

Code Switching and Political Strategy: The Role of Racial Discourse in the Coalition- Building Efforts of Charter Management Organizations

Laura E. Hernández 

University of California, Berkeley

With the pervasiveness of racism, some scholars have interrogated the role of discourse in perpetuating the racial status quo. While research has denoted how prominent leaders and policies advance deficit-laden characterizations of minoritized groups that reify racial hierarchies, how racial discourse is mobilized in day-to-day politics remains less understood. This study investigates this phenomenon by examining the racial appeals used by charter management organizations as they garner support. It finds that charter management organizations used color-evasive discourse and variable racial narratives to build the case for their organizations with funders, families, and school board members. This code-switching points to the strategic use of racial discourse in local politics while demonstrating how racial power can be manifested in the pursuit of resources.

KEYWORDS: charter schools, discourse, equity, politics of education, race

Growing awareness of the pervasiveness of racism has spurred increased scrutiny of its embeddedness in recent years. With this, many have not only interrogated its overt manifestations but also the more insidious ways it is upheld. Among the latter is the role of discourse, or the ways that understandings of racial groups are mobilized in language, texts, and imagery in the public sphere (Haney López, 2014). Rather than acting as a benign force,

LAURA E. HERNÁNDEZ holds a PhD in education policy from the University of California, Berkeley, and now serves as a senior researcher at the Learning Policy Institute, 1530 Page Mill Road, Suite 250, Palo Alto, CA 94304; email: lebernandez@berkeley.edu. By training, she is an interdisciplinary scholar who synthesizes political and sociological frameworks to investigate education policies and the factors that affect the equitable and democratic character of their implementation. To date, her work has examined the systems, factors, and processes surrounding a range of reforms, including school choice, teacher evaluation, community schools, and whole-child educational initiatives.

scholars have illustrated how racial discourse has bolstered the systemic allocation of advantages and disadvantages among racial groups. Many have pointed to its historical role, noting, for example, how derogatory depictions of colonized and enslaved peoples aimed to justify colonialism and the dawn of capitalism (Mills, 1999; Robinson, 2019). Others have elevated its contemporary influence. For instance, scholars have demonstrated how leaders deploy coded racial appeals to build support for policies that maintain privileged status for dominant groups (Chavez, 2013; Haney López, 2014). Others, too, have illustrated how deficit-laden depictions—many of which seek to evoke contempt or paternalism for minoritized communities—are embedded in policy processes and form the rationales that influence the policy problems and solutions that are identified (Brown & Donnor, 2012; Menjivar & Kil, 2002; D. M. Scott, 1997). While the circulation of this discourse has not been without resistance (Bowler & Segura, 2011; Haney López, 2019), research suggests that it remains an enabling political force that reinforces the racial status quo.

Scholars investigating the discursive and racial tenor of education policy processes have found similar trends, often delineating how derogatory characterizations of minoritized groups are codified in legislation or employed in reformers' persuasive tactics (Dumas, 2013; Felix & Trinidad, 2020; Flores, 2016; Welton et al., 2015). While these studies provide insights into how racial hierarchy is perpetuated in education policy, how this discourse operates in the day-to-day work of education leaders remains comparatively less understood. Sociologists of race assert that race is continuously acted upon and negotiated in social exchanges (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Omi & Winant, 1994), including formal and informal interactions at the local level. Thus, the political activities of education leaders, including the pursuit of enrollment, funding, and political endorsement, necessarily relies on relational and discursive tactics that are influenced and circumscribed by race and racial ideology. Given race's omnipresence and the often-harmful ways racial discourse has functioned in policy processes, this investigation explores how education leaders invoke racial appeals as they build stakeholder support at the local level.

The study investigates this phenomenon by exploring racial messaging in the political efforts of charter management organizations (CMOs)—nonprofits that manage two or more charter schools under the network's philosophy, model, and branding. Over the past two and half decades, CMOs have emerged as prominent institutions. As almost 50% of charter schools across the United States have come under the purview of for-profit or nonprofit-management, CMOs operate the majority, serving over 70% of students in managed schools (Miron et al., 2021) and often holding the market share of charters in urban areas (Lake et al., 2010). While CMOs vary in mission and span, they maintain central offices that sustain or replicate schools across their network, helping to support charters in expeditious ways (Farrell et al., 2012). Moreover, some research suggests that CMOs have supported strong

academic outcomes among the low-income students of color who comprise the majority of their schools (Furgeson et al., 2012). These outcomes have been found in some organization-specific studies, wherein students affiliated with a CMO have been found to outperform their non-CMO peers in state assessments or norm-referenced tests (Colby & Wicoff, 2006; Gleason et al., 2013). Others studies with a national sample have also found that CMOs have a positive impact on achievement, as measured by test scores, graduation, and college matriculation rates (Cheng et al., 2017; Lake et al., 2012).

While some provide a favorable assessment of CMOs, other studies have surfaced problematic evidence of their impact and practices. For example, studies have suggested that CMO impact is inconclusive, noting the variability of student performance among organizations and evidence of weaker math or English language arts scores among CMO students when compared with peers in non-CMO charters and traditional public schools (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2013; Woodworth et al., 2017). Others have shown that some CMOs use exclusionary enrollment practices (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2011), which may inflate the performance data that advocates elevate to justify their expansion. The racialized character of CMO practices has also been empirically demonstrated, begetting questions of how CMOs may exacerbate racialized power dynamics. This critique is not only elevated in studies that delineate the demographic mismatch between CMO practitioners and their students (J. T. Scott, 2008; White, 2018) but also in those that have identified how deficit-laden characterizations of communities of color have undergirded many CMOs' philosophies and programming (Golann, 2015; Henry, 2019; Sondel, 2015) and the broader discourses they employ in marketing tactics (Hernández, 2016).

Given their growing role and the dynamics surrounding their proliferation, this study investigated the political behaviors that CMO leaders used to maintain their organizations. This embedded case study was guided by an interdisciplinary framework that synthesized concepts from political science and the sociology of race and discourse. This conceptual approach enabled an examination of localized political processes and maintained race and discourse as central analytic axes—all of which have tended to be underexamined in CMO research in favor of broader and often decontextualized assessments of their practices. I drew upon interviews, observations, and documents to examine how a population of 10 CMO used racial appeals as they engaged stakeholders in one district, considering the holistic and varying patterns that CMOs displayed. Findings suggest that CMOs articulated an array of racial appeals, which were often coded and varied by target audience, as they sought to garner support. Many of these narratives were deficit-laden; that is, many CMOs pathologized minoritized communities, advanced paternalistic sentiments, and naturalized patterns of inequity to create a sense of urgency for their organizational intervention. At the same time, some racial narratives were positively connoted, particularly with local audiences,

suggesting that racial appeals may be used to advance equity-oriented messages. The variable nature of the racial narratives that CMOs advanced provides a window into their strategic use in localized political processes and illustrates how racial power can be manifested or challenged in political interactions.

