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How does Teach For America Engage Its Alumni Politically? A Case Study in Detroit

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Abstract: We describe the alumni engagement efforts by Teach For America (TFA) in Detroit as a case study of the specific ways that the organization works to influence its alumni's involvement in educational politics and disposition towards particular types of educational reform. During the 2019-20 school year, TFA Detroit facilitated a series of "policy

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workshops” for its alumni, intended to inspire TFA corps members and alumni to engage in political and policy advocacy. Combining field notes and other artifacts from the policy workshops with a social network analysis of the featured participants and central organizations, we show that TFA Detroit drew upon its local, state, and national policy networks to construct workshops that in turn would politically mobilize alumni to support their networks’ preferred city and state policies and reforms.

Keywords: Teach For America; politics; policy networks; social network analysis; thematic analysis; case study

¿Cómo Teach For America involucra a sus ex alumnos políticamente? Un estudio de caso en Detroit

Resumen: Describimos los esfuerzos de participación de los egresados de Teach For America (TFA) en Detroit como un estudio de caso de los esfuerzos de la organización para influir en la participación de los egresados en la política educativa y la disposición hacia tipos particulares de reforma educativa. Durante el año escolar 2019-20, TFA Detroit facilitó una serie de “talleres de políticas” para sus exalumnos, con el objetivo de inspirar a los miembros y exalumnos del cuerpo de TFA a participar en la promoción de políticas. Combinando notas de campo y otros artefactos de los talleres de políticas con un análisis de redes sociales de los participantes destacados y las organizaciones centrales, mostramos que TFA Detroit usó sus redes de políticas para construir talleres para movilizar a los exalumnos para apoyar las políticas y reformas de la ciudad y el estado preferidas de la redes.

Palabras-clave: Teach For America; política; redes de políticas; análisis de redes sociales; Análisis temático; caso de estudio

Como o Teach For America envolve seus ex-alunos politicamente? Um estudo de caso em Detroit

Resumo: Descrevemos os esforços de engajamento de ex-alunos pela Teach For America (TFA) em Detroit como um estudo de caso dos esforços da organização para influenciar o envolvimento dos ex-alunos em políticas educacionais e disposição para determinados tipos de reforma educacional. Durante o ano letivo de 2019-20, a TFA Detroit facilitou uma série de “workshops de políticas” para seus ex-alunos, com o objetivo de inspirar os membros do corpo da TFA e ex-alunos a se envolverem na defesa de políticas. Combinando notas de campo e outros artefatos dos workshops de política com uma análise de rede social dos participantes em destaque e organizações centrais, mostramos que a TFA Detroit usou suas redes de política para construir workshops para mobilizar ex-alunos para apoiar as políticas e reformas preferenciais da cidade e do estado do redes.

Palavras-chave: Teach For America; política; redes de políticas; análise de rede social; análise temática; estudo de caso

Introduction

Much of the popular discourse and research on Teach For America (TFA) has focused on the organization’s impact on student outcomes (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2010, 2014). Yet, the immediate impact of its corps members as teachers is just one part of TFA’s vision for education reform. The impact that alumni of the program will have after teaching—as school and system leaders, politicians and policymakers, non-profit leaders, and corporate supporters of its educational reform agenda—has always been core to its work (Brewer, 2016). Accordingly, scholarship on TFA

has increasingly situated its behavior within policy networks that promote neoliberal and managerial reforms in the United States and globally (Kretchmar et al., 2014, 2016; La Londe et al., 2015; Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017; Trujillo et al., 2017) and examined how the organization mobilizes its alumni as policy entrepreneurs to promote its preferred reforms (Brewer et al., 2018; Jacobsen & Linkow, 2014; Scott et al., 2016). Yet, as Scott, Trujillo, and Rivera (2016) note, few studies have provided evidence of “the specific mechanisms and processes...through which TFA may influence its alumni’s civic and entrepreneurial engagement” and “the manner in which the organization may inculcate specific values and ideological orientations that dispose alumni toward particular types of educational reform, policy, or leadership” (p. 15).

In this article, we present such evidence through a case study of alumni engagement efforts by TFA Detroit. During the 2019-20 school year, TFA Detroit facilitated a series of “policy workshops” for its alumni. The organization’s stated goal for these workshops was to “inform and inspire our network of alumni, corps members, and partners, to engage in political and policy advocacy” (promotional materials, 1/29/20). Following Scott et al. (2016), we asked: “How are TFA Detroit’s policy workshops designed to support its goals as a neoliberal political and social organization?” Combining a thematic analysis of field notes and other artifacts from the policy workshops with a social network analysis of the featured speakers and central organizations, we show that TFA Detroit drew upon its local, state, and national policy networks to construct workshops that the organization hoped would, in turn, politically mobilize alumni in support of its networks’ preferred city and state policies and reforms.

Conceptual Framework

Scott, Trujillo, and Rivera (2016) propose a conceptual framework that understands “TFA as a neoliberal political and social organization” and not just an alternative teacher preparation program (p. 4). This framework is useful to highlight TFA’s influence at the intersection of ideology, identity, and social networks, and specifically how the organization infuses policy entrepreneurs into educational policymaking and shapes influential policy networks to promote neoliberal educational policies and managerial approaches to educational leadership.

We define neoliberalism, here, as a political rationality that elevates *market* logics and individual liberty in the marketplace over *political* liberty, equality, and substantive citizenship (Brown, 2006; Giroux, 2004; Harvey, 2005). As Keddie (2020) writes, neoliberalism in the American context reifies a belief “that Small Government, secured through deregulatory and austerity measures, union-busting, and the privatization of public institutions like the military, public schools and universities, healthcare, and prisons, grants individuals the ‘freedom’ to prosper” (p. 63). In education, neoliberal reforms dovetail with the conception of education as a commodity—a private and individual economic good (Brewer & Potterton, 2020)—and an expectation that schools address issues of poverty and inequality in lieu of other social and economic supports (Brewer & Myers, 2015; Kantor & Lowe, 2006).

TFA, its political and organizational allies, and many of its most prominent alumni actively support policies designed to marketize, privatize, and de-democratize educational systems (Scott et al., 2016), and have played a central role in facilitating these kinds of reforms (Buras, 2015, 2016). Further, despite rhetoric surrounding equality and racial equity (Vasquez Heilig et al., in press), TFA reinforces neoliberal dispositions through recruitment, training, pedagogical, and alumni practices. The organization positions their corps members and alumni as exemplars of individualistic “hard work” and promotes a “no excuses” logic that shifts the burdens of generational poverty and racial inequality onto teachers and students (Horn, 2011, 2016; Noguera & Wells, 2011; e.g., Mathews,

2009; Thenstrom & Thenstrom, 2003). Participation in TFA may lead corps members to recognize systemic inequality rather than personal failings as a driver of disadvantage (Mo & Conn, 2018), yet TFA and its leaders suggest that focusing on those inequalities lets teachers off the hook and distracts from the goal of improving student test scores (Anderson, 2020; Goldstein, 2014; e.g., Farr, 2010).

Part of TFA's theory of change relies on moving alumni of its program into policy and leadership positions, not only for the expansion of its own political clout but the expansion of their vision for educational reform. For TFA, the combination of corps members and alumni as policy entrepreneurs, specifically, represents the opportunity to reimagine education and educational policy away from what the organization sees as a failed educational system and towards a system that elevates meritocratic notions and policy prescriptions. In addition, as Scott et al. (2016) suggest, TFA engages in the cultivation of power networks of elite interests. Multiple studies employing social network analysis have confirmed that TFA benefits heavily from such networks as a source of ongoing philanthropic funding and political clout (Brewer et al., 2018; Kretchmar et al., 2014, 2016; Reckhow, 2013). These efforts allow TFA and its partner organizations and funders to frame policy issues in a way that promotes the expansion of their respective organizations and their preferred political and pedagogical dispositions. More formally, these policy and funding networks have facilitated the creation of training programs that offer pathways to positions of influence, such as NewLeaders, TFA's Principal Pipeline, TFA's Capitol Hill Fellows, and Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE).

