

---

education policy analysis  
archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,  
open access, multilingual journal



Arizona State University

---

Volume 33 Number 66

October 21, 2025

ISSN 1068-2341

---

**“We're being erased. And nobody's talking about that”:  
Race-conscious versus Race-evasive Perspectives on School  
Board Takeovers and Policy Termination  
Recommendations**

*Olivia Marcucci*

Johns Hopkins University  
United States

*Aaron Park*

Saint Louis University  
United States

*Madelyn Yoo*

Washington University in St. Louis  
United States



*Kelly M. Harris*

Washington University in St. Louis  
United States

**Citation:** Marcucci, O., Park, A., Yoo, M., & Harris, K. M. (2025). “We're being erased. And nobody's talking about that”: Race-conscious versus race-evasive perspectives on school board takeovers and policy termination recommendations. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 33(66).  
<https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.33.9115>

Journal website: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/>  
Facebook: /EPAAA  
Twitter: @epaa\_aape

Manuscript received: 27/1/2025  
Revisions received: 30/7/2025  
Accepted: 9/9/2025

**Abstract:** State takeover of school boards is a controversial policy choice aimed at reforming “underperforming” districts. It includes the limiting or complete removal of powers of an elected school board. However, this policy intervention is overwhelmingly implemented in school districts serving predominantly Black communities. Despite extensive nationwide use, very little is known about how to terminate this policy intervention. This article uses the theoretical heuristics of race-evasiveness to analyze interviews primarily with board members, district-level administrators, and other policy actors ( $n=18$ ) in the three extant Missouri districts impacted by the policy. Specifically, we (1) interrogate policy actors’ perspectives for when and how two juxtaposing narratives—either race-evasive narratives or race-conscious narratives—emerge in their discussion of this policy; and (2) examine if and how policy actors’ reliance on these juxtaposing narratives changes how they approach appropriate policy termination strategies. We found that local policy actors demonstrate complex race-evasive or race-conscious understandings of the school board intervention policy and that their use of narratives changed how they discussed proper policy termination strategies. Policy actors who relied on race-conscious narratives questioned the legitimacy of the policy, contextualized the policy within Black political enfranchisement, and were also more likely to express confidence in the Black citizenry. Policy actors that understood the policy from a race-evasive perspective were more likely to recommend accountability metrics as the most important aspect of the policy termination process. Because of the centrality of democratic control of school boards in the civic vitality within the United States, this analysis suggests that policy actors should be encouraged to understand and interrogate a race-conscious lens in this policy.

**Keywords:** school board; state takeover; governance; race-evasiveness; color-blindness

**“Estamos siendo borrados. Y nadie habla de eso”: Perspectivas conscientes de la raza versus perspectivas evasivas de la raza sobre las intervenciones estatales en juntas escolares y las recomendaciones para la terminación de políticas**

**Resumen:** La intervención estatal en juntas escolares es una opción de política controvertida destinada a reformar distritos considerados “de bajo rendimiento”. Implica la limitación o la eliminación completa de los poderes de una junta escolar elegida democráticamente. Sin embargo, esta intervención se aplica de manera abrumadora en distritos escolares que atienden mayoritariamente a comunidades negras. A pesar de su uso generalizado en todo el país, se sabe muy poco sobre cómo poner fin a esta intervención política. Este artículo utiliza las heurísticas teóricas de la evasión racial para analizar entrevistas principalmente con miembros de juntas escolares, administradores a nivel distrital y otros actores de política ( $n=18$ ) en los tres distritos de Misuri afectados por la política. Específicamente, (1) examinamos las perspectivas de los actores de política sobre cuándo y cómo surgen dos narrativas yuxtapuestas—narrativas evasivas de la raza o narrativas conscientes de la raza—en su discusión de esta política; y (2) analizamos si y cómo la dependencia de los actores en estas narrativas yuxtapuestas cambia su forma de abordar las estrategias adecuadas de terminación de políticas. Encontramos que los actores locales demuestran comprensiones complejas, ya sea evasivas de la raza o conscientes de la raza, de la política de intervención en juntas escolares, y que el uso de estas narrativas cambió la manera en que discutieron las estrategias adecuadas de terminación de políticas. Los actores que se apoyaron en narrativas conscientes de la raza cuestionaron la legitimidad de la política, la contextualizaron en relación con el derecho político de la población negra y mostraron mayor confianza en la ciudadanía negra. Los actores que entendieron la política

desde una perspectiva evasiva de la raza fueron más propensos a recomendar métricas de rendición de cuentas como el aspecto más importante del proceso de terminación de políticas. Debido a la centralidad del control democrático de las juntas escolares en la vitalidad cívica dentro de los Estados Unidos, este análisis sugiere que se debe alentar a los actores de política a comprender e interrogar la política desde una perspectiva consciente de la raza.

**Palabras clave:** juntas escolares; intervención estatal; gobernancia; evasión racial; ausencia de conciencia racial

### **“Estamos sendo apagados. E ninguém fala sobre isso”: Perspectivas conscientes da raça versus perspectivas evasivas da raça sobre intervenções estatais em conselhos escolares e recomendações para a terminação de políticas**

**Resumo:** A intervenção estadual em conselhos escolares é uma escolha de política controversa destinada a reformar distritos considerados “de baixo desempenho”. Ela envolve a limitação ou a remoção completa dos poderes de um conselho escolar eleito. No entanto, essa intervenção é aplicada de forma esmagadora em distritos escolares que atendem predominantemente comunidades negras. Apesar de seu uso generalizado em todo o país, pouco se sabe sobre como encerrar essa intervenção de política. Este artigo utiliza as heurísticas teóricas da evasão racial para analisar entrevistas realizadas principalmente com membros de conselhos escolares, administradores distritais e outros atores de políticas ( $n=18$ ) em três distritos de Missouri afetados pela política. Especificamente, (1) investigamos as perspectivas dos atores de políticas sobre quando e como emergem duas narrativas justapostas—narrativas evasivas da raça ou narrativas conscientes da raça—em sua discussão dessa política; e (2) examinamos se e como a dependência dos atores nessas narrativas justapostas altera sua forma de abordar estratégias apropriadas de terminação de políticas. Constatamos que os atores locais demonstram compreensões complexas, seja evasivas da raça ou conscientes da raça, da política de intervenção nos conselhos escolares, e que o uso dessas narrativas modificou a maneira como discutiram as estratégias adequadas de terminação de políticas. Atores que se apoiaram em narrativas conscientes da raça questionaram a legitimidade da política, contextualizaram-na no âmbito do direito político da população negra e mostraram maior confiança na cidadania negra. Já os atores que compreenderam a política a partir de uma perspectiva evasiva da raça foram mais propensos a recomendar métricas de responsabilização como o aspecto mais importante do processo de terminação de políticas. Devido à centralidade do controle democrático dos conselhos escolares na vitalidade cívica dentro dos Estados Unidos, esta análise sugere que os atores de políticas devem ser incentivados a compreender e interrogar essa política a partir de uma lente consciente da raça.

**Palavras-chave:** conselhos escolares; intervenção estadual; governança; evasão racial; ausência de consciência racial

## **“We're being erased. And nobody's talking about that”: Race-conscious versus Race-evasive Perspectives on School Board Takeovers and Policy Termination Recommendations**

State takeover of school boards, sometimes referred to as “state control” or “state-appointed governance,” is a controversial policy choice aimed at reforming “underperforming” districts. It includes the limiting or complete removal of powers of an elected school board (Wong & Shen, 2003). However, this policy intervention is often criticized, as it is overwhelmingly implemented in school districts serving predominantly Black communities (Morel, 2018; Welsh et al., 2019). In Missouri, the state has intervened in the democratic governance of four school districts, all serving majority Black student bodies. Despite scholarly and community-based work highlighting the racialized connotations of this policy (e.g., Morel, 2018; Welsh et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2020), we have not found research that seeks to understand if and how policy actors interpret the state takeover as a racialized policy choice (Osworth, 2022). How policy actors interpret this policy may have implications for how they implement it and the conditions under which they believe state control should be terminated, which impacts the enfranchisement of Black communities across the state and across the country. While this policy goes in and out of use, very little research has sought to understand the complex policy termination dynamics (for exception see Carroll et al., 2024).

We use the theoretical heuristics of race-evasiveness to analyze interviews primarily with board members, district-level administrators, and other policy actors in the three extant Missouri districts impacted by the policy. Specifically, we (1) interrogate policy actors’ perspectives for when and how two juxtaposing narratives—either race-evasive narratives or race-conscious narratives—emerge in their discussion of this policy; and (2) examine if and how policy actors’ reliance on these juxtaposing narratives changes how they approach appropriate policy termination strategies.

We found that local policy actors demonstrate complex race-evasive or race-conscious understandings of the school board intervention policy and that their use of narratives changed how they discussed proper policy termination strategies. Policy actors who relied on race-conscious narratives questioned the legitimacy of the policy, contextualized the policy within Black political enfranchisement, and were also more likely to express confidence in the Black citizenry. Policy actors that understood the policy from a race-evasive perspective were more likely to recommend accountability metrics as the most important aspect of the policy termination process. Because of the centrality of democratic control of school boards in the civic vitality within the United States, this analysis indicates that policy actors should be encouraged to understand and interrogate a race-conscious lens in this policy.

### **Literature Review**

#### **State Takeovers of School Boards**

Since the release of *A Nation at Risk*, a 1983 landmark report released by the United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, state education actors have implemented numerous strategies to improve “underperforming” schools. One such strategy is “taking over” democratically elected school boards, referred to either as state takeover or state-appointed governance. Proponents of state takeover of school boards argue that appointed control allows for quicker decision-making and implementation of reforms, less dependence on political whims, and ultimately increased financial stability of the district and/or improved educational outcomes for students. Further, proponents point out that local school board elections are often uncompetitive and receive a low voter turnout (Ford & Ihrke, 2020; Hess & Meeks, 2010). School boards have also

been criticized for maintaining the racial status quo in diverse communities (Bertrand & Sampson, 2022; Sampson & Bertrand, 2022). New Jersey was the first state to implement state-appointed school governance, starting with Jersey City in 1989 (Oluwole & Green, 2009; Wong & Shen, 2003). In recent data, lawmakers in at least 34 other states granted their states the legal authorities to implement state-appointed district/school governance (Jochim, 2016). Although initially most state takeovers were due to financial management reasons, that trend quickly changed. Students' academic achievement became the primary rationale for the implementation of takeovers (Oluwole & Green, 2009).