CMOs as Institutional and Political Actors: What We Know

CMOs emerged in the mid-1990s as policymakers and advocates promoted their ascension to address some dynamics in the nascent charter sector. For instance, there was initial evidence that a networked approach to building charters lent greater capacity within and among schools. Many early independent charters struggled with site-based autonomies, and a central office—like those in CMOs—helped alleviate these challenges by having dedicated personnel who could attend to tasks like fiscal management, facility acquisition, and human resources (Farrell et al., 2012). As advocates acknowledged the support that charter management could provide, they also elevated CMOs as institutional vehicles in the wake of another challenge facing the sector: growing skepticism around for-profit managers and the poor fiscal and academic performance they had generated (J. T. Scott & DiMartino, 2010; Wohlstetter et al., 2013). With their nonprofit status, CMOs could support the sustainability and replication of charter schools without having to attend to shareholder demands (Farrell et al., 2012). All the while, they could continue embracing the transfer of private-sector practices to public schooling and seeking to bring high-quality charters to competitive scale (J. T. Scott & DiMartino, 2010). With their more favorable nonprofit status and the ability to enhance charter capacity, CMOs began to proliferate—a growth that was supported by charter-friendly state legislation, media attention, and investment from the philanthropy and the federal government (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010).

With their growth, scholars have investigated the institutional features of the CMO sector. For example, while CMOs share a theory of change, studies have shown that their networks and affiliated schools are diverse in focus and reach. CMOs have varied in the number of schools they operate and in geographic span, with some maintaining schools in a given city, state, or region, while others maintain a multistate presence (Miron & Gulosino, 2013). Moreover, these nonprofits have recreated distinct school models, ranging from those that emphasize strict discipline to schools that focus on college preparation or inquiry-based learning (Furgeson et al., 2012). With their diversity, scholars have also drawn attention to differences in how CMOs grow their schools. While many CMOs remain small and local, J. T. Scott and DiMartino (2010) suggested that those seeking to replicate approach it in two ways—corporate style growth or franchising. In the former, CMOs exert more direct control over each site, resulting in more tempered and uniform replication, while the latter facilitates faster recreation with less fidelity.

Farrell et al. (2013) generated a different typology to describe CMO growth styles. They explained that some CMOs enact *premeditated* approaches based upon strategic objectives, *organic* approaches in response to stakeholder demand, or *opportunistic* growth based on the resource availability. Overall, research suggests that CMOs do not act uniformly, but rather employ differing approaches as they sustain, and in some cases, grow their organizations.

Researchers have also examined the demographic characteristics of these institutions, noting the conspicuous patterns that have emerged in their proliferation. Notably, studies have shown that CMOs are disproportionately situated in urban areas (Lake et al., 2010) and serve a greater number of low-income, Black and Latinx students when compared with their host districts (Furgeson et al., 2012). This pattern is complicated by the demographic differences between students and educators in many urban charters. While charters have higher proportions of teachers of color when compared with their host districts nationwide, those in urban settings with a large concentration of CMOs, like Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, have significant demographic mismatches between practitioners and students—representation gaps that are double or more of those in district schools (Casey et al., 2015; White, 2018). Scholars have shown that these mismatches are exacerbated by practitioner turnover, which is prevalent in CMOs (Lake et al., 2010; Torres, 2014) and particularly acute among practitioners of color (White, 2018). With these findings, these studies consider how these differences in demography may affect the responsiveness of CMO schools or exacerbate racialized power differentials.

As scholars have elucidated CMOs' institutional features, others have examined the political factors that affect their sustainability. While some studies have highlighted the significance of dedicated personnel and central offices (Farrell et al. 2012), many have identified private funding as a key factor in CMO growth. Scholars suggest that prominent financial networks have enabled CMOs to recreate their models (Wohlstetter et al., 2011). Notably, studies have shed light on the distinct role of venture philanthropy, delineating how CMOs have not only benefitted fiscally from philanthropy but also politically as donors leverage their networks to agitate for favorable policies (Reckhow, 2012; J. T. Scott, 2009; Tompkins-Stange, 2017). With the sector's diversity, CMOs hold differential ties to corporate or philanthropic groups, though scholars have noted that larger CMOs have deep connections to corporations, foundations, and other reform networks (Kretchmar et al., 2014; J. T. Scott, 2009). Despite this variability, evidence suggests that private enterprise and philanthropy have lent political and fiscal resources to support CMO expansion, helping them grow in prominence.

Studies of CMOs' racial politics, wherein scholars investigate how racial dynamics circumscribe their political processes, are also a subset of the literature. For instance, scholars have exposed how racial groups have been included or excluded in CMO governance. In two such studies, Buras (2011) and Dixon et al. (2015) demonstrated how reformers have engaged

in opportunity hoarding in New Orleans—a landscape where CMOs operate the majority of charters. In their analysis, they exposed how entrepreneurs dispossessed Black practitioners and community members from power and redistributed resources to mostly White, elite outsiders to rebuild the city's educational system after Hurricane Katrina. There are also a growing number of studies that elucidate how understandings of race and racial groups are mobilized in CMOs' political efforts. Some have examined how racial equity has been broadly conceptualized in charter advocacy and rhetoric, often interrogating the individualistic conceptualization of empowerment embedded in their discourse (Dumas, 2013; J. T. Scott, 2013). Others, too, have examined the racialized rhetoric CMOs employ to depict the focus and scope of their work, demonstrating how CMOs can pathologize communities of color and reify harmful stereotypes to illustrate their impact for general audiences through marketing practices (Hernández, 2016). Taken collectively, these studies expose how racial discourse can undergird CMO politics and suggest how their broader discourse can reify prominent racial and market-oriented ideologies.

This review suggests that scholars have made important insights into the ways CMOs function as institutional and political actors. CMOs and their affiliated schools are diverse—though, demographic patterns among CMO students, practitioners, and their host districts have come to characterize the sector. They are also political actors, many of whom have leveraged political and racialized tactics to sustain their organizations. At the same time, more inquiries are needed to understand their localized political behaviors. The research on CMOs has tended to advance broad and often decontextualized assessments of their institutions and political actions. Yet, much of the political work of CMO leaders happens at the ground level as they seek the charter authorization, financial support, and student enrollment to sustain their schools and organizations. These localized political behaviors are the focus of this study. Through the interdisciplinary framework described below, I investigated how CMO leaders sought to build local coalitions to support their schools with keen attention to the discursive and racialized strategies deployed in their efforts. Given the racialized patterns surrounding their growth, attention to the racialized dimensions of their practice represents a critical addition to the field as it elucidates how racial appeals may be mobilized in localized exchanges and how those tactics can reify, reformulate, or resist social understanding of race that affect equity advancement.

Investigating Racial Appeals in CMO Efforts: An Interdisciplinary Framework

To understand the political and discursive dimensions of CMOs' localized efforts, this study employed an interdisciplinary framework that synthesized tenets from urban regime theory with sociological understandings of race and discourse. By integrating these concepts, this analytic approach provides

a multifaceted and comprehensive approach through which to examine the varied dimensions of CMO political practices.

Urban Regime Theory and the Localized Political Work of Leaders

Emerging from political science, urban regime theory investigates coalition building and the dynamics that surround this political process. At its foundation, the theory posits that politics are shaped by the relationship between appointed or elected leaders and the external control of resources (Stone, 1989). With political and economic shifts that require leaders to pursue a range of inputs (Stone, 2008b), regime theorists assert that leaders do not work unilaterally to institute reform. Instead, the theory suggests that leaders must secure arrangements (i.e., coalitions) with various actors to cultivate the resources and conditions needed for their initiatives (Stone, 1989).