TFA prepares its corps members for their lives as alumni from the beginning of their time with the organization. A significant part of TFA's appeal to its recruits is the social network it offers them and the way it increases access and reduces the costs for its alumni to move on to non-teaching careers (Labaree, 2010; Maier, 2012; Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2016). Corps members who are admitted into TFA travel to their assigned region for a week of Induction, and then travel to their assigned summer Institute site for a 5-week intensive Institute, consisting of 125 hours of content, pedagogy, classroom management training and 18 hours of student teaching (Brewer, 2014). In addition to daily training for the upcoming two years as a teacher, TFA begins conditioning corps members into the organization's theory of change, which is less focused on classroom teaching and more attentive to what a corps member might do as a TFA alumni. From the first days of Induction, TFA highlights the importance corps members' future work as alumni, in essence making it clear for incoming corps members that the primary focus of the organization is on leadership development, not teacher development. Indeed, TFA encourages corps members to plan to become principals through TFA's Principal Preparation Pipeline (Brewer, 2016; Brewer et al., 2016), to move into policy supporting positions through its Capitol Hill Fellows program (Teach For America, 2018), or run for elected office themselves by way of Leadership for Educational Equity (Leadership for Educational Equity, n.d.). Across each possible avenue of leadership—from school principal to school board leader, aid to a U.S. Senator, or becoming a Senator themselves at the state or federal level—alumni can leverage the credibility conferred by their teaching experience with TFA to enact change.

The growing list of TFA alumni who have risen into prominent educational policy roles over the past three decades illustrates not only the organization's success in moving corps members from their training into the classroom and then into political and organizational leadership positions, but the resulting alignment that those individuals have with TFA and their broader network's goals for education reform. To an immediate aim, alumni have helped secure TFA's position operating in different regions. For instance, John White (Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.) became the State Superintendent in Louisiana and Kira Orange Jones (J. Williams, 2016) likewise moved into leadership positions in New Orleans, putting both in a position to reinforce TFA contracts in the

state (Brewer et al., 2016), despite documented conflicts of interest (Esler, 2013; Schneider, 2013; J. Williams, 2012). Further, alumni promote the types of school and policy reforms supported by TFA, such as charter schools, increased standardized testing, merit pay for teachers, and the dismantling of teacher unions. Notable alumni turned reform leaders have included Michelle Rhee, who founded StudentsFirst and what is now NewLeaders, and served, notoriously, as a chancellor for the D.C. Public Schools; and Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, who founded the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) charter network. Burgeoning research has confirmed that TFA alumni who run for local offices employ a political platform more aligned with TFA's philosophy (Jacobsen & Linkow, 2014).

In line with this prior research, Scott et al.'s (2016) framework "illuminate[s] TFA's efforts to distinguish the organization and its corps members as educational policy innovators and experts on ameliorating inequality, often through market-based educational mechanisms...in the name of serving students more equitably" (pp. 17-18). The informal and formal ways in which TFA facilitates the expansion of alumni connections to the reform network, in Detroit or any other region, illustrate how the organization shapes influential elite policy networks. TFA alumni engagement with and incorporation into these networks channels them into political and organizational leadership positions, where they can enact reforms at the local, state, and national levels while employing managerial dispositions towards pedagogy, school organization, and funding. Considering that TFA's mission statement does not include reference to teachers or teaching, it is through these alumni policy networks that the organization realizes its stated mission of leadership. We draw on this lens to inform our analysis of TFA's political engagement with corps members and alumni in Detroit, connecting this conceptual understanding of TFA's motivations and approaches to political influence with Detroit's policy landscape and the history and current activities of TFA in the city. In what follows, our exploration of TFA Detroit's use of policy workshops serves as an artifact of the framework explicated by Scott et al. (2016), while providing a unique insight into how TFA operationalizes its network in the local context.

Context: Detroit and Teach For America

TFA Detroit's policy workshop series is part of the organization's broader strategic priority of mobilizing its corps members, alumni, and policy network to promote particular educational reforms in Detroit and Michigan. However, TFA Detroit's political and social influence today needs to be contextualized in Detroit's particular educational policy landscape and the history of TFA in the city. Detroit's school system has received national attention in light of Michigan-based Betsy DeVos's tenure as Secretary of Education within the Trump administration (e.g., Binelli, 2017; Gross, 2016), but the city's most recent developments include a variety of other influential actors with whom TFA Detroit has been associated (Kang, 2015; Lenhoff et al., 2019; Pedroni, 2011).

2000s: An Increasingly Marketized Landscape and TFA's False Start in Detroit

Leading into the 2000s, Michigan enacted a set of new educational policies that would be fundamental to what Kang (2015) has called the neoliberal "dismantling" of Detroit's school system. Detroit's population was increasingly high-poverty and racially segregated, as result of decades of White flight, deindustrialization, racial violence and residential containment, and political and legal resistance to desegregation (Baugh, 2011; Boyle, 2001, 2004; *Milliken v. Bradley*, 1974, 1977; Orr & Stoker, 1994; Steinmetz, 2009; Sugrue, 1996; Ticknor, 1978). In the wake of the city's "urban crisis" (Boyle, 2001; Sugrue, 1996), the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) struggled with budget deficits and low rates of academic achievement and attainment (Kang, 2015; Mirel, 1998, 1999, 2004). In the 1990s,

Republican Governor John Engler proposed a sweeping overhaul of Michigan's school finance and governance that included a per-pupil funding formula, a stronger state role in educational governance, and school choice mechanisms (Engler, 1993). In 1994, Michigan voters passed Proposition A, which established per-pupil funding on the basis of a state sales tax rather than local property taxes (Vergari, 1995); and state lawmakers passed one of the nation's earliest charter school laws (Goenner, 2011; Kang, 2015). In 1996, the state established policies giving local school boards the discretion to allow intra-district choice as well as to open their districts to inter-district choice (Pogodzinski et al., 2018). Engler also proposed mayoral control over Detroit's schools, and passed legislation that suspended DPS' elected school board for a five-year term starting in 2000. Detroit's mayor and a governor-appointed official appointed a "reform board," who hired a new school "CEO" to run the district (Kang, 2015, pp. 116-117).

Over the five years of mayoral control of DPS, the consequences of state educational finance and school choice reforms for Detroit became clear. At the turn of the century, about a third of the state's charter schools were located in Detroit, and DPS had slowly begun to lose students (Grover & van der Velde, 2016). Between the 2000-01 and 2005-06 school years, DPS enrollment fell by 20%—a loss of over 30,000 students (Detroit Public Schools, 2007). This decline far outpaced the rate of population loss in the city (Citizens Research Council of Michigan, 2016), reflecting the increasingly predatory role of charters (Green et al., 2019) and traditional public school districts in the metro Detroit area. Losing per-pupil funding along with its declining enrollment, DPS fell to a nearly \$200 million deficit (Kang, 2015). As a result, Detroit saw its first wave of DPS school closings, and a layoff of nearly half of DPS teachers (Kang, 2015).