Despite relatively clear objectives—improve district financial stability and/or academic achievement—research on the impact of state-appointed district governance intervention is limited. The research that does exist is mixed. Schueler & Bleiberg (2022), who tracked all state takeovers nationwide from 1988 up until 2016, did not find evidence that, on average, takeovers improve student achievement. Particularly, the authors link the heterogeneous effects of the intervention to the unique contexts of each district. The authors ultimately caution that this policy intervention does not have evidence to support its widespread use (Schueler & Bleiberg, 2022). Wong & Shen (2003), who examined 14 districts across the nation that experienced state- or mayoral-appointed district/school governance, also found heterogeneous results from context to context, although they found mayoral-appointed, compared to state-appointed, governing boards more effective in improving academic achievement short-term. The authors were not able to determine whether the results were sustained in the long run (Wong & Shen, 2003). Studies that examine single contexts individually found ambivalent results. Although Lawrence Public Schools of Massachusetts and schools in New Orleans post-Katrina witnessed a positive shift in student achievement (Carroll et al., 2024; Morel & Nuamah, 2020; Schueler, 2019), other contexts such as Tennessee (Zimmer et al., 2017; Zimmer et al., 2015; Pham et al., 2018; Pham et al., 2019) and Detroit (Arsen & DeLuca, 2016; Arsen & Mason, 2013; Steel, 2020) experienced mixed or negative effects on student achievement.

Glaringly, however, predominantly Black and/or Latinx student bodies are at disproportionate risk for state takeovers (Morel, 2018; Scheuler & Bleiberg, 2022). Community advocates and scholars have pointed out racial equity concerns around decisions to utilize this governance intervention. For example, Lopez et al. (2023) argued that state accountability system frameworks that often label schools as failing and initiate the process of takeovers are “racist in effect,” and can intensify racial inequities in students' self-perceptions and community real estate values (p. 16). Further, Welsh et al. (2019), in their analysis of takeover law in Georgia, argued that students of color, particularly Black and Latinx students, are painted as “deficient, inept, and criminal” in policy documents and news coverage related to the governance intervention (p. 508). Wright et al. (2020) found that proponents of state takeover in Michigan often exhibited, “conscious and unconscious racial fears and biases” (Wright et al., 2020, p. 425). Despite the grassroots and scholarly efforts to point out the racist motivations and implications of this policy intervention, it is still in effect in predominantly Black districts in Missouri, as well as in other predominantly Black and Latinx districts around the country.

### **School Boards Takeovers amidst the Black Fight for Democracy**

One of the most alarming impacts of this policy is on the enfranchisement of Black and Latinx communities. The fight for Black enfranchisement has been a constant feature of American history, post-chattel slavery (Valley, 2009). Even after constitutional amendments officially protected the voting rights of Black men (15th) and later Black women (19th), voter intimidation tactics often directly limited the opportunity to vote (Derfner, 1973; Pryor et al., 2019; Santoro, 2008). More contemporarily, voter ID laws have been used to disproportionately reduce the voting rights of

African Americans (Hajnal et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2014). Even further, Alexander (2010) and others made a compelling case that the disenfranchisement of formerly incarcerated felons is a racialized policy choice, since the rise of mass incarceration has been disproportionately enacted upon Black communities (Uggen et al., 2003).

We conceptualize the state takeover policy, as it is implemented currently, within this legacy of Black voting rights and civic resistance struggles. The civic vitality of Black and Latinx communities goes beyond just the opportunity to vote: Kang (2023) has further suggested that state takeover of school boards is embedded in the erosion of civic capacity in predominantly Black cities like Detroit. Kang (2023) casts state takeover within a legacy of market-based, neoliberal reforms that corrodes the capacity of “informal actors from the community to come together to support formal governance and decision-making” (p. 4). Burns (2010) found that leaders believe that state takeovers, “disenfranchise[s] racial and ethnic minorities by replacing officials elected by African Americans and Latinos with administrators appointed by the state” (p. 277). Morel (2018) further found evidence for the Black political empowerment hypothesis: that as Black citizens obtain more political power, the risk of district takeover increases. Admittedly, state takeovers have been legally upheld by the court systems—as are the voting ID laws and felony voting restrictions—even with an understanding of the racial disproportionality (Oluwole & Green, 2009; Smith, 2009). That said, the legality of the intervention may not match the moral and political expectations of equal civic opportunity for Black and Latinx communities. Oluwole and Green (2009), two legal scholars, argued that, “even in those cases where takeovers are legally justified, states should strive to retain the elective system” (p. 409).

### **The Termination of State Takeover Policy**

Given the historicization of this policy intervention within the Black struggle for the vote in the United States, understanding how policy actors—i.e., appointed board members, elected board members, and superintendents—discuss the racialized connotations of this policy is important. How policy actors adopt—and *recommend termination of*—these policies have implications for enfranchisement of Black individuals and the democratic vitality of this country. There has been almost no research on the termination of this policy. A notable and recent exception is Carroll et al. (2024), who looked at the reunification of New Orleans Public Schools under the Orleans Parish School Board. In post-Katrina New Orleans, virtually all schools were taken over by the state and converted to charters, leading to a severe limitation of the school board powers. In a series of governing and policy moves throughout the 2010s, the Orleans Parish School Board eventually became re-empowered over the majority of New Orleans Schools. The locally elected board has achieved clearer decision-making processes than their state-appointed counterparts and maintained the improvement in student outcomes; however, some community organizations still feel detached from the locally elected board. Carroll et al. (2024) claimed that the return to a locally elected school board was unique because the district still operates as a majority-charter district. Except for this unique case study, we have found little to no other empirical research examining the complex dynamics involved in the termination decisions for state takeover of local school boards, particularly how it intersects with the well-documented racial connotations of the policy. This is the main research gap in which we are intervening.

### **Theoretical Framing**

Race-evasiveness refers to a discursive and ideological approach where race is ignored or avoided in discussions and considerations of social, political, or economic issues (Annamma et al.,

2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Before the Civil Rights movement, overt anti-Black racism was a significant aspect of many White American communities, where Blackness was often directly associated with danger or dysfunction. Since the mid-20th century, however, there has been a shift in public opinion away from explicit discussion of race or racism (Center for Public Affairs Research, 2019). Most frequently, this discursive cultural phenomenon is referred to as “color-blindness” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). This color-blindness—or what we refer to as ‘race evasiveness’ following Annamma et al.’s 2017 DisCrit critique of the original term—also co-exists with legal doctrine that has been utilized differentially by both conservatives and liberals since the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537) decision (Haney López, 2007).

While the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement has forced some explicit reckoning with systemic racism—as well as the reactionary rise of White nationalist-endorsed Trump—race-evasiveness is still a dominant feature of many American communities and institutions (Dunivin et al., 2022). Today, many American communities avoid open talk about race (Annamma et al., 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Individuals either consciously or unconsciously code their “racetalk” or avoid thinking about race as a meaningful influence in modern-day life (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2010; King et al., 2023; Wilt et al., 2022). For example, in a focus group study, Bertrand (2010) found that both Black and White participants used geographic places to signify race. Marcucci & Elmesky (2024) found that focus group participants relied on coded language to communicate stereotypes of African Americans when discussing their predominantly Black school population but rarely explicitly discussed race or racism.

Race-evasiveness, importantly, extends to how policy is made. In fact, Thurgood Marshall, one of the chief legal architects in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the 1954 *Brown v. Board* (347 U.S. 483) decision ending de jure segregation, used “color-blindness” in his argumentation (Adelman, 2013; Haney López, 2007). He referenced the equal protection clause to argue that “the state could not use race to subordinate or demean” (Adelman, 2013, p. 135). That said, the idea neoconservatives in the 1960s and 70s soon coopted the idea to argue for an equivalency between, “race-conscious remedies and racial subjugation”, assigning them “the same level of constitutional hostility” (Haney López, 2007, p. 988). The expansive use of race-evasiveness to avoid structural understandings of racism in the legal and policy world have dominated since then. For example, in a qualitative analysis of 44 briefs amici curiae, Muñoz et al. (2023) found that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) case before the Supreme Court avoided understanding the racialized experiences of some immigrant children. This race-evasive judicial decision-making has become even more pronounced since the 2023 *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (600 U.S. 181) ruling, as well as the second Trump administration’s expansive (and many argue, significantly over-reaching) interpretation of that decision.

Outside of the courts, politicians have used “racetalk,” “dog whistles,” and other forms of race-evasive discourse to communicate racially relevant but coded messages (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Haney López, 2013). Most relevant, in an analysis of 150 policy and campaign-related documents, Welsh et al. (2019) found that politicians coded racial messages into campaigns for state takeovers of districts in Georgia. When enacted by politicians, this race-evasive discourse had impact on communities, as it removed the democratic control of school districts serving predominantly Black students. Race-evasive discourse, no matter if it is consciously or unconsciously enacted, “continues to obfuscate the underlying power dimensions of race and to limit analysis of how it operates in naturalistic settings.” (Marcucci, 2024, n.p.).

Race-conscious discourse, on the other hand, is one that recognizes the role race plays in shaping structures and institutions. It is a racial ideology that recognizes the structural presence of racial subjugation, rather than only as an interpersonal phenomenon (Haney López, 2007; Ray,

2023). In other words, race-conscious discourse does not just see racism as a negative interaction between two individuals. Instead, it explicitly discusses race as an organizing feature and/or influence in society. Race-conscious discourse has itself been critiqued: Ray (2023) found in a three-year ethnographic study of an elementary and a middle school that White teachers use race-conscious talk to “position themselves as racially progressive while perpetuating racial harm” (p. 683). The presence of race-conscious discourse does not necessarily equate to antiracism. That said, we (and many others) still contend that because race-consciousness by definition recognizes racism as a structural and organizing force in the United States, it leaves better opportunity for redressing harm and racial inequality.

## Research Questions

While the original research questions were formulated around understanding policy actor’s perspectives on appropriate termination strategies, this article focuses on examining the data corpus through color-evasive theory. The research questions are:

1. When and how do two juxtaposing narratives—either race-evasive narratives or race-conscious narratives—emerge in policy actors’ understandings of state takeover policy?
2. How does policy actors’ reliance on these juxtaposing narratives change how they make sense of policy termination strategies?

## Methods

### Study Context

Missouri is a state of around 6 million people. Its public schools serve almost 900,000 students across 554 districts (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MO DESE], 2024). According to the latest data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Missouri ranks around 30<sup>th</sup> out of all states and jurisdictions for most subject-specific performance (NAEP, 2022). As of March 2023, six districts are provisionally accredited—meaning they do not have full accreditation according to the state formula, which plays an important role in determining takeover eligibility. Three of the districts currently provisionally accredited are predominately Black, and three are predominantly White (MO DESE, 2023a; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024). As of the writing of this article, none of the predominantly White districts that have lost full accreditation have experienced a governance intervention by the state.