Conceptualizing politics and leaders' work in this way enables an analysis of the actors they engage in reform efforts. At a basic level, this theory asks who coalition members are—a question that is often answered by identifying what resources are essential for policy and what actors can provide them. Shipps's (2003) pivotal investigation of Chicago's education policy waves illustrated this key point, revealing how coalition composition was greatly determined by the importance of actors' resources to reform objectives. Of the reform coalitions she identified, her discussion of "entrepreneurial regimes," or the coalitions necessary to restructure schools in the market's image, is particularly relevant to this study. She found that business elites, families, and politicians were essential to sustaining these regimes, as they provided the monetary, political, and symbolic resources that built public legitimacy and secured a deregulated policy context. Through this example and other coalition typologies identified in education reform (Bulkley, 2007; Shipps, 2012), regime scholars demonstrate how actors' material, social, and symbolic resources are instrumental to leaders' decision to pursue their support.

In addition to elucidating coalition members and their resources, urban regime theory attends to the conditions and relationships that surround reform efforts. For instance, scholars have often demonstrated the impact of local history on coalitions, noting how each city has historical structures, resource inequities, and alliances that inform how reforms are received and manifested (Henig et al., 2001; Shipps, 2003; Stone, 1989). Within these contextual dynamics, regime scholars analyze how leaders seek to secure cooperation from actors who may hold disparate values, priorities, and experiences in local settings. To this end, this theory calls attention to the engagement strategies (e.g., formal/informal relationship-building, marketing) leaders use to secure support and their embedded persuasive tactics.

These tenets of urban regime theory guided this analysis and its understanding of CMO coalition building and the strategies leaders employ to persuade actors to lend support—actors who are assumed to hold disparate

values, priorities, and positionalities that inform their willingness to support initiatives.¹ While the theory has typically been employed to investigate how formal government officials mobilize coalitions, its use in this analysis of CMOs is also relevant and instructive. As a framework, regime theory is fundamentally focused on how leaders navigate a local landscape to build support for reform. While operating outside of traditional governmental spaces, CMO leaders are nonetheless officials that play an increasingly prominent role in urban settings and actively work to secure political, symbolic, and material resources that sustain their institutions.

Understanding Race and Racial Appeals in Coalition Building

Urban regime theory also provides insights into how race serves as a confounding factor in coalition building. For instance, researchers have highlighted how interracial distrust, often stemming from a history of local conflict, inhibits multiracial coalitions (Stone, 1989, 2008a; Trujillo et al., 2014). Researchers have also examined the dynamics within racial groups and noted how intragroup relations can promote power for marginalized racial groups while encouraging intergroup conflict in coalition-building efforts (Orr, 1996). Others, too, have considered the impact of Black leadership in building coalitions. While positing that Black leadership held political capital that could alleviate racial tensions, studies have found that Black leadership did not typically lead to broad support nor did it assuage race-based challenges (Henig et al., 2001). Collectively, these analyses elucidate the impact of local racial histories and racial representation in coalition-building efforts, demonstrating how racial group interests are advanced and how intra- and intergroup relations operate.

While regime scholars have provided insights into how race affects coalitions, some suggest that racial analyses remain limited. Horan (2002) articulated this critique by noting how regime scholars have tended to focus on “the behaviors or attitudes of racially identified political actors” (p. 20) without attending to other significant factors that make race a power relationship. Sociologists of race provide additional fodder for Horan’s critique by asserting that race serves as a central organizing principle of society (Omi & Winant, 1994), thus making it omnipresent and influential in systems, interactions, and the collective psyche. While race is socially constructed, its effects are tangible, influencing the resources that racial groups have amassed (Cox, 2000; Mills, 1999; Omi & Winant, 1994) as well as socialization processes that make race a way of explaining and acting in the world (Appiah, 2000; Omi & Winant, 2009). With its impact on societal structures and individuals’ way of being, one can understand race as a circumscribing force in political activities and how actors engage.

Discourse has played an instrumental role in shaping this racialized reality, as race and understandings of racial groups are learned, acquired, and

legitimated in discourse and representational practices (Hall, 1997; van Dijk, 2002). Sociologists have shown that discourse “mark[s], assign[s], and classifies” (Hall, 1997, p. 259) racial groups, thus influencing how individuals understand the causes and possible solutions to issues occurring along racial lines (Lewis, 2004). In shaping mental structures, discourse influences how individuals and institutions behave and the goals they seek (Lakoff, 2014). In the policy arena, it informs how initiatives are developed and implemented as well as the public’s imagination of what is effective or just policy (Dumas et al., 2016). Given the impact and influence of discourse, this study conceptualizes racial discourse as a key dimension of coalition building and considers how understandings of race are continuously present, acted upon, and negotiated in political efforts.

Understanding how racial discourse operates in coalition building requires an understanding of color-evasiveness, the racial ideology that predominates the United States and much of the globe (Annamma et al., 2017). Color-evasiveness purports that all racial groups have secured equal opportunity because of the gains made by the Civil Rights Movement. With this supposed egalitarian turn, color-evasive adherents have increasingly foregone explicit references to race in policy and language to minimize race’s salience (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). As a result, scholars have noted changing discourse patterns, which include the increasing use of euphemisms or imagery to allude to racial groups in lieu of explicit racial language (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; van Dijk, 2002). To illustrate, some individuals may describe marginalized racial groups with income-based or geographic modifiers (e.g., poor, urban) rather than in explicit racial terms. Text features, such as the placement of pictures and bolded phrases, can also serve to indirectly refer to racial groups.

While changes in word choice may seem benign, those espousing color-evasive discourse can articulate racial stories that reify harmful hierarchies in the midst of this coded language (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). For instance, narratives that ascribe negative characteristics to nondominant racial groups are a common feature of this discourse. In addition, narratives that implicitly lay blame for disadvantage with those in marginalized positions—either by naturalizing patterns of inequity by omitting references to the structural forces that create them or by elevating “beating-the-odds” narratives to suggest that individual merit can enable anyone to succeed—are also commonly articulated in color-evasive discourse. While color-evasiveness and its narratives are prevalent in the United States, scholars have illustrated how this orientation has been acutely deployed by reformers advancing market-based policies. For example, scholars have illustrated how market reformers depict communities as damaged to create a sense of crises that their interventions are purported to address without mention of the structural factors that create challenging realities (Hutchison, 2011; Saltman, 2015). Studies have also shown how reformers’ depictions of pathology often carry paternalistic underpinnings that minimize local agency and assets (Baldridge, 2016). Overall, color-evasiveness has

perpetuated a “racial grammar” (Bonilla-Silva, 2012) that reproduces a racial order by obscuring how race is discussed while furthering narratives that reify hierarchies and the forces that enable them.

In addition to reinforcing this racial grammar, the turn toward coded racial discourse has other social and psychological consequences. For example, experiments have shown that exposure to color evasiveness—when compared with messages that embrace multiculturalism—is associated with greater displays of explicit and implicit racial bias (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko et al., 2000). Color-evasiveness has also been shown to decrease individuals’ sensitivity to discrimination and the development of empathetic orientations, which can take a cognitive and tangible toll on nondominant racial groups (Holoien & Shelton, 2012; Tettegah, 2016), cause intergroup tensions (Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013; Vorauer et al., 2009), and affect how organizations seek to address inequities (Block, 2016). The effects spurred by color evasiveness have also been empirically demonstrated in educational settings. For instance, young students exposed to color-evasive tropes are less likely to identify or accurately describe discriminatory incidents (Apfelbaum et al., 2010), and color evasive teachers tend to resist efforts to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices (Hachfeld et al., 2015). With its impact and pervasiveness, this study investigates how color-evasiveness and its narratives are invoked in CMOs’ localized political behaviors to consider how the racial status quo is challenged or reasserted.