It was during mayoral control that TFA brought corps members to Detroit for the first time. Yet, one year after placing 37 corps members for the 2002-03 school year, TFA ended its operations in Detroit (Huston, 2010; Resmovits, 2011). TFA Detroit's abrupt end was the result of a combination of organizational problems, political pressure, and a rapidly changing educational landscape. Teacher placement was a central issue (Berliant, 2010). At the time, TFA only placed its teachers in DPS (Resmovits, 2011), despite the fact that the district had no teacher shortages. To the contrary, the district was firing teachers as it closed schools and lost students (Kang, 2015). It is important to note that the pattern of displacing veteran and traditionally certified teachers in order to accommodate the hiring of TFA corps members is part of a larger, national pattern (Brewer et al., 2016). The Detroit Federation of Teachers, DPS's teacher's union, also strongly opposed the presence of TFA; and TFA seems to have struggled to maintain its relationship with Marygrove College, and later Wayne State University, with whom it had partnered to provide its teachers with alternative teaching certifications (Berliant, 2010; Resmovits, 2011). While this first attempt to establish a presence in Detroit failed, TFA would return to the city at the start of the next decade, under more favorable circumstances for the organization.

2010s: Neoliberal Policy Agendas and TFA's Return to Detroit

After mayoral control ended, DPS's financial debt continued to grow, setting the stage for more state intervention and a host of neoliberal reforms. Indeed, President Obama's former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan would describe Detroit in the 2010s as "ground zero for education in this country" (Murray, 2011). Between 2005 and 2008, the district's deficit had grown to \$400 million, and Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm responded by declaring DPS in a state of financial emergency. In 2009, Governor Granholm used the state's "emergency manager" law (Hakala, 2016) to appoint Robert Bobb, a graduate of the educational reform-oriented Broad Foundation's leadership academy and career supporter of charter schools and privatization, as DPS's emergency financial manager (Jehlen, 2012; Pedroni, 2011). Bobb turned to marketing strategies to boost enrollment; and, overstepping his mandate as a financial manager, used his authority to sign

contracts with educational management organizations to run some of the district's lowest-performing schools and enact a host of other academic reforms (Kang, 2015).

At the same time in Detroit, a group of policy elites spanning education (including Bobb), government, and business lent their support to Excellent Schools Detroit, a new educational reform organization established by a coalition of regional philanthropies. With the release of their report *Taking Ownership*, Excellent Schools Detroit (2010) laid out an agenda for neoliberal and managerial urban education reform: creating a “report card” to hold schools “accountable” and help parents “become ‘smarter shoppers’”, moving to mayoral control and a “portfolio” model of school governance, closing “failing” schools or replacing them through school turn around initiatives—including a “Detroit Reform School District to manage the city’s lowest-performing schools”—and establishing alternative teacher programs such as TFA (pp. 9-12; see also Pedroni, 2011).

Importantly, these developments unfolded in the wake of Detroit’s continuing economic distress and austerity urbanism (Desan, 2014; Peck & Whiteside, 2016). Detroit was already “in serious fiscal trouble prior to the [2008] financial crisis” (McDonald, 2014, p. 3315). Its population and income levels continued to decline, translating to declining tax revenues; and austerity measures at the state and federal levels meant less financial support for the city. Black Detroiters, in particular, disproportionately held subprime and high-cost home loans (Sugrue, 2014), and residents suffered from a spike in mortgage and tax foreclosures (Akers & Seymour, 2018). The city government proposed “downsizing” the city by moving residents out of low-density areas, to decrease the cost of providing municipal services and free up land for new capital investment (Clement & Kanai, 2015; Pedroni, 2011). At the same time, Bobb proposed closing nearly half of DPS’s remaining schools—after more than 100 DPS schools had already closed since 2004 (Bobb, 2010; Kang, 2015). All of these developments reflected an increasing alignment of neoliberal urbanism and educational policy in Detroit, and were fueled in part by a more active philanthropic sector seeking to influence urban planning and educational policy in the city (Pedroni, 2011; Reckhow et al., 2020; Thomson, 2019).

These were the circumstances in which TFA returned to Detroit. While few of Excellent Schools Detroit’s policy recommendations were taken up, the reestablishment of TFA in Detroit represented one of its successes (Lenhoff et al., 2019). TFA Detroit was primarily funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the Skillman Foundation—a Detroit-based foundation at the center of the Excellent Schools Detroit coalition—along with a \$1 million grant from the Broad Foundation (Walsh, 2010). In addition to its financial and political support from the Excellent Schools Detroit coalition, the organization was returning under more favorable circumstances than during its first attempt. An increasing number of Detroit students were enrolling in charter schools (Grover & van der Velde, 2016), and TFA has both supported and benefitted from a growing charter school sector across the country (Waldman, 2019). The large majority of TFA Detroit corps members in the inaugural 2010-11 cohort were placed in charters (Schultz, 2010). Further, the Detroit Federation of Teachers—a source of opposition to the organization in 2002 (Resmovits, 2011)—was weakened by the powers of the DPS emergency manager, which were bolstered by Republican Governor Rick Snyder near the beginning of his first term in 2011 (Bowman, 2013; Hakala, 2016; Landon, 2011). This time around, TFA substantially increased its footprint, placing almost three times as many corps members in its 2010 cohort than it did in 2002, with plans to increase to over 200 new corps members per year (Resmovits, 2011). In addition to placements in charter schools and DPS under emergency management, the formation of the state-run Education Achievement Authority and takeover of fifteen Detroit schools (Guyette, 2014) provided TFA Detroit with an avenue for growing its corps, and increasing its revenue via teacher placement fees (Brewer et al., 2016). In the state-run district’s first school year, 27% of its teachers were TFA corps members (Mason & Reckhow, 2017).

Recent Developments in Detroit's Educational Landscape

Detroit's educational politics began to shift in response to the increasing neoliberalization of its educational landscape. Central to its changing politics was growing resistance to state takeover and the suspension of democratically-elected Detroit governing bodies (Bosman & Davey, 2016). By 2014, Detroit was under state control through three different channels. In addition to the Education Achievement Authority, an emergency financial manager for the city was nearing the end of his term as Detroit dealt with bankruptcy (Davey, 2013); and, DPS remained under emergency management despite its falling enrollment, worsening financial situation, and persistently low test scores under the state's control (Allen Law Group, 2019). Resistance to the state-run Education Achievement Authority was bolstered by teachers, journalists, researchers, and activists who began to vividly describe poor educational conditions and expose a host of issues, including the state-run district's contract with a for-profit educational software company and declines in test scores, student enrollment, and teacher retention (Guyette, 2014; Kang, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2015; Mason & Arsen, 2014). These anti-emergency management sentiments only grew as evidence of dangerous amounts of lead in Flint, Michigan's water supply—the result of a decision by a state-appointed emergency financial manager who previously oversaw DPS—garnered statewide and national attention (Kennedy, 2016).

During this period, the Skillman Foundation and other supporters of the Excellent Schools Detroit coalition worked to assemble the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS). In the context of the rising opposition to state takeover and emergency management, CFDS released a set of policy proposals that were formulated from a “better us than them” perspective (Lenhoff et al., 2019, p. 11), such as restoring DPS's elected board, having the state assume responsibility for DPS's debt, and taking steps to return Education Achievement Authority schools back to DPS (Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, n.d.). These recommendations represented a “triage” phase for Detroit schools that would be followed by a “transition” to a mayoral portfolio management model and city-wide systems for data, enrollment management, teacher recruitment and leadership development, and school transportation—reflecting the governance vision of the original Excellent Schools Detroit coalition. Finally, with those conditions in place, a “transformation” of the schools would follow (Lenhoff et al., 2019).