The Missouri state legislature first established legal authority of school board interventions by passing Senate Bill 781 in 1998, allowing the state to intervene in school districts that are provisionally accredited or unaccredited as well as those who are financially distressed (Rhinesmith et al., 2021). In 2008, the Missouri Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Missouri State Board of Education’s takeover of St. Louis City’s school board, further bolstering the legal foundations of the governance intervention (*Board of Education of the City of St. Louis et al. v. Missouri State Board of Education*; Smith, 2009).

To date, Missouri implemented the state-appointed governance for four school districts—three of which still exist, all of which are predominantly Black. The three extant districts under study are St. Louis Public Schools, Riverview Gardens School District, and Normandy Schools Collaborative (formerly, Normandy School District) (see Table 1). The fourth district, Wellston School District, experienced state-appointed governance in the 2000s, and the state later dissolved it (Missourinet, 2009).

**Table 1***Overview of extant Missouri districts who experienced state takeover of their school boards.*

	St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS)	Riverview Gardens School District (RGSD)	Normandy Schools Collaborative (NSC)
<b>2022 District Demographics</b>			
Total Student Body (K-12)	17135	5157	2764
% student body Black or African American	77.8%	97.1%	91.4%
Year of loss of accreditation	2007	2007	2012
Years under state control	2007-2019	2010- present (transitioning back to local governance during writing of this article)	2014-present (transitioning back to local governance during writing of this article)
State-appointed board structure	3-person state-appointed board called “Special Administrative Board”; elected board remained intact with regular elections but held no power during the years of intervention	3-person state-appointed board called “Special Administrative Board”; elected board disbanded*	5-person state-appointed board called “Joint Executive Governing Board”; elected board disbanded**

*Note:* \*RGSD began with a 3-member SAB, which was later expanded by statute to 5 members, and now includes 7 members

\*\*NSC began with a 5-member SAB (2 elected members, 3 appointed members), and has since expanded to 7 members (with 2 additional appointed members).

All data come from 2022 data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

St. Louis Public Schools began operating under the three-member Special Administrative Board after it lost its accreditation in 2007. After four renewals between 2007 and 2019, St. Louis Public Schools’ elected board regained its authority to govern (Rhinesmith et al., 2021). While it lost almost one-fourth of its student population during this time, St. Louis Public Schools reduced its financial deficit, improved graduation rates, and regained its full accreditation (MO DESE, 2023b; Rhinesmith et al., 2021). Riverview Gardens School District, the second school district in Missouri to operate under state-appointed board, became unaccredited in 2007 and began operating with a state-appointed Special Administrative Board in 2010. The district lost accreditation due to financial

and academic decline. Prior to loss of accreditation, the superintendent was charged with felony theft and fraud following use of district funds for gambling/personal use (Superville, 2016). It became provisionally accredited in 2016 (Rhinesmith et al., 2021). As of the writing of this article, the district is currently in the process of transitioning back to an elected board leadership. Third, Normandy School District lost its accreditation in 2012 due to financial instability and student achievement. In 2009, the Missouri State Board of Education determined that Normandy would absorb the dissolving neighboring district of Wellston, the first Missouri district to experience state governance takeover. The state then measured accreditation metrics one year earlier than promised, which arguably factored into Normandy's eventual loss of accreditation (Missourinet, 2009). The state dissolved and reformed the district as the Normandy Schools Collaborative (NSC). Since 2014, it has operated under state-appointed governance called the Joint Executive Governing Board (Rhinesmith et al., 2021). Although the NSC became provisionally accredited in 2017, the state recertified the Joint Executive Governing Board through 2023 (Rhinesmith et al., 2021).

### Data Collection

All research procedures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Saint Louis University, Johns Hopkins University, and Washington University in St. Louis. The data collection was motivated by interested state-level parties who had questions about appropriate policy termination strategies. State-level parties were particularly interested in local actors' ideas about how and when to end state-appointed governance throughout Missouri (please see Rhinesmith et al., 2021 for full review of original research questions). The original research objectives guided the data collection in two ways. First, it influenced the interview protocol. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) asked questions like "How confident were you in (enter school district name) ability to successfully educate children in the district?", "From your perspective, what influenced the decision to transition away from local control?" and "If you could speak directly to the State Board of Education, what would you recommend?" No question explicitly mentioned race, racism, or other demographic forces, as the original objectives of the study were not race-related. Second, the original intention of the research influenced the decision to include out-of-state policy actors ( $n=3$ ) in the sample. Since there were limited cases within Missouri that had experienced the termination of this policy, the original research team thought it was important to include experiences from out-of-state policy actors that had experienced a return to local control.

The final data set includes semi-structured interviews ( $n=18$ ) with policy actors from the three extant Missouri districts that have experienced state-appointed governance: Saint Louis Public Schools, Normandy Schools Collaborative, and Riverview Gardens School District, as well as three policy actors from outside of the Missouri context. There are several professional roles included: (1) current and former board members (appointed or elected) and (2) current and former central district administrators. All interviews took place over Zoom in Fall 2021. The interviews ranged in time from 30 to 120 minutes. We identified all elected school board members at the time of takeover until present (in relevant districts, when the elected board remained in place) and all appointed board members during the period of state control ( $N=44$ ). We also identified all the superintendents at time of takeover until present ( $N=9$ ). Of those 53, we could identify contact information for 46. Of the 46, 16 consented to interview, though one later withdrew. As mentioned earlier, 3 additional policy actors from outside Missouri were recruited to add insight into their organizational experience with state takeover and termination of the policy. Two of the out-of-state policy actors are from a metropolitan area and district that have similar demographics to the relevant Missouri districts. One is from a non-partisan organization that supports school boards. Of those three, none provided outlier data: we categorized two as using race-evasive narratives and one as using race-conscious. A

total of 18 interviews are included in the final sample. Appropriate sample sizes of interview studies are debated, though Hennink and Kaiser (2022) found in a systematic review that thematic saturation was reached in 9-17 interviews. We suggest that given the study's narrow focus, we have sufficient data points to make conclusions about the research objectives.

## Data Analysis

As with all qualitative analysis, the analytic procedures were iterative. For the original research (again, please see Rhinesmith et al., 2021 for full review), we first used initial preliminary rapid qualitative analysis, which provided initial familiarization of the data (McNall & Foster-Fisherman, 2007; Gale et al., 2019; Lewinski et al., 2021). Then, the team engaged in full emergent, systematic analysis followed Saldaña's (2016) two-step coding process. In the first step, two authors developed the descriptive emergent codes. There were 20 emergent codes, ranging from "confidence in the elected board" to "administrator-school board relationship" (see Appendix B). At least two authors coded each interview.

During this emergent coding phase, two of the authors noticed that some participants discussed race explicitly while others did not. Given the authors' professional and personal positionalities, race was always a construct that is socially relevant. We are a multiracial team, all dedicated personally and professionally to ensuring that all individuals have pathways to thrive. The first author is a white American faculty member; the second author is an Asian American graduate student; the third author is an Asian American clinical research coordinator; and the fourth author is an African American faculty member. The fourth author is also from St. Louis, and while she did not attend any of the included districts, she did grow up in and around these school districts. The first author has children who attend one of the studied districts. Both faculty member authors (who originated the research project), the second author (who is also a practitioner at a state education agency), and the third author use their scholarship and professional work to recognize and dismantle structures of racism that make it more difficult for individuals who are racially minoritized to have opportunities to thrive. This lens led to an inclination to notice when policy actors did or did not use race in their interviews.

Given these insights and positionalities, two authors began to engage in abductive co-analysis sessions, putting the data and codes in conversation with established theoretical concepts. This abductive approach to qualitative analysis recognizes the influences of interactions between researcher knowledge, positionality, and the data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Rather than a purely deductive procedure—which takes theoretical constructs and examines data through those lenses (Fife, 2024)—abductive analysis interplays between emergent and deductive procedures. The original research was emergent and then race-conscious lenses were layered in the second iteration of analysis. While in one stage the authors explored the heuristics of the antiBlackness tradition (Dumas & ross, 2016; Martin et al., 2019), we found that the parsimoniousness of race-evasiveness and race-consciousness theoretical frame gave cleaner insights into the sense-making around policy termination strategies. Two of the authors examined the passages organized under the emergent codes for mis/alignment, nuancing, and complications of the race-evasive theoretical heuristics. Specifically, for these research questions, co-analysis sessions focused on understanding the following descriptive codes: *reasons for takeover*; *perceptions of community members*; *race and racism*; and *strategies for transition to local control*.

What follows here is a review of the patterns across race-evasiveness and policy termination strategies. While race and gender may contribute to participant views, we cannot name gender or race of individual participants to protect their privacy.

## Findings

### Research Question 1

The first research objective examined the emergence of either race-evasive narratives or race-conscious narratives in explaining and justifying the state intervention in the school boards. While allowing for some nuance of thought and cognitive dissonance, 10 of the policy actors relied primarily on race-evasive narratives in their interviews and 8 relied primarily on race-conscious narratives (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Demographic Breakdowns of Policy Actors included in the Study (n=18)*

	Policy actors that relied primarily on race-evasive narratives, n=10	Policy actors that relied primarily on race-conscious narratives, n=8	Total, n=18
<b>Position</b>			
Elected board member	1	4	5
Appointed board member	5	0	5
District administrator	2	3	5
Other (more than one position or different title)	2	1	3
<b>Sex (all categories present in sample listed)</b>			
Female	5	6	11
Male	5	2	7
<b>Race (all categories present in sample listed)</b>			
Black or African American	7	6	13
White	3	2	5
<b>Affiliation</b>			
SLPS	3	5	8
NSC	1	2	3
RGSD	4	0	4
Other	2	1	3

There was, of course, internal tension in some participants. Most notably, one of the appointed board members actively used both narrative frames to understand the policy. She had four quotes that were descriptively coded into *reasons for takeover*. Of the four, three relied on race-evasive interpretations of the policy, while the fourth diverged. For example, even as she said "the behavior of the elected board got worse from year to year. And so there was just no way they could move forward with that leadership," she also said:

I'm really conflicted about it because I think what ends up happening is the state is only coming in and taking over communities of color. They're not taking over Clayton or Kirkwood [predominantly White and wealthy districts in the region]. That's not going to happen. And it's kind of like they've created the systems that have brought about this consequence by the way they fund schools. So, I mean, it's kind of like the state coming in, that's like bringing in the wolf to look over the hen house.

This appointed board member clearly wrestled with the internal tensions-- “I’m really conflicted”—about the policy. However, we count them as a policy actor who *primarily* relies on race-evasive narratives, since three of their four main quotes use that lens. The typology of “policy actor relying on race-evasive narratives” versus “policy actor relying of race-conscious narratives” should be understood to assess broad patterns. As with any quantification of qualitative data, it over-simplifies nuanced data in that effort. That said, there is still benefit in moving between these quantified typologies—to understand patterns—and close qualitative interpretation of quotes—to understand nuance. The remainder of the findings section does just that.