In synthesizing tenets from the sociology of race and discourse and urban regime theory, this study makes key conceptual contributions. Its interdisciplinary framework not only provides a way to elucidate the important yet underexamined localized efforts of CMOs but also enables an investigation into race and discourse’s persistent role in political exchanges, which can reveal how racial power are asserted, reified, or resisted. With this, the study’s framework extends the explanatory power of urban regime theory by moving race and discourse from a concept that is narrowly or peripherally examined to one that is more comprehensively understood. Moreover, the framework can be instructive to scholars who seek to investigate how race and racial equity are implicated in the politics of education.

Research Design

This study answered the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do CMO leaders engage diverse stakeholders to garner support and resources for their organizations?

Research Question 2: How is race and racial discourse invoked in these efforts?

To explore this phenomenon, this research followed an *embedded case study design* (Yin, 2013), where I holistically examined the outreach practices

of a population of CMOs alongside an analysis of nested subunits (i.e., individual CMOs) to elucidate additional insights. By definition, case studies enable researchers to investigate phenomena in context, allowing scholars to analyze multiple data sources to understand the phenomenon and its interplay with its environment. This design also enabled the exploration of similarities and differences within and across embedded cases, which provided more opportunity to corroborate evidence and illuminate specific case dynamics (Yin, 2013).

Case Selection and Description

I conducted research on all the CMOs operating in Birchwood, California,² a medium-sized city in Northern California. As a population, Birchwood CMOs represented a typical case (Patton, 2001), as the organizations shared significant features that are demonstrated in CMO research. First, like other urban centers, Birchwood has become a CMO-rich context. Charters have come to serve over one-third of the city's school-aged youth and created a competitive landscape for student enrollment. Birchwood CMOs operate the market share (i.e., approximately 60%) of local charters, making them prominent institutional actors in the city. Moreover, Birchwood CMOs have faced growing critiques from community members, including those centered on CMOs' selective enrollment practices and their corporate ties. School board members of the Birchwood Unified School District—the primary authorizing and regulatory body of charter schools under state law—also increasingly elevated these critiques in authorization proceedings. While the school board rarely denied petitions prior to 2015, more board members opposed or denied applications in recent years and grounded the position in these arguments. These political issues and public sentiments made it so that CMOs contended with negative perceptions of their organizations and sought to persuade some stakeholders of their import and impact.

Birchwood CMOs also reflected the demographic patterns identified in CMO research. First, schools affiliated with CMOs disproportionately served low-income students of color when compared with the host district and the broader city population, with over 80% of their students qualifying for free and reduced lunch and over 90% identifying as Black, Latinx, or Asian (Table 1). Data also suggest the predominance of White practitioners, particularly among their leadership ranks. To illustrate, of the 63 Birchwood CMO administrators, over half identified as White, with Black leaders representing the second largest group at about 20%. Imbalances in racial demographics in CMO board leadership—appointed boards of trustees who determine policy and strategic goals to guide the operation and expansion of CMO-affiliated schools—were also present. Taken collectively, 60% of the 111 appointed CMO board members in Birchwood were White. Black board members composed the next largest racial group (i.e., 24%), and Latinx and Asian racial

Table 1
An Overview of Birchwood’s CMO Population (2016–2017)

	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	CMO average	District average ^a	City average
Student demographics (%)													
FRL	77	89	54	95	86	91	67	97	91	71	82	75%	30%
AA	18	5	57	10	10	94	40	8	21	62	33	30%	25%
L	13	44	25	82	83	4	49	87	74	23	48	40%	25%
A	58	48	4	3	3	0	2	0	1	3	12	10%	20%
W	3	2	11	1	2	0	3	0	0	3	3	10%	25%
Other	8	2	12	5	3	2	6	5	4	9	6	5%	5%
ELL	22	25	1	58	45	6	12	28	37	10	24	30%	—
Number of schools													
Birchwood	3	3	2	6	3	2	1	1	7	1	2.9	—	—
Others in California	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	2	28	10	4.5	—	—
National presence	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	—	—	—

Note. FRL= free and reduced-price lunch; AA = African American; L = Latinx; A = Asian; W = White; ELL = English language learner.

^aDemographic percentages were rounded to the nearest five to maintain confidentiality of the district and city.

subgroups held 15% or less of the remaining seats. Overall, the data suggest that Birchwood CMOs had racial imbalances between their practitioners and the communities they serve, like those found in the broader research base.

Finally, Birchwood CMOs were diverse organizations, reflecting the sector's institutional variation. They ranged in programming (i.e., “no excuses,” STEM/STEAM [science, technology, engineering, and maths concepts to integrate with the arts], deeper learning) as well as in size and geographic reach. The CMO population was primarily composed of small or medium-sized charter networks³ that exclusively operated schools in Birchwood and/or its surrounding cities. Only two CMOs were extra-large networks with affiliated sites in multiple states and California regions. Six of the 10 organizations were founded in Birchwood, and five of these organizations continued to exclusively operate schools within the city boundaries. The size of Birchwood CMOs suggests that these organizations had engaged in tempered expansion efforts in the city even though all but two CMOs had operated schools in the city for at least 15 years.⁴ Yet, at the time of the study, six Birchwood CMOs were actively engaged in conversations about replication, spurring efforts to secure additional support and investment.

Given that Birchwood CMOs embody these characteristics identified in broader research, they represent a typical case. Thus, this investigation can yield analytic generalizations (Yin, 2013) that can help scholars understand how racial appeals are deployed as leaders seek to convince stakeholders to support their reforms. At the same time, there were unique sociopolitical dynamics in the locale with which CMOs would contend as they built coalitions. First among these was the city's history and culture of social activism, particularly around issues of economic and racial equity. With Birchwood's organizing tradition, its residents tended to be socially conscious and adamant about being heard in policy matters. Another salient issue was the growing scrutiny on racial opportunity gaps in local schools. Several recent Birchwood Unified School District reforms had fueled academic gains, but these gains had been primarily felt in the city's Latinx community, leading many to believe that leaders were underserving Black students. Many perceived the city's charters as complicit in this marginalization, causing them to question the cultural responsiveness of their school environments (Hernández, 2017).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected from March 2015 through January 2017 and included 18 semistructured interviews, 573 organizational documents, and 48 observations. I interviewed leaders and affiliates with each of the 10 Birchwood CMOs to understand the strategies each organization enacted and any challenges that arose in their efforts. I supplemented interviews with an examination

Table 2
Data Sources by Charter Management Organization

Data source	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	Total
Interviews	1	2	1	3	3	1	1	1	3	2	18
Organizational documents	42	47	43	77	68	32	42	63	107	52	573
Number of public events observed	4	4	4	4	8	2	2	3	13	4	48

of publicly available documents from each CMO, including internal (e.g., strategic plans, board-meeting materials) and external materials (e.g., informational materials, webpages). This provided the opportunity to corroborate how leaders implemented their efforts and to surface convergent and divergent patterns in CMO messaging for various stakeholders. Finally, I observed multiple public engagements that CMOs enacted to seek stakeholder support (e.g., petition hearings, community events, fundraisers), generating detailed field notes. These observations provided an opportunity to observe CMOs’ coalition-building strategies and to further data triangulation. Table 2 shows the data sources collected for this study disaggregated by CMO. Given the varying size of each organization, the amount of data retrieved for each CMO varied depending on how much material each organization made available or produced.