The announcement in 2016 that DPS would be bankrupt by the end of the 2015-16 school year (Golshan, 2016) served as a catalyst for a set of abrupt policy changes. As lawmakers weighed legislative interventions, CFDS's vision for Detroit school governance became a central point of contention. CFDS lobbied for a bill that included not only a financial solution for DPS, but also a governance framework for mayoral control—the Detroit Education Commission. The state senate included the Detroit Education Commission in its legislative package, and the DeVos family and other politically-aligned groups who opposed the Detroit Education Commission lobbied against the state senate bill (Mauger, n.d.). Ultimately, lawmakers passed the state house's version of the bill, which did not include the Detroit Education Commission. The legislation provided \$617 million in funding and separated DPS into two entities: an “old” DPS to pay off the district's debt and the “new” Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) to run Detroit's public schools (Gray, 2016). DPSCD would be run by an elected school board (Zaniewski, 2017) and the Education Achievement Authority would close and return its schools to DPSCD (Higgins, 2017), but mayoral control would not come to fruition (Levin, 2018).

TFA and Detroit Today

In 2018, TFA hired Armen Hrachian, a former leader of Excellent Schools Detroit, as the new executive director of TFA Detroit (Clifford, 2018). TFA Detroit has increased its focus on

alumni, including multiple teacher and school leader fellowships for alumni (field notes, 12/18/19), as well as the policy workshops examined in this study. TFA Detroit also established its own summer training Institute in the city, and turned to alumni in the area to manage the program (Harris, 2019). While its focus on the nearly 800 alumni in the metro Detroit area (Teach For America, n.d.) has grown, TFA Detroit has significantly decreased its number of active corps members. In the 2019-20 school year, Detroit saw only 33 new TFA teachers (Harris, 2019), more closely resembling the size of its corps during its first entry to Detroit than the large number of corps members that it placed throughout the city in the early 2010s.

Especially as Detroit has seen signs of new economic development (Burton et al., 2020; Detroit Future City, 2019) and a slowing rate of population decline (Aguilar, 2020), political, business, and educational leaders in the city have emphasized the importance of school quality for Detroit's economic future (Higgins, 2018; Thibodeau, 2016). Towards their view of educational quality, many educational policy actors remain committed to portfolio management-style governance reform in order to centralize A-F school ratings, enrollment and data systems, and decisions about school openings and closings (Lenhoff et al., 2019; Levin, 2018). Reformers are also concerned about Michigan's looming teacher shortage, which is a considerable problem in Detroit (Higgins, 2019; Teach 313, n.d.); and want to create pipelines for educational leadership (Detroit Children's Fund, n.d.). Finally, in light of a lack of outside funding support from national philanthropies (Einhorn, 2016), many are concerned with insufficient state funding, especially for charters (e.g., Launch Michigan, n.d.; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2020). With this constellation of political dynamics and policy goals emerging, TFA Detroit launched its policy workshop series to engage alumni politically.

Data and Methodology

The authors, here, are themselves former TFA corps members. One (Jeremy) taught in the Detroit Public Schools from 2014-15 (when he was a corps member) through 2017-18 and is now a graduate student in Detroit. As an alumnus, he was invited to attend TFA Detroit's workshops as an audience member, where he acted as a participant observer (Spradley, 1980). The other (Jameson) is a traditionally-certified educator who taught in the Atlanta Public Schools as a corps member from 2010-12, and is now a professor who has done research and written about TFA. Together, the authors conceptualized this descriptive case study as an opportunity to examine the particular strategies that TFA used to engage its alumni politically and mobilize them in support of goals shared by members of its policy network. While we conceived of the study as an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995), in that we were interested in the specifics of TFA's alumni engagement efforts in Detroit, we also believe our findings are suggestive of the general approach that TFA uses in its alumni engagement to position itself to influence educational reforms.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected over the course of five events: one alumni convening hosted by TFA Detroit in December 2019, where the policy workshops were announced; the three policy workshop sessions; and one meeting of alumni after the workshop sessions in a working group meant to discuss further political action (Table 1). TFA alumni and active corps members in the metropolitan Detroit area received direct invitations, and the events were later advertised through the organization's social media channels. Other planned events, such as a capstone to the policy workshops and other alumni working group meetings, were cancelled in response to COVID-19.

Table 1 provides an overview of the data sources. As a participant observer, Jeremy took extensive, transcription-style field notes. He recorded all comments and questions from the

presentations and discussions among panelists and between panelists and the audience, and catalogued lists of the featured presenters, panelists, and supporting organizations. He also kept copies of handouts shared physically, which included documents outlining TFA Detroit's strategic direction and promotional materials for the policy workshop series and other alumni engagement efforts; and documents and presentations shared virtually, including biographies of the featured panelists and presenters, and PowerPoint presentations that were used at the workshops. Finally, he catalogued surveys that were sent out by TFA Detroit related to its alumni engagement work, including formative and summative assessments of the workshop series by alumni who attended.

Table 1*Overview of Data Sources*

	Field Notes	Promotional Materials (<i>e.g., invitation emails, event descriptions</i>)	Workshop Materials (<i>e.g., participant bios, presentations, readings</i>)	Surveys sent to TFA Alumni
Alumni Event	✓	1	-	-
Pre-Workshop Communications	-	1	-	-
Workshop 1	✓	2	3	1
Workshop 2	✓	1	3	-
Workshop 3	✓	1	3	-
Capstone Event*	✓	2	1	-
Alumni Working Group	✓	1	-	1
Post-Workshop Communications	-	-	-	1

*While the capstone event was cancelled, the author took detailed notes from a conversation with a planned featured participant on the plans and goals for the event. The participant also shared a document outlining the event schedule, and the authors documented promotional communication about the event before its cancellation.

Data Analysis

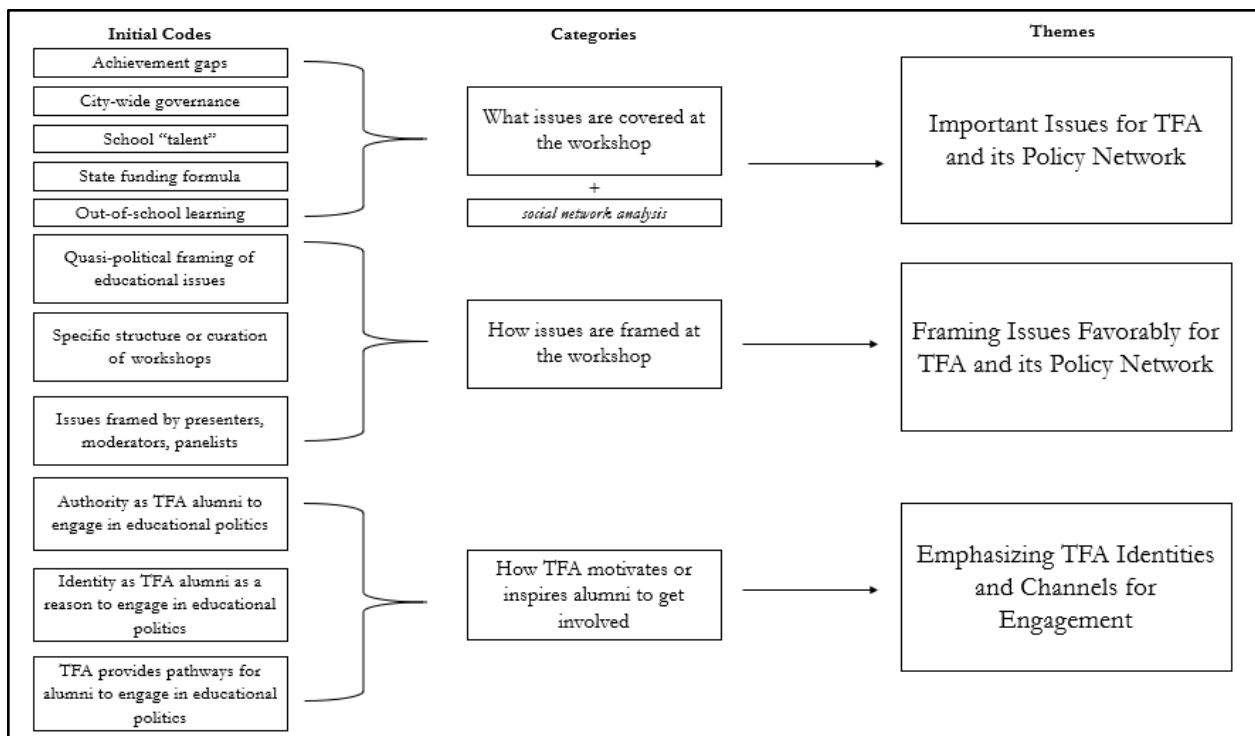
Our analysis proceeded in two phases. First, we conducted a social network analysis (Borgatti, 2002; Borgatti et al., 2013) to examine how the organization drew on members of its policy network to influence and engage alumni. All featured participants at the workshops—which we defined as organizers, presenters, moderators, and panelists—were included in the social network analysis. We used the biographies of these individuals provided by TFA Detroit and conducted additional internet searches to identify organizations with which they are or have been affiliated, and then mapped relationships between them. After mapping the relationships between the individuals and their affiliated organizations, we adjusted the size of nodes to demonstrate their centrality (based