The policy actors who relied on race-evasive narratives found the intervention to be a normal consequence of poor management that was marginally (if at all) related to historic or current racist structures. Some particularly found fault with the elected board members and how they functioned as a governing body. For example, one state board appointee noted, “the state intervened because the district had a chief administrator who ruined the district... he seemed to be enabled by the elected board...”. Elected board members also critiqued the inefficacy of the elected board. One elected board member said:

The district had been unaccredited and which kind of started some of this activity and never got any better, I think, until the state took it over, because of a lot of the infighting and the constant shift and the mix of [elected] board members. There was always an effort to get a majority, and it was usually a simple majority that drove its agenda. Then when the next majority come in, they would completely switch and drive their agenda. So, the students were suffering, I think, academically, and the district was just spinning its wheels and not making any progress. So, the only reason in my opinion, to stop the madness was to have the state come in and take over it with the appointed board members.

They argued that the political in-fighting of the elected school board had trickle down effects, so the state had no choice but to “stop the madness.” At no point in this elected board member’s interview did they mention race in explicit or coded ways. They justified the state intervention on the school board through bureaucratic and political mismanagement.

While some individuals blamed individual actors or groups, one district level administrator who relied on race-evasive narratives included a structural critique in their race-evasive narrative, even though they did not explicitly name race as an influence in this policy. After describing some of the reasons for state takeover (“losing students,” “losing revenue,” “student achievement,” “financial decisions”), they stated:

The belief was the system could not change itself. It couldn't reform itself to do better for children and make hard decisions. Along with choice, more charter schools, opportunity to leave the traditional public schools for charters, even leave the boundary of the city for surrounding school districts which exacerbated the depopulation, if you will, the lower residential rates. There was an ideological shift

with the powers that be that felt like the system could not improve itself. Therefore, you had to...change a governance structure to implement the changes that were necessary for the district to be more competitive, more accountable to students and families.

The race-evasive narrative that they used to explain the governance intervention was analytically nuanced. They presented a robust structural understanding of urban schools being influenced by entities like charter schools, political ideologies, and population mobility. That said, the administrator did not center race as a factor behind the governance intervention.

In contrast, 8 of the 18 policy actors explicitly used a race-conscious narrative to explain the school board takeover policy. As one district administrator said, “let's first acknowledge the, the, the historic systemic racism that exists inherently in this whole idea.” In a quote from an elected board member who relied on race-conscious interpretations of the policy, they said, “When money starts to really come back into the St Louis metropolitan area, especially with the NGA [National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency] coming, a lot of people with money don't want their children to sit next to a little Keisha or something like that. They want to have their own private schools.” While the elected board member does not explicitly name Black or African American, she used a stereotypically Black name, “Keisha,” which demonstrates a race-conscious perspective.

Many of these individuals who used race-conscious narratives referenced negative emotional and cognitive states of distress, like anger, confusion, devastation, and trauma. Most policy actors who had negative emotions coded also viewed the intervention as illegitimate and racialized. For example, one district administrator described the reaction from the community at the start of the state intervention:

They were angry about the takeover. They were angry about not being heard. They were angry about how they were treated. They were angry about the White savior attitude again—“we can come and rescue you, ” which they didn't. DESE [Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education] hasn't rescued a soul in their state takeover. They've only made things worse and compounded the problems. Poor strategy.

The administrator clearly tied the takeover to misplaced intentions by White actors at the state level, specifically naming the “White savior attitude” of the policy-enactors. They tied this perception of White saviorism to community “anger.”

Further, those policy actors who used race-conscious narratives were more likely to question the legitimacy of the intervention as a policy choice. One district administrator highlighted that the accreditation system that is intimately linked to the governance intervention is not designed for these “high diversity” districts:

Those districts that were all unaccredited had three things that were important: high diversity, high poverty and high transient components. And we looked at the data and every single school that had that benchmark was unaccredited. And I think there's a tendency to dismiss those and say, “well, there are other districts in this world that do that. You should be able to overcome it. ” And the concern is, we're not saying it can't be overturned, we're just saying with the...standards that you set, those kind of districts are going to fall off the cliff.

The administrator called into question the legitimacy of the accreditation and governance interventions policy, *because of* the policy's ignoring of “high diversity, high poverty and high transient

components.” They named “diversity” as a central characteristic that is ignored by the state in making the governance takeover decisions.

Multiple policy actors understood service on elected school boards to be an initial step leading to representation or participation in political service at higher levels. For example, one appointed board member who used race-conscious narratives noted:

For a lot of people that's their entry way into local politics is through the school board. So, when you took that away for 10 years, you were also taking away this pipeline and this opportunity for communities of color to be represented, and then also hopefully build upon, build a series of representatives moving forward. So, I think it takes away that opportunity.

While this interviewee acknowledged the long-term implications of the policy on political representation, many did not recognize or acknowledge this intervention as disenfranchisement. In contrast, policy actors using race-conscious perspectives viewed elected governance of school districts to be a critical source of civic engagement especially in marginalized communities and viewed this intervention as symbolic violence through the silencing of the public voice.

One elected board member described the governance intervention as part of a larger intentional political movement to remove the Black community from the city:

There ...used to be a cemetery for slaves...I went to visit it recently with a lot of Black St. Louisians out there. And you had 25 headstones, all crunched together, disrespectful. Just because progress comes, we always seem to get wiped out the pitch. Look at Martin Luther King [Boulevard]...look just empty. Really, there's nothing there. Where's the beautiful flourishing Black communities in this city? They're not there anymore. ...We're being erased. And nobody's talking about that, the real thing that's going on. So, I don't know. I don't know. I guess I'm feeling some kind of way about being erased around here, really feeling a way. And I don't want that to happen with [school district].

This elected board member, who was also a parent of students in the district, directly associated larger demographic and economic forces, like gentrification, in St. Louis with educational policy, including the school board governance intervention. The board member traced the lineage of this policy choice through other “erasure” of Black communities around the St. Louis Metropolitan Area.

Some of these race-conscious policy actors also reported confidence in the abilities of those within the communities of the impacted districts to govern themselves. For example, one district administrator noted:

(I) absolutely believed it could be done...because one of the things that I noticed is that people working in the district had love for these children. They loved these children. Some of them could have gone other places, but they said they loved these children. They loved these children, this urban context.

This district administrator emphasized not only the “love” that district employees had for the children and “urban context” but that they “absolutely believed [self-governance] could be done.”

An elected board member said:

It's funny that they didn't think that the public or the citizens of St. Louis would not understand that they felt like their children were being part of an experiment and thus, we had a mass exit of many of our students because people are not, excuse me,

I think interested in allowing their children to suffer any further from a lack of resources and things that they really needed because it's been really painful having children. I've had [own children] in [district], has really been painful to see what's going on. Many of our building didn't improve in condition under their leadership.

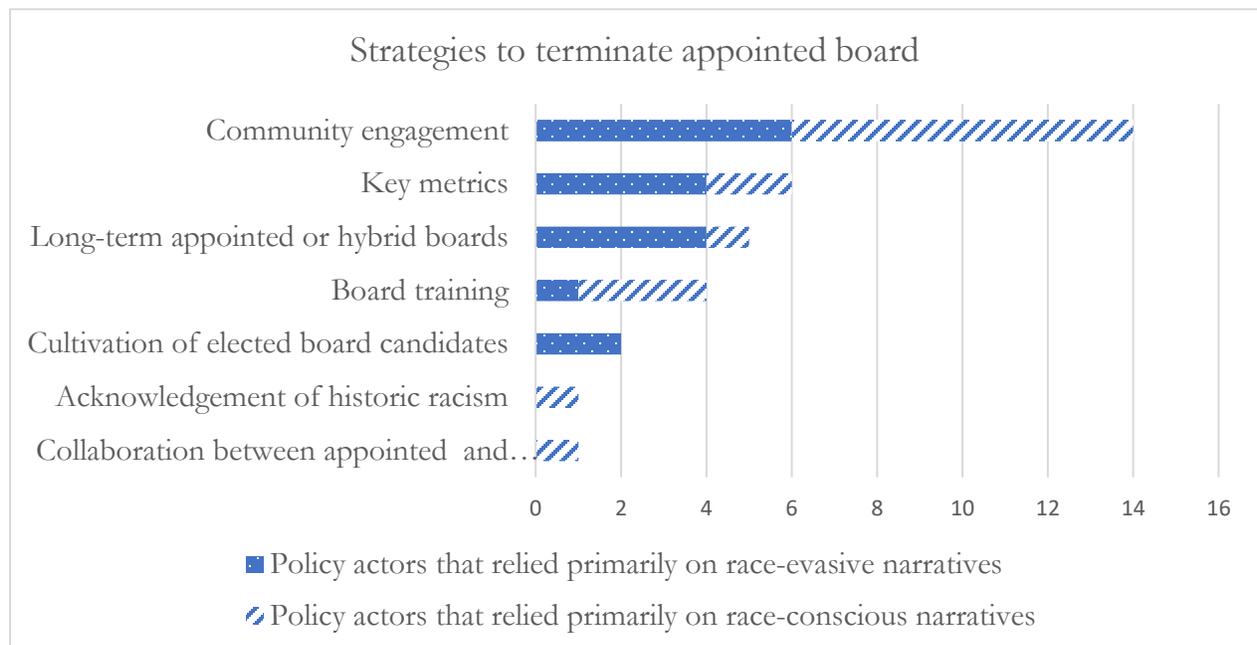
While many others—including other interviewees who ascribed primarily to race-conscious narratives—also recognized the nuance of a disengaging voting population, this board member and administrator recognized the political understanding, engagement, and power of the citizenry in these districts. Since both individuals specifically labelled these communities as Black, their comments on self-governance and political engagement were about the self-determining powers of Black individuals and communities.

**Research Question 2**

While race-evasive or race-conscious narratives emerged in policy actors’ explanations of the takeover policy, they also aligned with perspectives on appropriate policy termination strategies. The second research question aimed to see if and how policy actors’ reliance on these juxtaposing narratives changed how they approached termination strategies. Overall, there were seven unique strategies that policy actors recommended during the transition back to an elected board (see Figure 1): community engagement (14 participants), accountability metrics (6 participants), long-term hybrid or appointed board (5 participants), board training (4 participants), cultivation of elected candidates (2 participants), acknowledgement of historic racism (1 participant), and collaboration between appointed and elected boards (1 participant).

