation. To reduce clutter in the map, we did not differentiate the lines for different foundations located in the same cities. To capture the geographic differences of foundations in the same city, we point to the proportion of within- and between-city convergence for selected foundations.

A number of geographic patterns of convergence emerge from figure 8. Most notably, the vast majority (76.5%) of convergent funds were directed to organizations in New England, with most of this activity occurring in New York (66.6%). For instance, the close network proximity between Barr, Hayden, and Altman in figure 6 also corresponds to a distinct geographic proximity (of New York City and Boston) of convergence in figure 8. Similarly, the convergent funding of Benedum and Grable is almost entirely localized in Pittsburgh, where both of these foundations are headquartered.

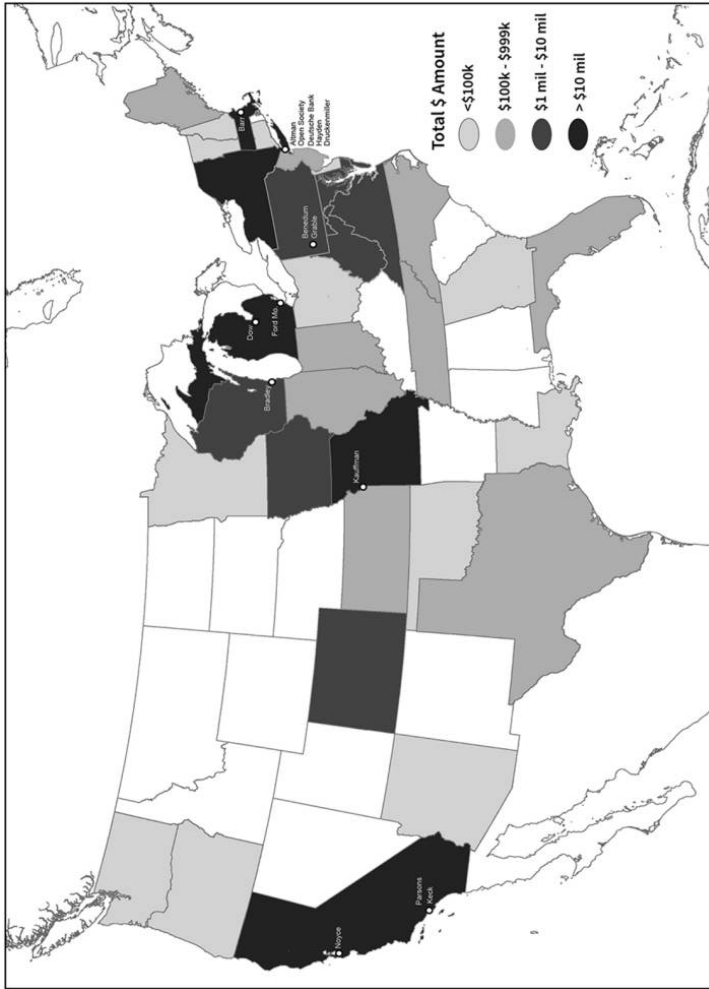


FIG. 7.—Choropleth map illustrating geographic distribution of awards across sample foundations