on their eigenvector measure; see Appendix A). We then identified four Detroit- and Michigan-based political campaigns and coalitions related to the issues discussed at the policy workshops, and mapped participatory and coalitional relationships between those campaigns and coalitions and the key individuals and organizations featured in the policy workshops.

Second, we analyzed the field notes and additional data sources thematically (Nowell et al., 2017), to highlight how TFA Detroit organized and framed the event, selected and framed the policy topics, and depicted TFA corps member and alumni opportunities for political engagement. Figure 1 shows the code tree for our thematic analysis. Following Nowell et al. (2017), we started by reading and initially coding the field notes and accompanying documents, and engaging in a series of peer debriefing sessions and returning to the research literature on TFA in order to clarify our initial reading. While the field notes provided the foundation of our data for analysis, we sought to triangulate emerging themes by looking for corresponding evidence in the promotional materials, workshop materials, and surveys, and even in relation to the patterns of the social network analysis. We sorted our initial codes into categories, and from those categories, we distilled three themes. Finally, we deductively re-coded the field notes and accompanying documents based on those themes, to capture additional data.

Figure 1

Code Tree for Thematic Analysis



Limitations

The study is limited in that it does not confirm whether the efforts detailed here translated into actual changes in disposition or beliefs on the part of alumni, nor does it identify new political behaviors or forms of involvement in educational politics by alumni as a result of the workshops. It is further limited in that it does not include interview data directly from the organizers of the workshop, featured participants, or attendees to understand their explicit goals and motivations.

Likewise, it does not connect this workshop with other alumni engagement initiatives in Detroit or with similar events by TFA in other places. Still, by carefully documenting the proceedings of TFA Detroit's policy workshop series, the study contributes new evidence of the mechanisms through which TFA aims to influence the political actions or beliefs of its alumni.

Findings

One of TFA Detroit's stated strategic priorities is to "connect and organize TFA's full network of leaders to...create the necessary city and state level conditions so that extraordinary learning can scale to all Detroit and Michigan children" (promotional materials, 12/18/19). Its policy workshop series was intended to support that effort. In written materials distributed to alumni, TFA Detroit explained that the workshops would provide "the TFA network [in Detroit and Michigan] with the foundational knowledge needed to effectively engage in local and state systems-level policy" (promotional materials, 12/18/19). Before each event, TFA Detroit sent registered attendees Detroit- or Michigan-specific background readings. Hosted in the Skillman Foundation's offices, each event featured an hour-long presentation on the topic of the evening, followed by a panel discussion featuring three representatives from educational organizations and a moderator to ask questions.

The proceedings of the policy workshop series, and the relationships between the individuals and organizations involved, offer evidence of the way TFA seeks to influence its alumni's disposition towards and engagement in support of particular reforms and policies. The decisions that TFA Detroit made about how to design the workshop, including what topics to cover and who to invite as featured participants, as well as the workshop organizers' efforts to manage the event and evaluate its success, provide a window into how TFA uses alumni engagement to support its goals as a neoliberal political and social organization (Scott et al., 2016).

We identified three salient themes in the design and execution of TFA Detroit's policy workshops. First, the workshops focused explicitly on educational issues at the center of ongoing political efforts by TFA Detroit and key members of its local and state policy network—in particular, the Skillman Foundation. Second, the policy workshop issues were framed and curated in ways that aligned with TFA and its policy network's outlook on educational policy, and it embraced a quasi-political perspective that reinforced particular views on education reform. Third, TFA emphasized to audience members throughout the policy workshops that their identities as TFA alumni should be the salient identities around which they organize for educational equity, and that TFA and its policy network offered the most effective avenue for influencing change. In combination, these themes show how TFA Detroit explicitly designed the workshop to support the educational reform agenda of its city and state policy network.

Important Issues for TFA and its Policy Network

TFA planned its workshops around issues that the Skillman Foundation and other members of its city and state policy networks are actively promoting through political coalitions and campaigns. The themes of the three workshops were: (1) Governance, Accountability & Performance; (2) Education Funding and Talent; and (3) Beyond the Classroom Walls. An objective of the policy workshops, according to TFA Detroit's post-workshop feedback survey, was to give alumni a "basic understanding" of these three topics (survey, 2/13/20).

The issues covered in these workshops are the central concerns of political coalitions and campaigns that TFA Detroit and the Skillman Foundation, as well as individuals and organizations featured in the policy workshop series, focus on currently. The CFDS, co-chaired by Skillman Foundation president Tonya Allen, had an intensive focus on governance reform (Lenhoff et al.,

2019). Launch Michigan, also co-chaired by Allen and with TFA Detroit as a supporting member, is pushing for an adjustment to state funding. Teach 313, a campaign to recruit teachers to Detroit public and charter schools, is co-funded by the Skillman Foundation and its offshoot, the Detroit Children’s Fund, which also funds TFA Detroit as part of its focus on “a high-quality pipeline of teachers and leaders in Detroit” (Detroit Children’s Fund, n.d.). Finally, the beyond-the-classroom-walls session was largely focused on out-of-school learning and enrichment opportunities. The session included explicit connections to the “Wayne County Wins!” campaign to approve a new county tax to fund afterschool and summer programs, co-led by the Skillman Foundation (Welch, 2019).

The social network analysis of featured participants points to the centrality of TFA Detroit and the Skillman Foundation. Figure 2 shows the organizational and funding affiliations between featured individual participants and their organizations. Table 2 lists and describes the affiliated organizations of the featured participants in the workshop series, as well as relevant policy coalitions and political campaigns described above. Many of the participants’ affiliated organizations have received financial support from the Skillman Foundation as part of its investment in these issues, including the Midnight Golf program, the Brightmoor Alliance, the Hope Starts Here Early Childhood Partnership, the Detroit Parent Network, the New Teacher Project, the Education Trust - Midwest, and City Year Detroit, in addition to TFA Detroit. Not only are many participants directly connected to TFA Detroit as alumni or staff, or to the Skillman Foundation through funding relationships, but also several of the affiliated organizations are linked to the national educational reform network in which TFA has played a prominent role—namely the Education Trust, the New Teacher Project, and the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP).