**Figure 1**

*Strategies recommended for the return to local control after appointed board, broken down by narrative interpretation of the takeover policy.*



There was notable discrepancy between policy actors that relied on race-evasive narratives versus race-conscious narratives, particularly in the two most frequently mentioned strategies: community engagement and accountability metrics. Policy actors who used race-evasive narratives were more likely to discuss the importance of accountability metrics, while policy actors who used race-conscious narratives were more likely to emphasize the importance of community engagement during policy termination.

Overall, six policy actors highlighted the importance of quantifiable accountability metrics as the primary guide determining policy termination timelines and processes—four who aligned with race-evasive narrative, and two who critiqued the policy from a race-conscious perspective. The two who critiqued from a race-conscious lens, however, also critiqued how metrics had been used in the past by the state, while still pragmatically recognizing that they will be used to assess readiness for policy termination. For example, one former administrator who used a race-conscious lens suggested that if metrics were to be used to catalyze the transition back to local control, the state should look at *progress* on metrics like achievement tests, rather than reaching an absolute cut off (“instead of looking at, did they hit the benchmark, they should look at, are they making progress towards the benchmarks?”). They contextualized this recommendation with larger demographic trends (“those districts that were all unaccredited had three things that were important; high diversity, high poverty and high transient components.”). Unlike the administrator who utilized race-conscious interpretations, the policy actors who used race-evasive narratives did not question the legitimacy of the metrics. Instead, they argued for the use of “meaningful evidence” to trigger the termination of state takeover. For example, one elected board member who used a race-evasive lens pushed back against a strict timeline (“I don't think you can just say three years, because things may not change”)—instead arguing that “you need to have some evidence of meaningful evidence of change before you return the district back to the public.”

Community engagement was the most discussed strategy of policy termination across both groups, although those who relied on race-conscious interpretations of the policy mentioned it at higher rates. All 8 of the policy actors that primarily relied on race-conscious interpretations of the policy emphasized talking with the community, while 6 of the 10 policy actors who relied on race-evasive narratives suggested talking with the community. Frequently, as policy actors who primarily relied on race-conscious narratives spoke about the role of community engagement during termination of the state takeover, they did so in a way that highlighted the competencies and expertise of the local (predominantly Black) populations. For example, one elected board member said:

More public engagement. More public engagement. Something I think that was really lacking is that having the trust of our citizens because many of them are very skeptical about what's going on. They've seen over the years how things have gone for them. And many of our students don't care anymore and a lot of our families are just on the edge of... They're doubtful. So, getting the respect and the trust of our parents and our students and our staff was really important.

In their statement, the board member emphasized the astute observations of the public (“many of them are very skeptical about what’s going on”). The re-instating of the elected board needs to come hand-in-hand with the re-gaining of the “respect and trust” of the families. Another elected board member said:

When you don't have parents at the table, community members at the table, when these decisions are happening, you lose a great chunk of support that you actually need to make decisions successfully for these people's children or the community in

general. You can't make them alone or just as a three-person group or five or whatever that structure might look like.

As they critique the small, appointed boards (only appointed boards include three or five individuals), they also talk about authentically including “parents at the table.”

A smaller percentage—though still the majority—of those who relied on race-evasive narratives also mentioned the importance of community engagement during the policy termination process. Even when one participant who used race-evasive narratives talked about collaborating with individuals, however, they did so in a way that communicated skepticism of the public:

I do think if you're in transition [back to an elected board] at periodically outside the board meetings, there should be, these community opportunities to come...and ask questions. So even if they don't show up, you should still provide that opportunity as part of your transparency and as part of the readiness, or to help people understand why. Because oftentimes they'll get something in newspaper, see something on a news report or get a letter at home saying that there's a change at the governance level. And everyone may not have an understanding why that's taking place, so they believe whatever somebody tells them.

While the policy actor emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for community engagement, they did so while simultaneously emphasizing “even if they don't show up” and that “they [the public] believe whatever somebody tells them.” This comment communicated a skepticism in the public's willingness to engage in the governance process. While there are credible concerns of voter engagement in school board elections across the nation, this comment heralded a substantively different tone than the community engagement comments that communicate trust in the citizenry's abilities.

Further, two race-evasive policy actors emphasized community engagement with large institutions, like universities and non-profits, rather than with the general citizenry. One individual who is both an appointed board member and a former administrator talked about collaborating with a local university to build on its expertise, and then said, “I would say to you that I think that there should be much greater collaboration between institutions to meet the needs of children that we currently see, schools and law enforcement and social workers and community development and housing.” Another appointed board member recommended talking to Big Brothers Big Sisters and “organizations like that.” While this board member also talked about connecting directly with community members, they encouraged it as a regular part of district and school functioning, not as a particularly important feature of the termination of the state takeover.

## **Discussion**

There are three major takeaways from this analysis. First, local policy actors demonstrate complex race-evasive or race-conscious understandings of the school board intervention policy. Second, policy actors who relied on race-conscious narratives questioned the legitimacy of the policy, contextualized the policy within Black political enfranchisement, and were also more likely to express confidence in the Black citizenry. Third, policy actors that understood the policy from a race-evasive perspective were more likely to recommend accountability metrics as the most important aspect of the policy termination process, while policy actors with a race-conscious perspective were more likely to recommend community engagement, honoring the lived experience and knowledge of Black citizens.

When contextualized within the Black struggle for civic opportunity in the United States, these takeaways suggest that race-conscious perspectives on state takeovers encourage a timely termination of the takeover interventions and contribute to civic vitality of the United States. After decades of neoliberal approaches that have disproportionately gutted local Black political power, these findings indicate that strategies for self-determination and/or returning school boards to democratic control must be race conscious. Further, they must be intentional about repairing, rebuilding, and empowering the school district community or risk returning to the internal erosion of U.S. civic vitality.

### Takeaway 1

Racialized interpretations of state takeover policy are emerging in the literature (Lopez et al., 2023; Welsh et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2019), but the continued prevalence of race-evasiveness as a pervasive force in American discourse has the potential to inflict greater harm at the student and community level (Annamma et al., 2017). Race-evasiveness, a term stemming from a DisCrit analysis of the more ubiquitous term ‘colorblindness,’ refers to the dominant discursive pattern to avoid explicit discussion of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). This can occur at the interpersonal level or the policy-making level (Welsh et al., 2019). While some policy actors who engaged with race-evasive narratives explanations focused on individual-level explanations, others did not shirk away from the political nuance. A rejection of race as an explicit variable in the construction of this policy does not preclude sophisticated systems-level thinking, however it does preclude *explicit* engagement with race. While there was no evidence of *intentional* racial harm by the policy actors that spoke in race-evasive narratives, the sophisticated engagement with race-evasive narratives aligns with contemporary race-evasive trends that perpetuate the status quo of racialized harm.

While the sample size was small, there were descriptive patterns in who ascribed to race-evasive or race-conscious interpretations of the policy. Both narratives were present in the data—and could even co-exist within the same person. While there were no patterns within this sample about participant race or gender and reliance on one of the narratives, participants from RGSD and individuals in appointed positions were more likely to describe the policy from a race-evasive lens. The trend of RGSD participants to ascribe to race-evasive narratives is perhaps more unusual, as the other districts tended to have both policy actors representing race-conscious and race-evasive narratives. This may in part be because the takeover in RGSD was motivated by both financial misconduct and academics, whereas the takeover in the other districts was primarily grounded in academic failure or failure to meet accreditation metrics (Rhinesmith et al., 2021). That said, the trend between appointed and elected officials is unsurprising. As appointed individuals, it is not within their self-interest to critique the legitimacy of the policy that empowered them.

### Takeaway 2

The second major takeaway from this analysis makes clear the political and material implications of these two perspectives. Those who relied on race-conscious narratives were more likely to question the legitimacy of the takeover policy, contextualize it within the Black struggle for enfranchisement, and to express confidence in the citizenry of the majority Black districts. Policy actors who used a race-conscious perspective argued that Black communities not only have the right and capacity to govern themselves and their educational systems, but that right has been limited by this policy. The race-conscious perspective also actively resists what one participant identified as the ‘erasure’ of the Black community, both in their physical presence and in their civic power.

This erasure is embedded in larger neoliberal movement in educational policy. Neoliberal reforms are grounded in race-evasiveness narratives that perpetuate the harm of structural and systemic racism. (Carpenter et al., 2014). The confluence of race-evasiveness and neoliberal

discourse can be seen in a quote by one of the race-evasive actors who argued that “you had to...change a governance structure to implement the changes that were necessary for the district to be more competitive, more accountable to students and families.” Rather than recognize the role that race and racism play in the dynamics of this policy, the actor directly used established neoliberal discourses of accountability and competition (“market/choice”; Carpenter et al., 2014) to justify the state takeover. Scholarship has established the link between neoliberal state takeover and race. Kang (2023) situated the corrosion of civic capacity in Detroit, a predominantly Black city, within the neoliberal, market-based reform landscape of urban education, including the removal of the locally elected school board.

This analysis supports a small but growing empirical base that highlight the racial motivations and implications of takeover policies (Morel, 2018; Welsh et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2020). School boards are an important mechanism for Black political power, and the race-conscious participants were more likely to argue that the policy undermined it. These policy actors’ narratives are supported by Morel’s (2018) evidence of the Black political empowerment hypothesis. Morel found that as Black and Latinx citizens gain more political power, the local school district is at increased risk of state takeover. While this analysis did not have the data to make conclusions about the internal mental processes related to racial biases in the participants, Wright et al. (2020) found that proponents of the takeover policy in Michigan exhibited racial biases. At its foundation, this analysis further buttresses the idea that takeover policies like this one must be contextualized within the racialized structures of the United States.

### Takeaway 3

The policy actors in this study demonstrated race-evasive or race-conscious lenses can have tangible implications for how they would recommend the termination of the policy as well. If race cannot be understood as a factor influencing the policy—particularly by those appointed individuals empowered by the state—then race-explicit critiques of the policy and equity-motivated urgency for termination are stymied. Further, when termination *does* occur, policy actors ascribing to race-evasive narratives did not express the same level of confidence in Black community members’ capacity for self-governance.

While several discrete termination strategies were discussed, the two most common were the use of accountability metrics and the role of community engagement. This in and of itself is a significant contribution to the research base: since virtually no research has occurred on the termination of this policy, very little is known about how policy actors think about appropriate ways to end this governance intervention. While Carroll et al. (2024) discussed the unique case study of New Orleans, the empirical understanding of the policy termination processes is severely underdeveloped.