To analyze the data sources, I first engaged in qualitative coding (Miles & Huberman, 2019) of interview transcripts, documents, and field notes to delineate the strategies CMOs used to engage stakeholders. I applied deductive codes from the study’s framework of urban regime theory (e.g., local political culture, race/class landscape, city history, stakeholders and their resources, stakeholder engagement) and racial discourse during an initial data review. The latter included codes that captured instances of explicit racial language (e.g., race, Latinx, African American), deracialized euphemisms (e.g., urban, underserved, low-income), and the visual representation of racial groups in materials and public engagements. (See Supplemental Appendix for the study’s full codebook in the online version of the journal.) During this initial analysis phase, I also generated inductive codes related to the persuasive tactics CMOs deployed (e.g., testimonial, accolades) and other messages they invoked (e.g., 21st century, college attendance, economy) while refining code definitions and boundaries through a constant-comparative method (Kolb, 2012). All codes were then applied during a second round of coding to increase the precision and reliability of code applications.

To further investigate the nuance of racial discourse, I conducted two additional analytic steps consistent with critical discourse analysis (CDA)—a guiding method and tool in this study that elucidates how discourse reproduces or challenges broader ideologies that systematically influence text or talk.

CDA allows researchers to analyze microlevel linguistic or textual features as well as assess the overall messages constructed in their messaging to draw connections between discursive exchanges and broader societal structures (van Dijk, 1997). With the prominence of color-evasiveness, CDA provides a methodological approach to surface the nuances of how race and conceptions of racial groups are directly or indirectly invoked in interactions. To do this, I conducted a focused analysis of the coded excerpts related to racial discourse, identifying additional articulations of implicit or explicit racial subtexts (e.g., civil rights, restorative justice, diversity, character). As a final step, I assessed the overall argumentation related to race that were present in these excerpts. I analyzed how patterns reflected, adapted, or deviated from color-evasiveness (e.g., eschewing of racial references, individualization or meritocracy, naturalizing inequity) and how they varied by audience.

To support holistic and embedded case analyses, I created case memos for each CMO, which captured their individual characteristics and key themes related to their outreach and racial messaging for stakeholder groups. These embedded case memos informed the development of a cross-case data display (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of the discursive strategies CMOs deployed. Once the data was reduced and organized in cells, I noted patterns in CMO outreach and verified my findings by using counts to check for representativeness (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, I examined if there were outliers and negative evidence to consider divergent data. In drawing my conclusions, I identified a finding if the conclusion was triangulated, and more positive evidence was present despite the presence of negative information. At the same time, I explored negative data to understand the complexity of CMO approaches where relevant.

Findings

Leaders from each CMO identified funders, families, and school board members as groups that lent critical resources to sustain their organizations. Lesser mentioned constituencies included educators, who were identified by the city's most recently founded CMOs (i.e., B3, B6), and students, who were mentioned by a B4 leader who oversaw a small network of deeper learning high schools. Because evidence demonstrated a consensus around school board members, families, and funders as a focus of CMO outreach, this investigation focused on elucidating the coalition-building practices CMOs used to secure their support.

In the sections below, I briefly describe the primary engagement strategies the focal CMOs used to elicit support from each audience followed by an in-depth discussion of the discursive and racialized tactics they employed as persuasive mechanisms. Table 3 provides a holistic and disaggregated overview of how CMOs deployed racial discourse in their efforts. The racial appeals in CMO outreach displayed some cross-organizational patterns.

Table 3
Charter Management Organizations’ Racial Discourse
Patterns by Target Audience

	Board member engagement		Family engagement		Donor engagement	
	Race explicit	Coded ^a	Race explicit	Coded	Race explicit	Coded
B1	18	35	0	3	—	—
B2	10	28	6	19	0	1
B3	2	4	0	7	—	—
B4	8	14	0	2	0	3
B5	17	23	2	8	1	10
B6	5	8	0	3	0	1
B7	3	5	0	2	0	6
B8	3	4	0	5	1	1
B9	20	31	0	3	2	11
B10	3	7	2	3	2	17
Total	89	159	10	55	6	50

^aCoded racial discourse includes those that are income-related, deracialized, or visually indexed.

The focal CMOs predominantly used implicit racial messaging to appeal to stakeholders, typically eschewing explicit racial references in favor of visual references to minoritized racial groups and the use of deracialized modifiers. This was particularly prevalent with families and funders, where CMOs generally made few explicit references to race, communities of color, or specific racial groups. School board member engagement differed as CMOs made more explicit references to race in these exchanges, yet CMO leaders still advanced implicit racial appeals with comparatively more frequency. Taken collectively, this array of racial appeals enabled CMOs to signal that their schools served students of color despite the rarity of explicit racial discourse in their outreach.

In the context of their racial word choice and semiotics, CMOs advanced narratives about race and racial groups to garner support from target audiences. With families, these narratives were positively connoted while many of those used with board members and funders were deficit-laden as leaders built a case for educational intervention. The contours of CMO coalition-building efforts for target audiences are described in turn in the following sections. Given the convergence of data around racial discourse patterns used by Birchwood CMOs, findings are primarily discussed in the aggregate, but deviating evidence is explored when applicable.

Board Member Outreach: Race as Explicitly and Implicitly Present

CMOs identified school board members as key coalition actors who they engaged for support. Interviewees acknowledged that these local policy-makers served as primary charter authorizers as per California law, thus making them the central political authority and regulatory body that determined if CMO-affiliated schools could exist. To secure their support, each CMO formally engaged board members through required charter petition applications that contained descriptions of their programming, performance results, and their compliance with California's Education Code. Following petition submission, CMOs conducted formal presentations for board officials and attending members of the public. In addition to these legally required engagements, representatives from eight CMOs mentioned that they engaged board members through informal efforts such as one-on-one meetings and invitations to school sites as a way of seeking support.

CMOs used varied racialized discourse in their board outreach. Some of the discourse in slide presentations or public commentary at petition hearings was race-explicit, particularly as they described their school populations and some diversity-related efforts. For example, the 16 slide presentations in the data set, which captured efforts by each CMO, included a minimum of four references to specific racial groups or general allusions to communities of color, equaling 89 references across the CMOs. Sixty-six percent of these references were made in describing student demographics while an additional 16% were made in discussing academic performance by subgroups. Most of the remaining explicit references were concentrated among four CMOs that had been criticized for their lack of student and teacher diversity. With these critiques, CMO representatives, who included White leaders as well as practitioners of color, discussed efforts to diversify their schools in explicit racial terms during hearings. To illustrate, the White CEO of B5, a CMO with a history of low Black student enrollment, stated that the organization "had hired community organizers to focus in on the African American community" while calling attention to the progress B5 had made in diversifying their leadership ranks.