Figure 2

Social Network Analysis of TFA Detroit Policy Workshop Featured Participants

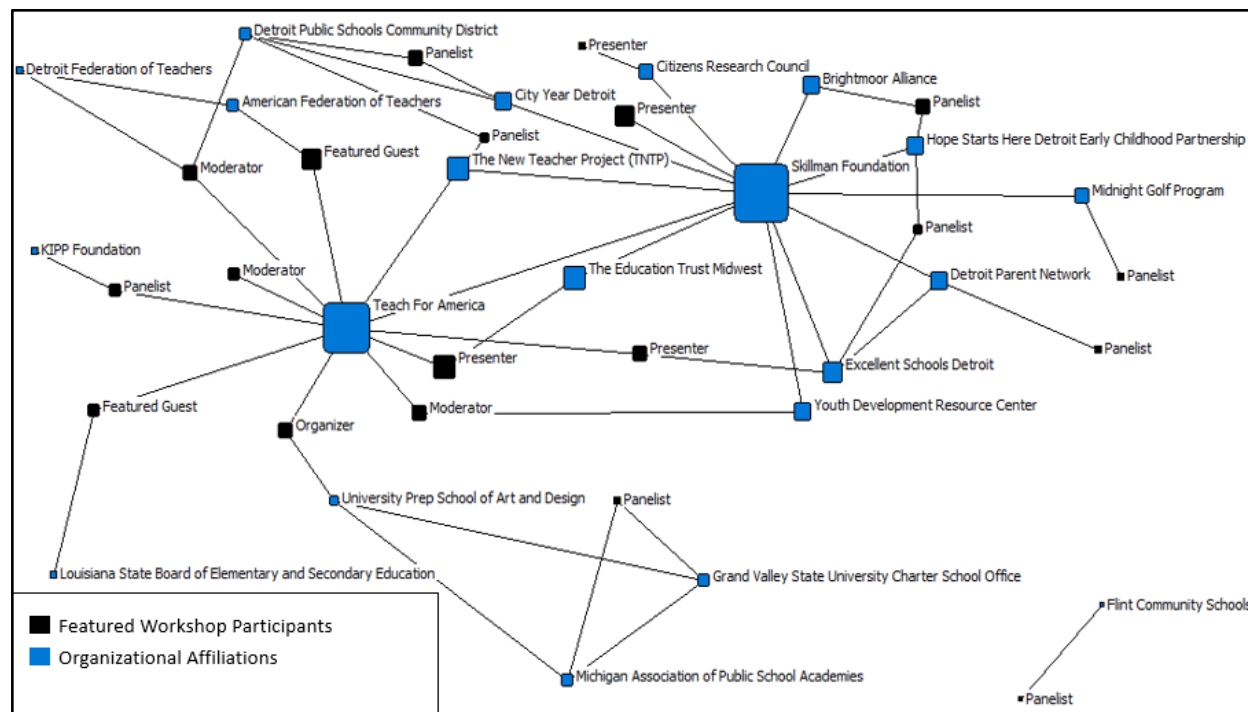


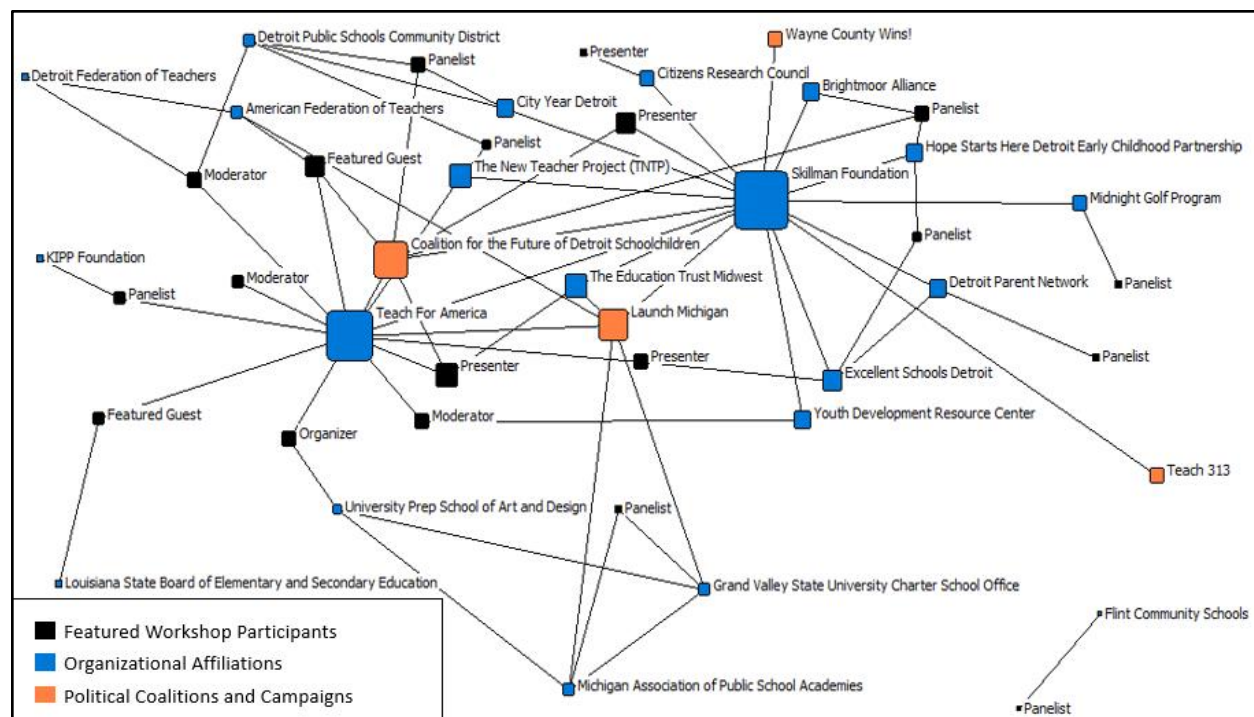
Table 2*Organizations and Political Coalitions and Campaigns Affiliated with Featured Participants*

Organizations	Description
Teach For America (TFA) Detroit	TFA's regional team in Detroit.
Skillman Foundation	Regional philanthropy at the center of educational reform initiatives in Detroit.
Excellent Schools Detroit	Intermediary organization formed in 2010 that produced annual school scorecards and other briefs to influence educational reform in Detroit; supported by Skillman Foundation and other regional philanthropies, ceased operations in 2017.
Detroit Parent Network	Network of families that provides resources for families and mobilizes them to support educational reforms.
Hope Starts Here Detroit Early Childhood Partnership	Campaign to promote and improve the quality of early childhood education in Detroit.
Youth Development Resource Center	Support organization for youth development in Detroit, promoting out-of-school programs and providing technical assistance to youth development organizations.
Brightmoor Alliance	Network of community-based organizations serving families in the Brightmoor neighborhood of Detroit.
Midnight Golf Program	Out-of-school program focused on student character development and college access.
Citizen Research Council	Nonpartisan, privately funded, and not-for-profit public policy research group in Michigan.
Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD)	Detroit's traditional public school district.
Detroit Federation of Teachers	DPSCD teacher's union.
American Federation of Teachers	National teacher's union.
University Prep School of Art and Design	Detroit charter school.
Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education	Governing entity for public schools in Louisiana.
KIPP Foundation	Foundation associated with Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) charter schools, which promotes KIPP, trains leaders for KIPP, and provides resources to KIPP schools.
Grand Valley State University Charter School Office	The office at Grand Valley State University that oversees charter schools authorized by the university.