In this analysis, policy actors relying on race-evasive interpretations of the policy were more likely to mention the importance of accountability metrics in triggering the policy termination process. Policy actors relying on race-conscious narratives were more likely to mention the importance of community engagement in the policy termination process. While accountability metrics allows policy actors to ignore race, a focus on community engagement is a direct recognition of the importance of the lived experience of the Black students and families impacted by the policy. Interestingly, when individuals who ascribe to race-evasive narratives reference community engagement, they were more likely to talk about partnerships with institutions (i.e., local universities and non-profits), rather than with the general citizenry. While these partnerships are no doubt important, they do not emphasize the moral and political imperative of democratic governance of Black communities. This is particularly relevant as we contextualize the policy within the history of

the Black struggle for equal voting access (Derfner, 1973; Pryor et al., 2019; Santoro, 2008). Even though there is no legal protection for the democratic governance of schools, when democratic governance is denied to predominantly Black (and Latinx, in other states) communities while continuing in predominantly White communities, a moral and political wrongdoing occurs (Oluwole & Green, 2009).

### Implications

We have demonstrated that race-conscious and race-evasive narratives have consequences for how policy actors make sense of termination approaches. Because of the centrality of local control of school boards in the civic vitality within this multi-racial nation state (Kang, 2023; Morel, 2018), we believe that policy actors should be encouraged to understand and interrogate race in this policy. If our united goal is to preserve American democracy, despite its imperfections, then problem framings that encourage termination of state takeover (and therefore a return to local democratic control) should be encouraged. Race-conscious perspectives, while diverse and dynamic, can create more opportunities for vibrant democratic processes.

Sophisticated recognition of the context of race in this country is politically tricky. Given federal movements against “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” and related discourses and practices (Office for Civil Rights, 2025), this analysis is even more timely. At the beginning of the second Trump administration in 2025, federal officials began an expansive attack on all race-conscious framing, programs, and policies. Their argument is that the Supreme Court ruling that struck down race-conscious college admissions (*Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. Harvard College*, 600 U.S. 181) should be used to herald in a new race-evasive era in the United States. It rests on what legal scholar Haney López (2007) saw almost 20 years ago as, “the contemporary rise of an anticlassification understanding of the Equal Protection Clause that accords race-conscious remedies and racial subjugation the same level of legal hostility” (p. 985). Despite these renewed federal pressures from the Trump administration to see “race-conscious remedies” (or, in this case, race-conscious policy framing) and “racial subjugation” as one and the same, this analysis and others shows the civic imperative for race-conscious perspectives of this policy and its termination.

### Limitations and Future Research

Because of risk to identification, we could not list participant race/gender, along with their position, except in aggregate. Racialized and gendered positionalities most certainly come to bear on how one understands a governance intervention policy. That said, the ethical and legal guidelines laid out during the Institutional Review Board-approved consent process indicated that no identifiable information would be shared beyond the research team. Given the small sample size and identified school districts, we felt that race and gender could risk identification of participants. The analysis was further constrained because it included only local policy actors’ perspectives, not state-level officials. Additionally, some may critique the small sample size of the interviewees. That said, because of the sampling frame, purposive sampling strategies, and specific research questions, we believe the data corpus has sufficient depth—a qualitative analog for statistical “power”—to provide insights into how those in power interpret this policy (Hennink et al., 2017; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Qualitative interview studies, like the one presented in this article, offer valuable insights into the sense-making of board members and district administrators. Future research endeavors could consider expanding the participant pool to include a more diverse range of voices, incorporating perspectives from educators, parents, and community members. There could also be valuable lines of future inquiry into state-level policymakers’ understandings of this type of policy, as well as a

document analysis of color-evasive language in the policy documents themselves. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of state takeovers on racial disparities in educational outcomes and community dynamics would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between educational governance, racial equity, and policy implementation. Finally, this is one of the first published studies on the *termination* of this policy (see Carroll et al., 2024 for a recent exception). Termination studies are a ripe area for future research.

## Conclusions

Despite its criticisms, the democratic control of schools is a central feature of schooling in the United States. Policies undermining democracy, particularly when exclusively enacted within Black communities as they were in Missouri, are politically, morally, and ethically unsound. This article adds to the literature in two additional ways: first, we add to the critical interpretations of “state takeovers,” particularly in understanding the discursive constructions of these policies through race-evasive or race-conscious perspectives. Second, we specifically examine perspectives on how to exit from this policy intervention. In other words, we seek to understand if and how policy actors explain both the implementation and termination of state takeover within an anti-Black system. Given the current attacks on democracy, preserving locally elected control of school boards is an essential method to protect the democratic potential of the United States.

## References

- Adelman, L. (2013). The glorious jurisprudence of Thurgood Marshall. *Harvard Law & Policy Review*, 7, 113. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2336247>
- Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. The New Press.
- Annamma, S. A., Jackson, D. D., & Morrison, D. (2017). Conceptualizing color-evasiveness: Using dis/ability critical race theory to expand a color-blind racial ideology in education and society. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 20(2), 147-- 162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1248837>
- Arsen, D., & DeLuca, T. (2016). Which districts get into financial trouble and why: Michigan's story. *Journal of Education Finance*, 100-126. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jef.2016.a649723>
- Arsen, D., & Mason, M. L. (2013). Seeking accountability through state-appointed emergency district management. *Educational Policy*, 27(2), 248-278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904813475711>
- Bertrand, M. (2010). Differing functions of deracialized speech: The use of place names to index race in focus groups with African American and white parents. *Talk & Text: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse, & Communication Studies*, 30(5), 485-505. <https://doi.org/10.1515/text.2010.024>
- Bertrand, M., & Sampson, C. (2022). Challenging systemic racism in school board meetings through intertextual co-optation. *Critical Studies in Education*, 63(3), 323-339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1765823>
- Board of Education of the City of St. Louis et al. v. Missouri State Board of Education, 271 S.W.3d 1 (Mo. 2008)
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2010). *Racism without racists: color-blind racism & racial inequality in contemporary America* (3rd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
- Burns, P. (2010). Race and support for state takeovers of local school districts. *Urban Education*, 45(3), 274-292. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085908322653>

- Carpenter, B. W., Diem, S., & Young, M. D. (2014). The influence of values and policy vocabularies on understandings of leadership effectiveness. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 27(9), 1110-1133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2014.916008>
- Carroll, J. M., Harris, D., Childs, J., Tracy, H., Jabbar, H., Marsh, J., Shields, M., & Ogden, K. (2024). *A new first: From state takeover to the nation's first all-charter, district-governed school system in New Orleans*. Education Research Alliance for New Orleans. <https://educationresearchalliancencola.org/publications/back-to-the-future-2>
- Center for Public Affairs Research. (2019). *Changing attitudes about racial inequality*. [https://apnorc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/APNORC\\_GSS\\_race\\_relations\\_report\\_2019-1.pdf](https://apnorc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/APNORC_GSS_race_relations_report_2019-1.pdf)
- Derfner, A. (1973). Racial discrimination and the right to vote. *Vanderbilt Law Review*, 26, 523.
- Dumas, M. J., & ross, k. m. (2016). "Be real Black for me": Imagining BlackCrit in education. *Urban Education*, 51(4), 415-442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916628611>
- Dunivin, Zackary Okun; Yan, Harry Yaojun; Ince, Jelani & Rojas, Fabio (2022). Black Lives Matter protests shift public discourse. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(10), 1-11, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2117320119> [Date of Access: October 30, 2023]. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2117320119>
- Fife, S. T., & Gossner, J. D. (2024). Deductive qualitative analysis: Evaluating, expanding, and refining theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23, 16094069241244856. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241244856>
- Ford, M., & Ihrke, D. (2020). Uncontested: Electoral competition in American school board elections. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 58(6), 661-675. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-02-2019-0020>
- Gale, R. C., Wu, J., Erhardt, T., Bounthavong, M., Reardon, C. M., Damschroder, L. J., & Midboe, A. M. (2019). Comparison of rapid vs in-depth qualitative analytic methods from a process evaluation of academic detailing in the Veterans Health Administration. *Implementation Science*, 14(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-019-0853-y>
- Hajnal, Z., Lajevardi, N., & Nielson, L. (2017). Voter identification laws and the suppression of minority votes. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(2), 363-379. <https://doi.org/10.1086/688343>
- Haney López, I. F. (2007). A nation of minorities: Race, ethnicity, and reactionary colorblindness. *Stanford Law Review*, 59, 985.
- Haney López, I. (2013). *Dog whistle politics: How coded racial appeals have reinvented racism and wrecked the middle class*. Oxford University Press.
- Hennink, M. M., Kaiser, B. N., & Marconi, V. C. (2017). Code saturation versus meaning saturation: How many interviews are enough? *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(4), 591-608. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316665344>
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292, 114523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Hess, F. M., & Meeks, O. (2010). *School boards circa 2010: Governance in the accountability era*. Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Retrieved from ERIC: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED515849.pdf>
- Jochim, A. (2016). *Measures of last resort: Assessing strategies for state-initiated turnarounds. Linking state and local school improvement*. Center on Reinventing Public Education.
- Kang, L. (2023). Urban education reform in wicked times: The limits and possibilities of building civic capacity in Detroit. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 31. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.31.7166>

- King, G. P., Russo-Tait, T., & Andrews, T. C. (2023). Evading race: STEM faculty struggle to acknowledge racialized classroom events. *CBE-Life Sciences Education*, 22(1), ar14. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.22-06-0104>
- Lewinski, A. A., Crowley, M. J., Miller, C., Bosworth, H. B., Jackson, G. L., Steinhauser, K., White-Clark, C., McCant, F., & Zullig, L. L. (2021). Applied rapid qualitative analysis to develop a contextually appropriate intervention and increase the likelihood of uptake. *Medical Care*, 59. <https://doi.org/10.1097/MLR.0000000000001553>
- Lopez, T. A., Riesco, H. S., & Goering, C. Z. (2023). Obfuscating systemic racism: A critical policy discourse analysis on the operation of neoliberal ideas in media representation of a school district state takeover. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 31. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.31.6707>
- Marcucci, O. (2024). Racial matching in interviews: Integrating ethical and ontological arguments with quantitative methodological research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 25(1), Art 2. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-25.1.4048>
- Marcucci, O., & Elmesky, R. (2024). Coded racialized discourse among urban educators: Implications for social-emotional outcomes and cultures of antiblackness. *Urban Education*, 59(9), 2859-2888. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859221119115>
- Martin, D. B., Price, P. G., & Moore, R. (2019). Refusing systemic violence against Black children: Toward a Black liberatory mathematics education. In J. Davis & C. C. Jett (Eds.), *Critical race theory in mathematics education* (pp. 32-55). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315121192-4>
- McNall, M., & Foster-Fishman, P. G. (2007). Methods of rapid evaluation, assessment, and appraisal. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 28(2), 151-168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214007300895>
- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2024). *Moving to Missouri*. <https://dese.mo.gov/moving-missouri#:~:text=Facts%20about%20Public%20Schools,to%20more%20than%202023%2C00%20students>.
- Missourinet. (2009, Dec 13). Education officials to discuss closing of troubled Wellston school district. *Missourinet*. <https://www.missourinet.com/2009/12/13/education-officials-to-discuss-closing-of-troubled-wellston-school-district/>
- Morel, D. (2018). *Takeover: Race, education, and American democracy*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190678975.001.0001>
- Morel, D., & Nuamah, S. A. (2020). Who governs? How shifts in political power shape perceptions of local government services. *Urban Affairs Review*, 56(5), 1503-1528. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087419855675>
- Muñiz, R., Lewis, M. M., Tumer, T., & Kane, E. (2023). The story of DACA as told by friends of the court: The role of interest convergence, color-evasiveness, and exceptionality in policy discourse. *American Journal of Education*, 129(3), 297-324. <https://doi.org/10.1086/724305>
- National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2022). *The nation's report card: State profiles: Missouri*. [https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/MO?sfj=NP&chort=2&sub=RED&sj=MO&st=MN&year=2022R3&cti=PgTab\\_ScoreComparisons](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/MO?sfj=NP&chort=2&sub=RED&sj=MO&st=MN&year=2022R3&cti=PgTab_ScoreComparisons)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Education demographic and geographic estimates*. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/acsdashboard>
- Office for Civil Rights. (2025, February 14). *Dear colleague letter regarding Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/dear-colleague-letter-sffa-v-harvard-109506.pdf>