On fewer occasions, some CMOs (e.g., B4, B6, B7) made explicit racial references to suggest an urgent need for change. For instance, an Asian American school leader at B7—a small but reputable CMO that operated deeper learning high schools—read the following statement during a charter hearing:

Since 2002, the number of African-American men killed on the streets of Birchwood has nearly matched the number who graduated from high school. Seven hundred eight-seven Black boys and men in Birchwood were victims of homicide. During that same time, just 802 graduated ready to attend the state university.

In this example, the B7 leader used explicit racial messaging in naming Black men and tied race to concepts of crime and grim educational prospects.

Similarly, those at B4, a medium-sized, Birchwood-based CMO, verbally shared statistics to describe community circumstances. After naming the neighborhood's racial composition, the Asian-American leader described its high levels of poverty, incarceration rates, and gang activity to delineate the challenges students and families faced. In these few examples, CMOs deployed explicit racial language to characterize communities in deficit-laden ways as way to underscore the need for educational intervention.

While representatives made explicit racial references, CMOs also deployed implicit racial discourse in their board outreach. Primarily, CMOs indexed race through visual means, usually through prominently displayed pictures in PowerPoint presentations. Of the 16 hearing presentations, 14 contained prominently displayed images of students, parents, or teachers of color on one or more slides. Visual racial representation was also accomplished with student and parent testimonials during presentations or public comment, which used by each CMO in petition hearings. Amid visual racial references, each CMO described their students with income-related or deracialized modifiers in presentation slides and in their accompanying comments. Each CMO used income-based modifiers (e.g., low-income, high poverty) a minimum of two times, totaling 59 instances across the board-focused materials. In addition, CMOs used deracialized modifiers (e.g., underserved, inner-city) a total 81 times across the 16 board presentations, with references ranging from three to 18 among the individual organizations. Deracialized modifiers were not simultaneously used with race explicit modifiers while income-related descriptors co-occurred with race explicit discourse in CMO board member engagement 35 times. These overlapping instances of explicit and implicit racial discourse in CMO engagement exclusively occurred as CMO representatives described their students or discussed student performance.

A subset of income-related and deracialized descriptors was articulated as leaders described their organizational missions. To illustrate, when describing their academic programming, a White CMO executive at B9, a large national network, stated the following: "Our mission is to empower inner-city students to be different and stand out from their community peers." Here, the term "inner city" is a euphemism used by B9 leaders to describe its students of color that compose most of its school population. A Black leader at B1, a small, locally based CMO, opted for the euphemism "underserved" in their vision statement to the school board: "B1 exists to prepare all students, especially those who have been traditionally underserved, to successfully enter a high performing high school, with the goal of being admitted into a 4-year college after graduation from high school." Whether it was conveyed in describing performance, demographics, or their organizational missions, CMOs frequently used deracialized modifiers, which coexisted with explicit racial frames as well visual references to individuals of color in their board member engagement.

Summary

To secure board support, CMOs advanced racial appeals that were both explicit and coded to demonstrate their impact and responsiveness. CMOs typically used explicit racial messaging when describing their school populations and performance data. In fewer cases, explicit allusions to race or minoritized groups were made as CMO leaders characterized Birchwood neighborhoods and the need for interventions. Yet, explicit and implicit racial messaging coexisted, primarily when describing CMO students and their missions.

Family Engagement: A Deracialized Depiction With Positive Narratives

CMO leaders also cited the importance of families as a stakeholder group in their coalitions. In addition to noting how families motivated their work, leaders discussed how families lent critical resources, including helping schools meet enrollment projections and maintaining fiscal solvency amid the competitive school landscape. Interviews and charter petitions revealed that CMOs relied upon particular strategies and communication channels to solicit family support. For instance, each CMO circulated advertisements on social media and posted informational flyers at local businesses and community centers. Representatives of each CMO also described outreach that enabled them to speak directly with families. These strategies included individual recruitment (e.g., canvassing neighborhoods, festival booths) and conducting presentations in larger settings (e.g., open houses, church congregations).

Unlike school board outreach, materials intended for families typically eschewed explicit racial language as they sought to persuade them of their effectiveness. Of the 48 flyers, webpages, and advertisements targeting prospective parents, only 10 documents contained references to specific racial groups, which were exclusively made in congress with a graphical depiction of the schools' demographic composition. These demographic descriptions were concentrated among three CMOs (i.e., B2, B5, B10), which differed in size, geographic presence, and the primary racial group they served. In addition to the infrequency of race-explicit discourse, family outreach included fewer coded racial modifiers in comparison with board outreach. Of the 48 family-facing documents, none included income-related descriptors (e.g., low-income), and deracialized terms (e.g., diverse, underserved) were made a total four times by three organizations (i.e., B1, B6, B10), which varied in size, spread, and years of operation. Visual references to race, which came in the form of prominently displayed images of students or families of color on outreach materials, were the more commonly used implicit reference in family engagement. Specifically, 18 of the 48 materials targeting families contained a prominent image of a person of color. While two CMOs forewent visual allusions to minoritized racial groups (i.e., B1, B6) in their materials, these organizations used the terms *diverse* or *underserved* to describe their student

populations in family outreach. Overall, family engagement materials tended to understate race discursively, and visual racial messaging was less pronounced.

Within this more deracialized depiction, CMOs elevated programmatic information that could persuade families of their effectiveness and responsiveness. For example, each CMO provided information about their pedagogical models (e.g., blended learning, wrap-around supports) in their family recruitment. In describing their models, each CMO also emphasized themes related to school culture and college preparation. For example, a B9 enrollment flyer stated, “A college-going culture is embedded in our curriculum, academic programs, and school activities.” In a second example, B1 described their model on a webpage for prospective families as such: “Our commitment to high expectations in attendance, academic achievement, and character development results in our students being prepared for lifelong success.”

These themes were not only reiterated at the four family events observed in this study but also included the introduction of a new message with racial subtexts: social justice. To illustrate, at a community event held by the small but long-established B5, the Latinx principal expressed that its students were to make history. He stated, “Like those that came before them, your children are learning to be change makers. They are going to make the world to be the way they want it to be for your family and your community.” In alluding to “those that came before them,” the principal alluded to the city’s history of race conscious social movements, and in doing so, invoked a racial construct that would likely resonate with community members. A community organizer and supporter of B10—a CMO with a national presence—made more explicit allusions to Birchwood’s activist history at a ceremony celebrating a school’s relocation to one of the city’s Black neighborhoods. She stated, “[*Samuel Haynes*] walked the halls of this school and died in our streets. Your children will now walk these halls and continue his legacy.” Like the B5 principal, this speaker of color emphasized how B10 students were future leaders. Yet, she explicitly alludes to a specific leader—Haynes—who was a Birchwood-based activist in the Black community with the more progressive wing of the Civil Rights Movement. Invoking Haynes’ name drew connections between the B10 school and the race-based social movement that had been a part of Birchwood history, thus situating the CMO in the quest for social justice.

Summary

In engaging families, CMO representatives rarely invoked race-explicit or coded racial discourse beyond visual racial allusions as they sought to persuade them to support and enroll in their schools. With this more deracialized presentation, CMOs tended to emphasize descriptions of their programming while at times, advancing narratives related to social justice at parent gatherings, which served as an implicit racial reference for Birchwood audiences who would associate these statements with local social movements.