Table 2 cont.*Organizations and Political Coalitions and Campaigns Affiliated with Featured Participants*

Organizations	Description
Michigan Association of Public School Academies	Association that promotes and provides support to charter schools in Michigan.
Flint Community Schools	The traditional public school district of Flint, Michigan.
Political Coalitions and Campaigns	Description
Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren	Detroit-based educational reform coalition that supported many of the initial proposals of the Excellent Schools Detroit Coalition; most active 2015-17
Launch Michigan	Michigan-based educational reform coalition focused on a new state funding formula, capacity building; school supports, and accountability through the Michigan Department of Education; improved data systems.
Teach 313	A campaign to recruit teachers to work in Detroit public and charter schools, headed by the Skillman Foundation and the Detroit Children's Fund.
Wayne County Wins!	A campaign for additional state funding to support out-of-school learning programs for Wayne County students. (Detroit is located in Wayne County, Michigan.)

The social network analysis also shows that many of the featured participants and their affiliated organizations have been involved in these political efforts (Figure 3). In particular, a significant number of the invited panelists and presenters served on “leadership teams” for the CFDS (Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, n.d.). Several others are affiliated with organizations directly involved in the Launch Michigan campaign. Taken together, these connections highlight the fact that members of TFA Detroit’s local and national policy network, by supporting its alumni engagement efforts, were in turn supporting the preferred reforms of their own organizations.

Figure 3*Social Network Analysis with Political Coalitions and Campaigns***Framing Issues Favorably for TFA and its Policy Network**

TFA Detroit structured and curated the policy workshops in a way that offered a quasi-political presentation of issues, while avoiding or attenuating the normative and political dimensions of educational policy. Consequently, the policy workshops promoted an outlook on educational reform that aligned with TFA and its policy network.

From the start of the policy workshops, TFA Detroit's staff sought to neutralize critical views by maintaining strict parameters for discussion that would avoid topics that challenged TFA's normative viewpoint. As a leader of TFA Detroit stated at the first event,

What we realized is we want to activate and support our network to get into this work, and make sure we position you with a common fact base...It's not an ideological conversation...So: how are schools governed, how are they performing, what's talent and funding look like, and what's going on outside schools? They are all '101' sessions. (field notes, 1/15/20)

This emphasis on keeping things simple was used to avoid topics that threatened to undermine the reform narrative to which TFA Detroit is wedded. For example, when one audience member pointed to the concentration of charter schools in high-poverty and racially segregated cities, and asked when segregation would be addressed, a TFA-affiliated presenter responded, "There's a lot behind this but I wanna stay centered on [school governance arrangements] as the top layer of the onion." Likewise, an audience member commented that "there's an ideology behind charter schools that has a strong connection to how the policy has impacted particular cities like Detroit...that's a really important piece, the ideology and market-based argument." The presenter

responded, “I disagree with that...We can find space for that conversation but that’s getting beyond what we want to do right now” (field notes, 1/15/20).

In addition, the workshop’s informational presentations at the start of each event were primarily delivered by people closely enmeshed in TFA Detroit’s policy network—for example, a leader of TFA Detroit, a researcher with the Education Trust - Midwest, and a program officer from the Skillman Foundation. Presenters thus tended to frame the problems and potential solutions in alignment with the views of TFA Detroit and other influential individuals and organizations in its policy network. For example, the Education Trust researcher’s presentation used “achievement gap” framing to define the problem of education equity in Detroit and Michigan (field notes, 1/15/20). In reviewing the city’s governance landscape, the TFA Detroit leader juxtaposed the “1.0 version” charter school laws like Michigan’s, where many different entities are allowed to authorize charters, with the “2.0 charter laws” in places New Orleans, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C., and described the latter as “better” because they have more centralized authorizing arrangements. He also opposed a narrative that the expansion of charter schools drove a major drop in DPSCD enrollment, insisting that “charter enrollment [in Detroit] can’t be accounted for by DPSCD because of the magnitude of enrollment”; and he emphasized, semantically, that “there is no such thing as for profit charters. There are non-profit charters with non-profit boards who have the ability to hire a for-profit entity or non-profit entity to manage the school” (field notes, 1/15/20).

Within this carefully managed dynamic, the workshops were framed as an opportunity to hear opposing viewpoints. As a TFA Detroit leader stated in an introductory speech, “There will be people presenting *facts*, and then we’ll have a panel of people who see it from a different perspective, and if you wanna understand what’s going on you need to see it from these different viewpoints” (field notes, 1/15/20, speaker’s emphasis). For example, in a discussion on governance, a DPSCD board member, a former charter school leader and current staff member for a charter school authorizer, and the leader of a citywide parent organization were the featured panelists. To an extent, this approach was also reflected in the background reading. Before the “Education Funding and Talent” workshop, for example, TFA Detroit sent registered attendees a state funding study conducted by Michigan State University professors and a critique of the study from the Mackinac Policy Center, a right-wing think tank. Ultimately, however, the emphasis on *difference*—a different viewpoint, a different role, different school systems—was wielded quasi-politically in order to crowd out genuine political and ideological *disagreement*. As a concluding statement for one of the workshops, a TFA alumna who helped organize the events put it this way: “We’ve talked about some complex things, but...we’re all committed as an organization and as like-minded individuals to where we want to go [in education]” (field notes, 1/15/20).

The panel discussions offered some differing perspectives on the topics at hand, and participants did have opportunities to break from the narrower parameters TFA Detroit tried to maintain. For example, in response to a question about whether Detroit’s school governance landscape was stabilizing, a DPSCD board member responded, “At the end of the day we’re talking about poverty and that does not lend itself to stability” (field notes, 1/15/20). Likewise, when asked about the main issues that Detroit children face, a community organization leader responded, “We sit and look at this problem but we will not confess that the origin of all of this is poverty” (field notes, 2/12/20). In addition, the moderator of the funding and talent panel, who is a TFA alumna teaching in DPSCD and active in the Detroit Federation of Teachers, questioned neoliberal and managerial reforms, including: “Charter management organizations will say a union is detrimental to attract high-quality teachers and they are concerned about the budget impact. What are your thoughts on the effect of collective bargaining agreements?”; and “How has accountability failed us and how should we address this?” (field notes, 1/29/20).

Still, disagreements driven by a diversity in viewpoints were attenuated by the fact that participating panelists had connections to individuals and organizations in TFA Detroit's policy network, often including funding or coalitional relationships with the Skillman Foundation (see Figure 2 & Table 2). With the exception of two panelists, all of the moderators, presenters, and panel members were either TFA alumni or are affiliated with organizations that have been funded by the Skillman Foundation. TFA Detroit therefore had carefully selected participants whose positions would not strongly challenge a need for charter and public school cooperation, the virtue of managerial perspectives on teaching and school leadership, and a narrower focus on educational interventions rather than structural racism and economic inequality.

The capstone event for the policy workshop (which was ultimately cancelled due to COVID-19) also reflected this careful mitigation of how educational policy problems and solutions would be discussed. The event was originally a panel featuring a former TFA New Orleans leader and Louisiana state school board member; and a TFA alumna and former leader in the District of Columbia public schools. It was pitched as a chance to learn educational policy lessons from New Orleans and D.C. for Detroit (field notes, 2/12/20), aligned with TFA Detroit's stated goal of "bring[ing] case studies to life from other cities that have achieved and sustained the outcomes that we aspire for our children to inform the work and advocacy of our network" (field notes, 12/18/19). When the former D.C. leader was unavailable, TFA invited a TFA Detroit alumnus and leader in the American Federation of Teachers in Michigan, to compare New Orleans and Detroit. The event would be "a conversation about some of the pros and cons of the New Orleans and Detroit reforms, but it would not be a debate format" (personal correspondence, 2/28/20). Guiding questions for the evening would include, "What measurable progress have you seen for students system-wide in your region over the past decade?" and "When considering potential drivers of progress, what will accelerate the pace of change here?" (personal correspondence, 2/28/20). The selection of guests, format of the evening, and construction of discussion questions would have left little room for more critical perspectives on the educational reforms that have been enacted in New Orleans and Detroit over the past two decades or the cultural, political, and economic contexts of those reforms.