- Oluwole, J., & Green, P. C. (2009). State takeovers of school districts: Race and the Equal protection Clause. *Indiana Law Review*, 42(2), 343-410. <https://doi.org/10.18060/3995>
- Osworth, D. (2022). Looking toward the field: A systematic review to inform current and future school takeover policy. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, 4(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2022.1>
- Pham, L., Henry, G. T., Zimmer, R., & Kho, A. (2018). *School turnaround after five years: An extended evaluation of Tennessee's Achievement School District and Local Innovation Zone*. Tennessee Education Research Alliance. [https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/TERA/files/School\\_Turnaround\\_After\\_Five\\_Years\\_FIN\\_AL.pdf](https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/TERA/files/School_Turnaround_After_Five_Years_FIN_AL.pdf)
- Pham, L., Henry, G. T., Kho, A., & Zimmer, R. (2019). *School turnaround in Tennessee: Insights after six years of reforms*. Tennessee Education Research Alliance. [https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-sub/wp-content/uploads/sites/280/2023/07/School\\_Turnaround\\_After\\_Six\\_Years.pdf](https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-sub/wp-content/uploads/sites/280/2023/07/School_Turnaround_After_Six_Years.pdf)
- Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).
- Pryor, B., Herrick, R., & Davis, J. A. (2019). Voter ID laws: The disenfranchisement of minority voters? *Political Science Quarterly*, 134(1), 63-83. <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12868>
- Rhinesmith, E., Marcucci, O., Harris, K., Park, A., Coleman, K., Christian, T., & Ritter, G. (2021). *Exiting gracefully? Lessons on de-implementing state appointed governance from literature and stakeholder perspectives in Missouri*. Delivered to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- Ray, R. (2023). Race-conscious racism: Alibis for racial harm in the classroom. *Social Problems*, 70(3), 682-697. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spac009>
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Sampson, C., & Bertrand, M. (2022). "This is civil disobedience. I'll continue.": The racialization of school board meeting rules. *Journal of Education Policy*, 37(2), 226-246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2020.1778795>
- Santoro, W. A. (2008). The civil rights movement and the right to vote: Black protest, segregationist violence and the audience. *Social Forces*, 86(4), 1391-1414. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0042>
- Schueler, B. E. (2019). A third way: The politics of school district takeover and turnaround in Lawrence, Massachusetts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(1), 116-153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18785873>
- Schueler, B. E., & Bleiberg, J. F. (2022). Evaluating education governance: Does state takeover of school districts affect student achievement? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 41(1), 162-192. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22338>
- Smith, J. D. (2009). Hostile takeover: The state of Missouri, the St. Louis school district, and the struggle for quality education in the inner-city. *Missouri Law Review*, 74, 1143.
- Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard, 600 U.S. 181 (2023)
- Superville, D. R. (2016, Dec 5). Riverview Gardens, Mo., district receives provisional accreditation. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/riverview-gardens-mo-district-receives-provisional-accreditation/2016/12>
- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30(3), 167-186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914>
- Uggen, C., Manza, J., & Behrens, A. (2003). Felony voting rights and the disenfranchisement of African Americans. *Souls*, 5(3), 48-57. <https://doi.org/10.1080//10999940390463365>

- Welsh, R. O., Williams, S., Little, S., & Graham, J. (2019). Examining the narrative: An analysis of the racial discourse embedded in state takeover. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 52*(4), 502-526. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1691958>
- Wilson, D. C., Brewer, P. R., & Rosenbluth, P. T. (2014). Racial imagery and support for voter ID laws. *Race and Social Problems, 6*, 365-371. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-014-9131-4>
- Wilt, C. L., Annamma, S. A., Wilmot, J. M., Nyegenye, S. N., Miller, A. L., & Jackson, E. E. (2022). Performing color-evasiveness: A DisCrit analysis of educators' discourse in the US. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 117*, 103761. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103761>
- Wong, K. K., & Shen, F. X. (2003). Measuring the effectiveness of city and state takeover as a school reform strategy. *Peabody Journal of Education, 78*(4), 89-119. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327930PJE7804\\_06](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327930PJE7804_06)
- Wright, J., Whitaker, R. W., Khalifa, M., & Briscoe, F. (2020). The color of neoliberal reform: A critical race policy analysis of school district takeovers in Michigan. *Urban Education, 55*(3), 424-447. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918806943>
- Zimmer, R., Henry, G. T., & Kho, A. (2017). The effects of school turnaround in Tennessee's achievement school district and innovation zones. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 39*(4), 670-696. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373717705729>
- Zimmer, R., Kho, A., Henry, G., & Viano, S. (2015). *Evaluation of the effect of Tennessee's Achievement School District on student test scores*. Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development. Retrieved from [https://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wpln/files/201512/ASD\\_Impact\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_FiFin\\_12.8.15.pdf](https://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wpln/files/201512/ASD_Impact_Policy_Brief_FiFin_12.8.15.pdf)

## About the Authors

### Olivia Marcucci

Johns Hopkins University

[omarcucci@jhu.edu](mailto:omarcucci@jhu.edu)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3954-725X>

Olivia is an Assistant Professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, where she is core faculty at the Center for Safe and Healthy Schools and faculty lead for the Urban Leadership specialization in the Education Doctorate Program. Her current research agenda is motivated by the foundational question: How do schools contribute to or disrupt racialized systems of injustice?

### Aaron S. Park

Saint Louis University

[aaron.park@slu.edu](mailto:aaron.park@slu.edu)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6629-0352>

Aaron Park is a Ph.D. Candidate in Education Policy & Equity at Saint Louis University and Senior Education Research Analyst at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, District of Columbia Government. His research focuses on state-appointed district governance, four-day school weeks, and school finance.

### Madelyn Yoo

Washington University in St. Louis

[m.g.yoo@wustl.edu](mailto:m.g.yoo@wustl.edu)

Madelyn Yoo is a clinical research coordinator with an educational background in occupational therapy and human development. She supports pediatric chronic disease management research in the Health Equity, Opportunity, and Education Lab at WashU Medicine led by Dr. Kelly Harris.

**Kelly M. Harris**

Washington University in St. Louis

[kmharris@wustl.edu](mailto:kmharris@wustl.edu)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5282-4226>

Dr. Harris is an Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy, Surgery (Public Health Sciences), and Education at Washington University in St. Louis, School of Medicine. She directs the Health Equity, Opportunity, and Education Research Lab where her research agenda focuses on the interdependence of chronic disease, opportunity and educational outcomes for youth in communities impacted by systems of oppression.

---

## education policy analysis archives

Volume 33 Number 66

October 21, 2025

ISSN 1068-2341

---



Readers are free to copy, display, distribute, and adapt this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and **Education Policy Analysis Archives**, the changes are identified, and the same license applies to the derivative work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. **EPAA** is published by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. Articles are indexed in CIRC (Clasificación Integrada de Revistas Científicas, Spain), DIALNET (Spain), [Directory of Open Access Journals](#), EBSCO Education Research Complete, ERIC, Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson), QUALIS A1 (Brazil), SCImago Journal Rank, SCOPUS, SOCOLAR (China).

About the Editorial Team: <https://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/epaa/about/editorialTeam>

Please send errata notes to Jeanne M. Powers at [jeanne.powers@asu.edu](mailto:jeanne.powers@asu.edu)

---

## **Appendix A**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

#### **Background**

1. What is your relationship with the district?
2. How long have you been in the district community?
3. What were thoughts about the need for state level intervention prior to DESE taking control of your local school district?
4. How did you feel when the district lost accreditation? (*Potentially define accreditation.*)
5. How confident were you in (enter school district name) ability to successfully educate children in the district?

#### **Moment of state takeover questions (RQ1)**

1. How did you find out that the state was intervening assumed control of your local school district?
  - a. Do you remember when you learned this?
  - b. How did you feel?
  - c. How would you describe the community's reaction to the news?
  - d. Were responses in your community consistent or did they vary?
2. From your perspective, what influenced the decision to transition away from local control?

What was the community's involvement in this decision? Were any voices louder or more influential than others? If so, whose?

#### **Experiences during state control (RQ1)**

1. What was the transition from local to state control like from your perspective?
2. How confident were you in the state's ability to successfully education children in the district initially? And now?
3. How do you feel the state has managed the district? What are your overall thoughts and feelings regarding the state's leadership of the district?
  - a. Have you heard other attitudes and opinions from others in your community?
  - b. Have you heard any specific reactions from your community regarding the state's leadership of the district?
4. Can you describe a time when you felt things were working well during the state's leadership?
5. Can you describe a time when you felt things were not working well during the state's leadership?

#### **Appropriate exit strategies (RQ2 & 3)**

1. Where are you in the process of transitioning back to local governance?
2. If you could speak directly to the State Board of Education, what would you recommend?
  - a. Key considerations at both the school and community level
  - b. Key individuals to speak to prior to initiating the transition or to include in the process
  - c. Specific events or engagement of community to consider during the process
3. What are your concerns about the transition process? What are concerns for school board governance following the transition?

4. What are your hopes for the transition process? What are hopes for school board governance following the transition?
5. What are unique values, characteristics, assets, or concerns of (enter district/community name) that should be considered in the planning and implementation of this transition process?
6. *Riverview/Normandy*--
  - a. When do you think is the optimal time for the state to return control to the local school board?
  - b. What has happened to indicate it is or isn't time to transition to local control? What are important considerations in this decision?
  - c. Do you have any thoughts about how this transition should occur? What are important considerations in this process?
7. *SLPS (and outside of STL districts)*--
  - a. What has happened to indicate it was time to transition to back to local control? What are important considerations in this decision?
  - b. What worked well during the transition of control back to a local elected board?
  - c. What did not work well during the transition?
  - d. What were key strategies used were effective during this transition?
  - e. What were additional strategies that were not used but may have been helpful?