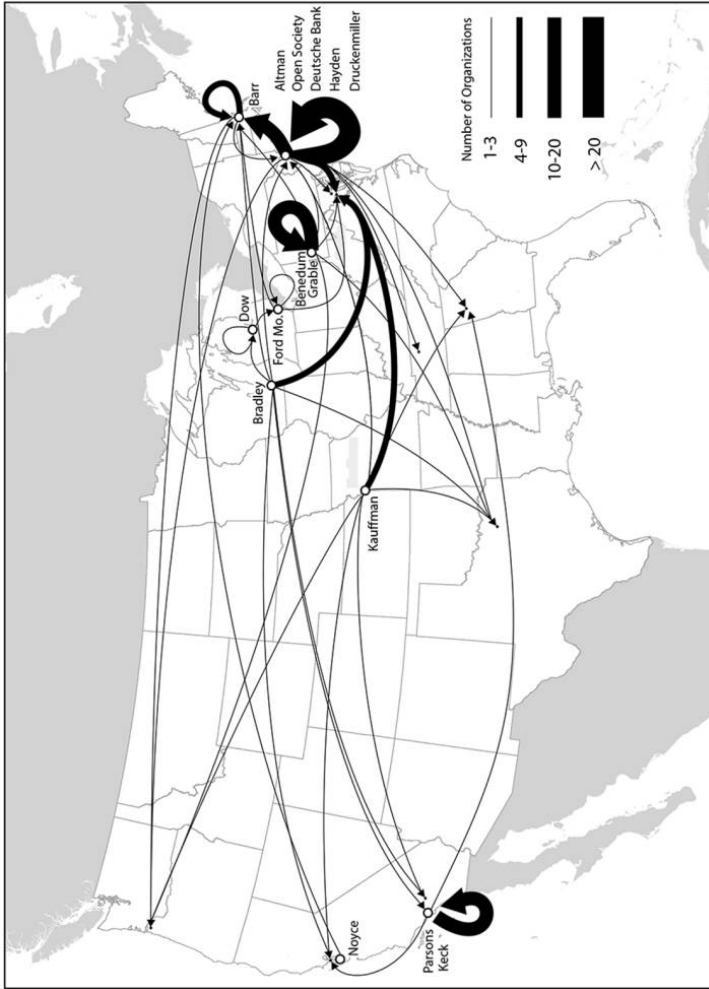


FIG. 8.—Flow map of organizational convergence in grant awards

### *Nonmajor Philanthropic Giving in K–12 Education*

Not all of the New England foundations adhered to a local pattern of convergence, however. Nearly half of Open Society's (43%) and Deutsche Bank's (45%) convergence was directed to organizations outside of New York City. On the other hand, not all of the tendency toward local convergence was confined to the East Coast. On the West Coast, more than 8 in 10 (82%) of Parsons's and Keck's organizational convergence was within the greater Los Angeles area. Similar to Benedum and Grable in Pittsburgh, these LA-based foundations primarily converged on local organizations offering arts and enrichment services.

The Midwest-based foundations—who occupy close positions in figure 6—follow an interstate pattern of convergence. Kauffman and Bradley best represent this pattern, with 100% of their convergent giving directed to out-of-state organizations. Their cofunding of national advocacy and research organizations explains the thick arcs running to Washington, DC, but they also converged with other foundations on a number of national jurisdictional challengers (e.g., TFA, KIPP). Ford Motor Company Fund and Dow also directed a majority of their convergent giving to organizations at nonlocal scales, albeit at substantially smaller frequencies than Kauffman and Bradley.

The vast majority of convergent funding thus appears to have been driven by the likelihood of having another foundation in close proximity. Bradley and Kauffman, for example, simply do not have a counterpart in Wisconsin or Missouri (respectively) with which to converge. This is true of our sample and of the broader field of foundations engaged in education funding. Of the original 230 foundations from which we selected our sample, only 3 foundations are in Wisconsin, and only 2 are in Missouri. In contrast, New York (37), California (33), and Pennsylvania (13) have substantially more foundations involved in these efforts. Yet, geography does not tell the whole story. The results above clearly demonstrate that Bradley's and Kauffman's national convergence is also driven by an ideological alignment and commitment to building a network of national advocacy organizations that promote market-based reform.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Our task has been to determine whether nonmajor foundations (i.e., challengers) tend to mimic the organizational giving patterns of elite foundations (i.e., major foundations, or incumbents) that focus their efforts in similar policy niches or whether they pursue alternative organizational strategies toward these ends. In short, we set out to test the new institutionalism model against an alternative field theoretical model. In particular, we hypothesized that our sample of nonmajor foundations would exhibit patterns of giving that diverged from their incumbent counterparts, but that they would do so heterogeneously. Whereas in some instances it is clear that our sample of challenger foundations did follow

major foundations (i.e., exhibit isomorphism), there is compelling evidence that most of the foundations pursued divergent and highly varied organizational strategies. In other words, a field theoretical model appears to be a better fit for the data. In the following, we situate our findings in the literature and discuss implications for education policy.

In the aggregate, our sample of nonmajor foundations did adhere to the incumbent preference of funding national over local advocacy organizations and jurisdictional challengers over traditional institutions. In addition, we observed a meaningful degree of organizational convergence for many of these advocacy groups (e.g., Aspen Institute) and jurisdictional challengers (e.g., TFA). In many other ways, however, the foundations in our sample gave against the grain of their elite counterparts. Most important, in 2010 these challenger foundations engaged in convergent giving much less frequently than those foundations in the top 15 (see Reckhow and Snyder 2014). This finding is consistent with previous research that found large foundations to be more likely than small foundations (in terms of asset size) to engage in collaborative activities such as cofunding arrangements (Ostrower 2004). Others have argued that foundations with national ambitions are more likely to engage in strategic (or venture philanthropic) forms of giving to directly shift the direction of education policy (Colvin 2005). In general, our findings are consistent with the latter claim.

Our sample of challenger foundations diverged in other important ways. For example, even though these foundations gave substantially more to charter schools and networks than to public schools and districts, they still gave only about a third as much to charters as did the top 15 foundations analyzed by Reckhow and Snyder (2014), proportionately speaking. Instead, it was college readiness organizations that were awarded on par (again, in proportion) with what the top 15 incumbent foundations gave to jurisdictional challengers. In addition, organizations that promote local arts and after-school programs were funded at greater amounts overall than were any single category of jurisdictional challenger. As previous research suggests, these foundations may be working to position themselves within specific educational niches where they expect to have the greatest impacts (Ferris et al. 2008). Regardless, future research should examine these college readiness and student enrichment organizations in more detail, and whether foundations have been changing their support for such organizations over time.

We can conclude that there are key similarities and differences in the organizational strategies between our sample of challenger foundations and their incumbent counterparts, but it is more accurate to say that some challenger foundations behave similarly to incumbents and that others act very differently. As anticipated by our field theoretical model, even when challenger foundations mimicked some of the organizational funding patterns of incumbents, they simultaneously funded organizations that represented strategies of reform dif-

ferent from theirs. That is, a clear pattern throughout the affiliation network analysis is that the aggregate results hide meaningful variation. The approach taken by Reckhow and Snyder (2014) does not allow us compare the subgroup structure and our affiliation networks among those foundations in the top 15. It is plausible, then, that the propensities of major foundations observed in the aggregate conceal meaningful variations. Future research should explore these potential variations in more detail and examine the extent to which factions of major and nonmajor foundations shift over time and place.