Funder Engagement: Color-evasive Approach With Deficit-Laden Tropes

CMO leaders also identified funders as key coalition members because of their ability to provide supplemental funding and access to financial networks that could support operations, facilities access, and site development. With this, CMOs employed strategies to cultivate a funder base. An overarching strategy was to maintain webpages for current and prospective donors. These webpages, which were hosted by eight of the 10 CMOs, typically included donation portals, lists of sponsors, and downloadable flyers regarding corporate sponsorship. Interviewees and observations also revealed that six CMOs (i.e., B4, B5, B7, B8, B9, B10)—medium or large CMOs with long-standing presence—engaged in individualized recruitment by encouraging their board members to leverage their networks to solicit financial investment. Finally, four CMOs (i.e., B5, B7, B9, B10) held annual fundraisers to engage donors.

Like in other outreach, race tended to be invoked implicitly through visual means that worked with deracialized modifiers to describe students and communities. For example, each of the analyzed funder webpages contained a prominent image of a student of color or included a student testimonial in a textbox or video, making a total of 22 semiotic racial references across 33 funder webpages and embedded materials. Amid these visual racial references, each CMO included income-related or deracialized modifiers to describe their students or schools. For example, the small, deeper learning CMO B7 described its work as follows:

B7 runs small, high-performing urban public schools. Our mission is to transform the lives of students—especially those who will be the first in their family to attend college—by preparing them for success in college, in careers, and in life.

In this statement, B7 used the deracialized phrases “urban” and “first in their family” alongside a prominent image of a student of color on their funder-intended flyer to characterize its organizational work. In another example, B4—a medium-sized, long-established local CMO—stated their mission on a funder webpage:

[T]o provide a superior education to Birchwood’s most underserved communities by creating schools that relentlessly focuses on our students’ academic achievement. Our schools have an average of 95% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch and are located in neighborhoods that have high levels of violence and poverty.

Here, B4 used the deracialized term “underserved” and income-based references related to poverty status alongside racialized imagery, signaling that the CMO worked with minoritized communities despite the lack of race-explicit references.

Amid this coded language, each CMO with funder-facing materials emphasized the idea of impact to demonstrate how they were improving the lives of the minoritized youth. A representative example of this can be seen in the introductory language on B9's donor webpage: "Will you make College Guaranteed a reality for our students? B9 relies on the hard work and help of many people to maintain high-performing schools. At B9, we are changing the odds for our students." The sentiment of "changing the odds" was also reflected in a promotional video created by the small, Birchwood-based B5, which was accessible on its funder webpage. In the video, a B5 board member stated, "We are taking students from despair and poverty, and they're being educated. I can't think of anything else that is more important." In this description, the White male speaker characterized B5 students as living in deprived conditions and suggested that the CMO were the drivers in altering their paths. Overall, materials intended for donors relied on implicit racial references, which suggested how CMOs worked with minoritized communities without naming race in the process. In doing so, they crafted narratives that emphasized the ideas of impact to show how CMOs positively affected student circumstances.

At the four funder events analyzed in this study, CMO leaders deployed racial discourse in similar ways, opting to rely on coded modifiers and visual racial cues to describe students as they crafted messages to garner donor support. Amid this coded discourse, CMO representatives advanced narratives that signaled how their schools altered student trajectories, primarily through student testimonials. For instance, a Black female alumnus from the large CMO B9 described herself in the following way: "When I was 13, I was resistant, lazy, and downright unresponsive. But the B9 teachers never gave up on me." Here, the young speaker suggests that B9 practitioners were central to altering her behavior, which put her on the path to success that she described in the remainder of her comments. Another example can be seen in the comments shared by a Black male alumnus from B10—a large, national, CMO—at an annual fundraiser: "Our society has so many gifted and talented children living in the worst neighborhoods . . . B10 gave me and my father the foundation to my goals and dreams." Through his words, the alumnus suggests that B10 was the change agent that reset his trajectory and mitigated negative circumstances. Taken collectively, these representative examples demonstrate how the CMOs further emphasized the idea of impact for funder audiences by using the voices of their constituents of color to illustrate how their lives had been affected. While potentially resonant for donors, these tactics had problematic subtexts. Not only were CMO constituents often asked to recount traumatic experiences along their personal journeys for primarily White, wealthy, and non-Birchwood audiences, but their narratives also contained deficit-laden tropes that tapped into imaginaries and stereotypes of individuals and communities of color.

While coded racial references were more common in funder outreach, there were six instances where CMOs included explicit racial language in donor materials. In one instance, B8, a small but well-established Bay Area CMO, used the phrase “teachers of color” to solicit donations for a teacher pathway initiative to diversify its workforce. B9 and B10—two national and large CMOs in the sample—also included references to race or specific racial groups alongside income-based modifiers in select materials as they described their student populations. Finally, two CMOs (i.e., B5, B10) used race-explicit discourse when presenting statistics that elevated the urgency of advancing educational equity for minoritized youth. To illustrate, B5, a small, well-established CMO, made this statement in an invitation to their annual gala:

Birchwood’s future is threatened because kids aren’t getting the education they deserve: 27% of the city’s Latino and African American students drop out before graduating high school. Of those who graduate, only 44% graduate with the credits that make them even eligible to apply to a 4-year college.

While discourse like B5’s was rare, it suggests that CMOs may be willing to name race when raising awareness around the need for educational intervention for communities of color.

Summary

To garner funder support, CMO representatives primarily relied on implicit racial discourse as they made the case for their organizations. Through visual racial allusions or coded modifiers, CMOs suggested that they worked in service of minoritized communities while rarely characterizing their work as such. Amid these coded racial appeals, Birchwood CMOs depicted their organizations as central to changing students’ odds—an argument that was, at times, advanced after depicting minoritized communities as damaged and in need of saving.

Racial Appeals in CMO Coalition Building

While many increasingly recognize the potency and impact of racial appeals, this investigation examined how they have been mobilized in the coalition-building practices of CMOs—a prominent actor in the education reform community who engage in localized political activities to maintain their organizations. In synthesizing concepts from urban regime theory and the sociology of race and discourse, this study surfaced the nuanced ways racial discourse and its subtexts are deployed to build persuasive messages that secure support and resources. Findings suggest that the racial discourse upon which CMOs relied in coalition building was primarily characterized

by color-evasiveness, which allowed race to be omnipresent yet understated. CMOs tended to advance implicit and semiotic racial references in their outreach and engagements, thus indexing, or signaling, the idea of race for audiences despite the lack of explicit racial language (van Dijk, 1997). In turn, the more frequently used income-related or deracialized modifiers became alternative ways to speak about minoritized racial groups. While the focal CMOs did employ race-explicit discourse upon occasion—often amid illustrations of impact or in making the case for intervention—they were comparatively less prevalent and typically coexisted with coded references that tempered their use.