## Appendix B

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Codes and frequencies*

Name	Description	#	Exemplar
Administrator - School Board relationship	Includes all references to communication and relationship between superintendents or school administrators and appointed or elected board. Excludes references to communication between superintendents or school administrators and the State Board of Education.	38	"Many of the people that they appointed were not necessarily aware of the things that we were trying to do. They were only aware of what the state had presented to them as their perception of what had happened before I got there. A lot of it was stuff that happened before I got there. And so I was most concerned about that. The other piece, when you get hired as a superintendent, the relationship with the board that hired you is established. And so for a year, I was able to establish a functional, productive relationship with the members of the [elected] board that were there." (Superintendent)
Board Training and Preparation	Includes references to any professional development or training that board members receive or lack thereof. Also includes suggestions for training that board	99	"I just think that there needs to be some key pieces of information that's shared early. I think I mentioned the pre onboarding for potential candidates so they know exactly what it to expect when they join a governing board that has the important role of running a school district.

Name	Description	#	Exemplar
	members should receive. Excludes general references to board member competency or overall preparedness.		So that really is something that I said we're taking the lead." (elected board member)
Charter Schools	Includes any explicit mention of charter schools.	37	"Last year they were having a lot of community turmoil around a charter school that had been approved for the [district]. So that was on top of anything else that had happened. The potential loss of students and then funds to that charter school was like a third trauma. The charter school never got started, but it's just the trauma associated with the fact that it could potentially. It had already been approved. It just never got implemented." (elected and appoint board member)
Community Response to Implementation or De-Implementation of State Control	Includes any references or descriptions of community member responses to the state control, from initial decision through implementation or de-implementation.	116	"We did it myself along with 300 or 400 students and a few teachers and other people from the community had to sit in at the mayor's office. And we went to Jefferson city to protest the state takeover before what decision came down." (elected board member)
Competing Interests and Agendas	Includes any stakeholder questioning the motivations of any other stakeholders.	62	"You have to be careful about who selected. Right now, the Commissioner will recommend to the state board of education. I believe this month six applied, I believe to be added to the board. She will select probably two. Be careful about making sure you dig into the background. Even within elected board, a number of people... And I'm a former school superintendent. So I said from that point, I've seen too many who have come on the board to start the political career. And they really are not interested in doing the work some of them, but to show on their resume. I was a board member at that time. So know what you're getting into, know that people will come to the board for various reasons and try to... If you are appointing, try to select citizens of the community who has a real interest in

Name	Description	#	Exemplar
Confidence in the elected board	Includes references to confidence in or the competency or ability of the existing ELECTED BOARD or potential future ELECTED BOARD members.	95	bettering the school district.” (appointed board member) “When the board removes themselves from the responsibility and allows the leader to make all the decisions, that's when things go awry because there's a system of checks and balances and the checks and balances should be like our political systems, should be functioning, which it's not, it's dysfunctional. But that whole checks and balances issue it's a fine line between board should govern through policy but they also should be aware of what's happening in their schools. And this board has functioning committees. I can tell you that. And everybody's in attendance at board meetings, everybody.” (superintendent)
Elected board Inclusion in appointed board or State Governance Practices	Includes references to how the ELECTED BOARD are included in on-going APPOINTED BOARD/State governance practices, including references to meetings and other communication, transition, and information sharing. Should only apply to SLPS files.	47	“[The EB] did remain in place [during the takeover], but they had absolutely no power, which caused more chaos than it was worth because the poor superintendent I remember, I don't know if he stopped after a while, he was trying to go to both meetings and I'm like, we're like, ‘They don't hire and fire you. Kind of we do. So stop entertaining them.’ But he was going back and forth to both meetings.” (appointed board member)
Elected board-appointed board Transition	Includes references to transition from the elected board to the appointed board only. Excludes transitions from appointed to elected board.	79	“Not one time do [the incoming appointed board] reach out to have a session to, okay, can you give me, tell me this is going on, tell me that's going on. Give me an idea about this, this, this, whatever, some of the issues, concerns, like any company would do. Update me if there was a merger or something like that. None of that took place. They just came in and started shooting from the hip because they didn't care. They came in, started shooting from the hip, just not making decisions.” (elected board member)
Financial Resources	Includes mentions of community level poverty, resource distribution,	59	“One thing they're going to have to consider is this, what do we have to do in order to bring local businesses back in our community? You need a tax base. What is it

Name	Description	#	Exemplar
	community disinvestment, and gentrification. Also includes references to individual or family SES (i.e. references to students from poor communities/families/backgrounds, etc.)		we can do in [district] in order to attract business people to invest in [district's community]. It's almost like they're going to have to have some type of campaign or find something good and just blow it up and say [the community] is worth investing in.” (superintendent)
Impact of Takeover	Includes impact in all areas (i.e. emotional, learning, performance, etc) for all stakeholders (i.e. students, parents, teachers, community, etc). Includes impact on the individual stakeholder and the broader community.	46	“[The appointed board] extended the school day, they extended the school year. 50, 48 percent of the staff ... all the staff was let go and 52% of the staff was rehired which meant 48% of the staff was new. They implemented two weeks additional probably professional development for administrators and maybe another two weeks additional development for the teachers going into the school year. All that had to be done in 30 days. That's a set up for some huge issues and there some people on the leadership team at that time and tried to work to be sure that this would not be from internally a catastrophic deal. But that's what had to happen.” (appointed board member and administrator)
Confidence in APPOINTED BOARD	Includes any references to confidence in the APPOINTED BOARD's ability to lead the district and educate students.	143	“In terms of myself and the other two people I was working with, I felt that we had experience in administration of public organizations. We had experience in and knowledge of the community. That part was not an issue. The handicap we had, was that shortly, just within a couple of months before we started our first term, the elected board had appointed a new superintendent. They didn't wait to give us the option to select a superintendent. They hired somebody and gave them a three year contract, and that person was not the most capable person around.” (appointed board member)
Emotion related to takeover	Includes explicit use of words referencing emotion in relation to the takeover (e.g. pain, happy, joy, trauma, frustration, sadness,	71	“[Losing accreditation] wasn't a good feeling, but I knew that there was power in numbers, power in the people and that there was something that we can do about it. Of course, I'm not happy, but I'm a strong believer, you can't keep crying over spilled milk. You have

Name	Description	#	Exemplar
	excitement, etc). Could include individual or community impact. Excludes use of words referencing emotion in relation to the return to local control.		to strategize and figure out a way to make things better for the majority. The thing about being in office is that we are all passionate about certain things, but you have to sometimes take your feelings out of it and focus on the data and facts. When I say that they could have done focus groups or done some type of analysis or gotten more resources towards the areas that we needed them or whatever that looked like, that stuff could have happened.” (elected board member)
Parent and Citizen Involvement	Includes references of parent or other community member involvement in ELECTED BOARD, APPOINTED BOARD, and other governance practices. Includes references to recommendations for community engagement or parent and citizen involvement.	114	“I said to the commissioner and associate or assistance commissioner at the time is I thought the design of the appointed boards should be two elected people that would continuously have to be elected so that the community would have some input and then three people of their choice, because they wanted to have the majority of the people that represented them on the board. But at least the community then would feel like they had had some input to the members of the board. I think they wanted to eliminate the board because they thought they were dysfunctional.” (superintendent)
Perceptions of Community Members	Includes references to community members, the general electorate, etc. Includes both positive and negative perceptions and judgements about community members (i.e. engagement or competence)	43	“I don't mean to sound pejorative about activists in any way, but it's one thing that hold the system accountable and advocate for things. It's another thing to run the system. And a lot of times, activists had no idea how to run anything, but their critique is strong, sometimes even right. But that's a different skillset than actually being a board member and managing or governing through the challenges of the transition.” (superintendent)
Perceptions of the School or District Pre-Takeover	Includes any stakeholder attitudes and perceptions of the school or district prior to the intervention	52	“I still always have [been confident in the district]. I never, even though they dissolved the district, I never thought that they could not educate children. I never had that thought. If I did, I wouldn't have accepted the appointment. But I never thought that they could not.” (appointed board member)
Politics or Politicians	Includes any explicit use of the words, "politics" or	122	“It's my understanding because of the pressure of state politicians who live in the district or cover the district who are pushing

Name	Description	#	Exemplar
	"politicians." Also includes specific references to political officials, specific politicians, or Jefferson City.		for return to local governance, plus the commissioner of education has talked to me about beginning the process to return to local governance. So it's coming. And I think it was Senate bill 215 that changed the law about transitioning back, first going from a three member to at least a third member board and so forth. So that process has begun." (appointed board member)
Race and Racism	Includes explicit and implicit references to race, racism, or racial dynamics. Includes any racially coded language.	43	"I just think it's important to acknowledge that the concept of emergency management is rooted in the exact opposite of the ideals of American society or what we say they are. So I find it just always the very interesting that usually the communities that experience this exact opposite of American ideology are usually a high minority, high poverty districts that a lot of times do not have the empowerment and privilege that other districts have. So the first thing I would say is particularly in this time of understanding systemic, historic, and current racism and structural institutions in this country is to acknowledge that the very concept of an emergency manager is rooted in systemic historic and current racism." (superintendent)
Reasons for takeover	Includes stakeholders explicitly identifying reasons for takeover/implementation of APPOINTED BOARD.	77	"There were isolated pockets of pure excellence... But the vast majority of the students did not or were not being served in that way. So to answer, probably there did need to be some sort of intervention." (administrator, appointed board member)
State Board	Includes mentions of the State Board of Education, DESE (and others if for participants outside of Missouri), and their policies and decisions related to local districts. Includes references to state accreditation.	164	"There was no statutory mechanism for what the transition out of it would look like. And I remember we were going through the town halls. It was essentially like we can go back to a fully elected board, but anything else, any other structure would require state intervention... When the state board makes a decision, you go back and that's that, and there wasn't really much detail provided by state law." (elected board member)
Strategies for Transition to Local Control	Includes strategies used and recommended as important components	317	"I think again you'd have to identify some indicators you're looking for to know if the time is right but you still have to set a time.

Name	Description	#	Exemplar
	in the return to local control.		Because you won't ever dot every I and cross every T before you make the transition. What you try to do is develop capacity in people so that when the transition is made, whatever issues aren't resolved, they'll be able to resolve and then new issues are coming up, yeah. But I say three years tops but with real intentional planning.” (administrator, appointed board member)