Emphasizing TFA Identities and Channels for Engagement

Finally, emphasizing TFA identities and presenting immediate TFA-related opportunities to engage in city and state educational politics represent a concrete strategy that TFA Detroit used to translate alumni engagement into alumni political action. TFA emphasized to audience members that their identities as alumni should be the salient identities around which they organize for educational equity. TFA Detroit encouraged alumni to see themselves as part of a movement with TFA and to actively turn to, work with, and rely on TFA's political network as they get involved in political advocacy. TFA's message to alumni implied that their alumniship provided useful social capital for political engagement, and that it conferred authority and acted as a justification for alumni to uniquely address educational issues.

These messages to alumni were plainly stated in written materials to recruit attendees. In print materials advertising the policy workshop series to alumni, TFA Detroit wrote: "The Teach For America alumni network in Michigan represents the most powerful and untapped network of champions of educational equity. If activated and mobilized, they are positioned to make equitable and enduring system-level policies and practices" (promotional materials, 12/18/19). Likewise, the print materials emphasized the workshops as an opportunity to "connect the TFA network with leading thinkers and advocates who can provide direct connections to opportunities to engage in issue advocacy and candidate support" (promotional materials, 12/18/19). The importance of this message to alumni was revealed in follow-up surveys meant to assess the impact of the workshops.

A short feedback survey at the end of the workshops asked attendees to share the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: (1) “I feel connected to other Teach For America alumni who are committed to educational equity in Detroit”; and (2) “When I want to expand opportunities for children, I turn to the Teach For America network (i.e., fellow corps members, alumni, or Teach For America staff) for partnership, support, and/or collaboration” (survey, 2/13/20).

An emphasis on TFA identities and opportunities to engage with TFA’s network was also built into the structure of the workshops and follow-up initiatives. At the outset of each session, TFA staff and alumni who planned the events reminded attendees to “maximize the networking opportunity” because “there is a wide range of experience, knowledge, and expertise in the room” and “we intentionally planned time for you [to] build relationships over the next three sessions” (field notes, 1/15/20). In addition, while follow-up plans were disrupted by COVID-19, an engaged group of TFA Detroit alumni had organized three working groups for attendees to join as a pathway to engage: supporting the political campaign for a new state funding formula, identifying and endorsing TFA alumni and other “pro-education” candidates for local office, and finding new ways to engage alumni in the region (field notes, 2/12/20 and 3/5/20). As an alumna who helped plan the workshop series explained, these three new working groups were “all purposefully planned [to convene] before [the capstone event to learn from New Orleans and Washington, D.C.] so we can come together as a network, already taking steps forward in these three areas as we mobilize ourselves towards our goals” (field notes, 2/12/20).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to provide a detailed description of how TFA Detroit designed its policy workshop series to engage alumni towards its goals as a neoliberal political and social organization. Through the policy workshops, TFA Detroit sought to politically mobilize TFA alumni in Michigan in support of educational reforms favored by the central organizations and key members of its policy network. Their goals align with the political efforts of reformers in Detroit over the past few decades, and are especially coherent with the neoliberal “transformation” of Detroit’s educational system envisioned first by the Excellent Schools Detroit coalition and then championed by members of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (Lenhoff et al., 2019; Pedroni, 2011). The workshops not only centered the most salient issues for this network of policy actors (e.g., governance, funding, talent), but also relied upon members of that policy network to shape the message to alumni and present tangible ways for alumni to get politically involved. TFA Detroit crafted a series of events that explicitly recruited alumni to support its policy network’s reform agendas, and implicitly reinforced to attendees the logics of neoliberal and managerial reforms and the credibility conferred to them by virtue of their TFA alumniship.

Our analysis aligns with the conceptual framework, explicated by Scott, Trujillo, and Rivera (2016), that TFA works to make connections between business, philanthropy, and entrepreneurship networks and its own alumni. This network, in turn, reinforces the broader national reform network, provides entry for alumni, and bolsters the organization’s (and its network partners) ability to enact change at the local level—in Detroit, for example. The establishment, and facilitation, of TFA Detroit’s policy workshops by the organization represents an overt artifact of how the organization leverages its policy networks to influence its alumni’s dispositions and orientations towards education reform and channel them into political advocacy and engagement. Our findings point to some of the specific strategies that TFA may use to orient alumni towards its policy network’s preferred reforms and the mechanisms through which it may influence their political engagement (Scott et al., 2016). If other regional teams operate similarly to TFA Detroit, they are likely to

coordinate with and take cues from the organizations central to their regional policy networks—for example the Skillman Foundation in Detroit—to set an agenda for alumni engagement, identify individuals who it can rely on to communicate frame these issues favorably, and suggest immediate channels for political engagement around which TFA can organize its alumni.

Our findings complement prior research that suggests TFA actively intervenes to shape the political outlook of its alumni and provide evidence of how TFA structures their alumni engagement to do so. The way that TFA Detroit's leadership and staff planned and structured their workshops, responded to challenges to their reform logic during the events, and emphasized TFA identities and TFA-related channels for political action are all reminders that the political alignment we often see between the organization and its corps members and alumni is in part the result of concerted cultivation. Moving forward, researchers can interrogate and disentangle the influence of these kinds of efforts by TFA, prior dispositions of their corps members, and the incentives created by TFA-related career opportunities that lead many alumni to support and champion neoliberal reforms and managerial approaches to educational leadership.

Our study points in several other directions for research on TFA's political engagement with alumni as well. A multiple case study approach that compared TFA's alumni engagement efforts in multiple regions would be valuable because TFA operates in different political, economic, and cultural contexts and under somewhat independent leadership of different locally-based directors. The way that TFA operates in this respect may therefore be different as a result of differences in context, organizational behavior, and leadership. Longitudinal studies, compared to this event-specific study, would facilitate describing alumni's experiences when they engage with TFA and their motivations for doing so. A multi-year study would also allow researchers to examine how TFA adjusts its strategies over time in response to alumni and to developments in the educational policy landscape. Finally, a closer look at how TFA collaborates with key members of its policy network to steward their goals through alumni engagement is warranted. In some ways, our findings highlight the central role of the Skillman Foundation more than TFA itself, and so it would be important to understand more precisely how the foundation's social, political, and financial relationships with TFA influenced this particular approach to alumni engagement. Likewise, it would be valuable to describe the particular way that funders and elite policy actors and organizations at the national level incentivize TFA to take up particular forms of alumni engagement, or how TFA itself influences the thinking of these organizations with its focus on alumni.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Eigenvector Measure of Centrality for Organizations in Social Network Analysis

Organizations Affiliated with Workshop Participants	Eigenvector Centrality Measure
Skillman Foundation	0.535
Teach For America	0.426
Excellent Schools Detroit	0.227
Detroit Parent Network	0.189
Hope Starts Here Detroit Early Childhood Partnership	0.163
Youth Development Resource Center	0.158
Brightmoor Alliance	0.142
Midnight Golf Program	0.132
Citizen Research Council	0.132
Detroit Public Schools Community District	0.105
Detroit Federation of Teachers	0.041
American Federation of Teachers	0.036
University Prep School of Art and Design	0.031
Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education	0.026
KIPP Foundation	0.026
Grand Valley State University Charter School Office	0.011
Michigan Association of Public School Academies	0.011
Flint Community Schools	0.000

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