We also identified a geographic specificity in these factions through the GIS analysis. Some factions appeared to mimic one another within geographic proximity (e.g., Benedum and Grable), whereas others showed similarity across multiple state boundaries (e.g., Bradley and Kauffman). Thus, in many cases, geographic proximity appears to structure (or at least correspond to) similarities and differences in giving patterns, whereas social or ideological proximity appears to be the underlying process at work in other cases. These theoretical processes deserve greater attention in future research.

### *Implications*

Several practical implications follow from our analysis of nonmajor philanthropic giving in K–12 education. Our results suggest that there is (or at least was, in 2010) considerable space in the philanthropic field for those organizations looking to pursue policy objectives running counter to the market-driven policies that are the current dominant approach to education reform. Indeed, the foundations examined above demonstrate an extraordinary range of organizational variation in their patterns of giving. The importance of fostering diverse educational experiences across the arts, sciences, and humanities was evident among some factions of foundations, as was support for racial, religious, and other group-based equity. Many of these foundations also provided vital funds to a variety of support services and academic enrichment programs that would otherwise be absent in the current education policy climate in the United States. Thus, attempts to homogenize the work of foundations—at least at the time of this analysis—are highly problematic.

On the other hand, because the policy networks are constructed and sustained through philanthropic giving, they are also vulnerable to change. It is evident that policy networks are a preferred mode of governance for venture philanthropists, who demand measurable results backed by the threat of cutting off funds and moving on to the next venture. However, for those concerned about the lack of accountability for policy networks and their philanthropic financiers, the ephemeral order of these networks poses a meaningful challenge to democratic approaches to educational governance. Many of the organi-

zations we have discussed are largely dependent on foundation dollars to sustain their operating budgets. There is a great risk, then, of these services being cut if foundations decide to shift policy focus. This is true of jurisdictional challengers and many other nonprofit organizations whose operating budgets are not financed by tax revenue. Future studies should examine how shifting patterns of philanthropic giving impact the services of these financially dependent organizations.

From our geographic analysis, we also saw that money tended to flow and converge locally among our sampled foundations—and this occurred in a relatively limited number of cities and states. This can be welcome news for organizations positioned in New York or California, but it also means that cities and states without a substantial base of foundations will be unable to sustain organizations that rely heavily on foundation dollars. Rural states in the Mountain West and South, in particular, are at a major disadvantage in this regard. These states may not serve as many students as the urban Midwestern and coastal areas, but they nevertheless represent a meaningful portion of the US population and face a litany of educational challenges that directly impact rural and urban communities (Carr and Kefalas 2009; Ticken 2014). One might argue that major foundations are better equipped at filling this role, but at present we have no research to support this assertion. More extensive GIS work is needed to gain a deeper understanding of these geographic disparities in foundation awards to education.

The results of our analysis also add to the ongoing conversation concerning the role of private wealth in shaping public policy. It is no secret that private foundations allow wealthy individuals and corporations to shield substantial portions of their wealth from tax liability (Saltman 2010). This provides foundations with exclusive power to shape the direction of public education while simultaneously diminishing public control over these lost tax revenues. That is, the growing influence of philanthropic foundations—whether major or not—comes at the expense of public influence. We have no illusions about the effectiveness of our current democratic system of governance in shaping education, but in principle there are at least some institutional levers (e.g., judicial, electoral) that members of the public sphere can push to mobilize educational change. At present there is simply no such mechanism to challenge the public education policy ambitions of private foundations.

We do not mean to imply that philanthropic involvement in education policy is inherently problematic or antithetical to a thriving public education system. Many of the foundations in our sample exhibited a strong commitment to supporting traditional public schools and community organizations that offer rich curricula to some of the most disadvantaged students in the United States. Yet, much like their elite counterparts, others focused their funding efforts on private organizations working to fundamentally alter the very idea of public education.

Regardless of one's support for or opposition to this particular policy agenda, the key point here is that foundations and the organizations that seek their funding determine these matters privately. Therefore, although our results demonstrate that nonmajor foundations represent a wide range of visions for public education, many of these visions take form with very limited contributions from those most influenced by their gifts.

## Notes

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their detailed feedback and insightful suggestions.

1. We use the lexicon of Fligstein and McAdam (2012) because their work is the most complete and thorough treatment of organizational field theory.
2. The data supporting this assertion came from Benedum's 2010 Form 990 downloaded from the Foundation Center's 990 Finder, <http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/990finder/>.
3. The 2010 Top 50 Foundation Funding lists were the most recent publicly available lists from the Foundation Center, [http://foundationcenter.org/educationexcellence/top\\_lists.html](http://foundationcenter.org/educationexcellence/top_lists.html), as of access on June 15, 2014.
4. <http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/990finder/>, accessed on June 15, 2014.

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