While studies have shown that a reliance on implicit racial language can have negative effects in of itself, understandings of racial groups that are conveyed amid this racial insinuation must also be interrogated to comprehensively assess the implications of this discourse. Within CMOs' racial discourse, the organizations tended to advance deficit-laden characterization of their constituents and local communities, particularly as they sought support from funders and school board members—stakeholder groups who maintained financial, political, and/or racial power. CMOs and their constituents often pathologized urban spaces or conveyed paternalistic sentiments that suggested that minoritized communities needed saving in engaging these audiences. While these narrative depictions may capture some of the realities that minoritized groups face in the wake of centuries of systemic oppression, they nonetheless tap into public imaginaries of urban spaces as those characterized by criminality, damage, and depravity.

In doing so, CMO discourse and its embedded narratives reified the racial status quo by advancing harmful understandings of racial groups in the pursuit of financial, political, and symbolic resources and the cultivation of a positive public image—a tactic compounded by the demographic mismatch in CMOs whereby primarily White leaders engage in these political activities in the supposed service of communities of color. Moreover, their color-evasive orientation discursively naturalized patterns of inequity by eschewing references to the forces that created them and by emphasizing individualistic success stories to suggest that those who fail have done so because of their lack of persistence. These findings coalesce with the research on the discursive politics of education reformers, providing further evidence of how supporters of market-oriented policies—a group that includes CMOs—can use problematic tactics in the pursuit of organizational interest. At the same time, there was evidence that CMOs advanced some positively connotated narratives amid color-evasive discourse. These narratives, which elevated messages related to diversity and social justice with local audiences suggests that color-evasive discourse may, at times, be used to advance equity-oriented messages that challenge derogatory social understandings that characterize and uphold racial hierarchy.

Color-Evasive Discourse and Political Strategy

While the use of color-evasive discourse has its own implications, its variable character in CMO coalition building suggests it serves as a strategic, political strategy. On one hand, the strategy underlying this variation is evidenced by the fact that the data analyzed in this study were intentionally developed. The materials, webpages, and petition hearing resources were crafted and presumably vetted by CMO personnel before they were shared for consumption. The presentations and public gatherings were not informal in nature, but rather contained predetermined speakers and content that helped CMOs make their case for support. Thus, the variation observed in CMO efforts can be understood as curated and deliberate.

Moreover, the CMOs articulated messages in ways that would seemingly resonate with audiences and their values—a longstanding tactic that political scholars have elucidated (Lakoff, 2014). With families, allusions to social justice could be understood as showing affinity for Birchwood's culture of activism and progressive politics—values that the minoritized groups they engaged would likely hold dear. With board members, references to diversification not only signaled race consciousness which conformed with the local political culture but also anticipated critiques CMOs faced related to the racialized patterns among their students and faculties. For funder audiences, CMOs opted to rely on color-evasive tropes that emphasized notions of individualism and naturalized patterns of inequity to urge this socioeconomically powerful stakeholder group to invest in their organizations through the values they presumably held.

This variability in racial messaging suggests that CMOs engaged in a form of political and racial code-switching as they built their coalitions—a strategy that had seemingly paid dividends as none of the CMOs had had their charter petitions denied, showed signs of fiscal insolvency, nor closed their doors due to low enrollment during the study's duration. While these political strategies had been successful in helping CMOs secure support, they have equity implications. On one hand, circulating deficit-laden characterizations of people of color—particularly when enacted by or engaging those that hold racial, political, and economic power—reifies negative understandings of minoritized groups, which affects how the U.S. grapples with race collectively. While CMOs' messages may be characterized by “tacit intentionality” (Gillborn, 2005), wherein individuals do not deliberately invoke ideas that reify or resist racial hierarchy, they nonetheless advanced problematic conceptions of racial groups at times, which upheld broader patterns of racial advantage and inequity. Moreover, the selective way that racial discourse was deployed begets questions as to how the pursuit of resources in a competitive landscape may drive leaders to employ tactics that undermine important social aims. Each CMO in this study espoused equity commitments. Yet, they used tactics that undermined this orientation to pursue resources. While counternarratives, like those articulated by CMOs with families and board members,

may seek to elevate positively connoted conceptions of race and racial groups, they nonetheless co-occur and compete with derogatory depictions in the public sphere, thus providing a window into the way racial power is manifested in political interactions.

Conclusion

The current moment has exposed the entrenchment of race in U.S. society. While many have consistently recognized and borne the weight of systemic racism, citizens who previously turned a color-evasive eye to these processes are increasingly cognizant of how race influences daily manifestations of power, privilege, and oppression. This emerging recognition of systemic racism and the growing public will to embrace antiracist orientations will influence the policies and politics surrounding education reform for the foreseeable future.

While this study makes important contributions to understanding the political practices of CMOs, it also provides insights into how scholars may examine education reform efforts and how their political and normative dynamics can further or stunt racial equity. The study demonstrates what can be garnered from investigations of racial discourse, which have been underexamined in policy research, and suggests how more comprehensive understandings of race and racial power can be facilitated in political scholarship. While its focus on one population of CMOs inhibits generalizability, the study advances conceptual and methodological tools that can be employed into investigations of how leaders build resonant and racialized messages in the advancement of their initiatives. Moreover, given that school choice is likely to remain prominent in the policy arena, this study can inform how scholars investigate these ongoing efforts amid changing political windows and opportunities.

While this study generated descriptive and conceptual insights, future research can enhance the analytic conclusions drawn in this study. For example, examinations of CMO outreach can explore how they engage other audiences in their coalition building. Investigations of CMO efforts to elicit support from the broader public and media would be especially instructive, as evidence suggests that these institutions have a growing infrastructure (e.g., personnel, budget) dedicated to influencing public perception, buffering prominent critiques, and maintaining a positive image (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018).

Scholars can also engage in a range of comparative analyses to enhance the research base. Specifically, studies can examine the similarities and differences among CMOs in different regions to draw further analytic conclusions about the distinct political and racialized behaviors of these actors at the local level. Additional scholarly efforts can be made to conduct in-depth studies of CMOs at the local level. This study's assessment of the strategies enacted by Birchwood CMOs identified patterns across the organizations. Yet, the study relied on publicly accessible data, which minimized opportunities to observe how coalition-building tactics were developed and enacted—insights that

could lead to more systematic comparisons of how CMO practices may differ depending on their features, histories, and orientations. In addition, future studies should investigate how CMO tactics compare with those employed by leaders of independent charters and traditional public schools. All education leaders engage in coalition building to sustain their schools amid a precarious pool of resources and shifting sociopolitical sentiments. Comparing how leaders enact political and discursive tactics in the pursuit of support can elucidate the tenor of their respective political strategies, helping to understand if these tactics are widespread or distinctly shepherded by particular organizations.

In addition to its implications for research, this study has insights for policy and practice. The work of educational leaders is inherently relational and political. As educational leaders navigate contexts, they seek to meet their organizational needs by securing stakeholder support. As this study showed, leaders can advance harmful and derogating tactics that promulgate racial inequities and hierarchy to ensure their institutional presence during these exchanges. To counteract these practices, school and district officials should invest and engage in systemic professional development that deepen practitioners' understandings of implicit racial bias, community assets, and broader systems of disadvantage. These learning opportunities should engage leaders and district and school board officials in reflections on stakeholder engagement and its accompanying messaging to identify culturally responsive strategies. Moreover, this professional learning should support practitioners, education leaders, and charter authorizers in identifying deficit-laden orientations in schooling practice so that they can support culturally responsive institutions that attend to the technical, political, and normative dimensions that circumscribe all educational practice and interactions (Oakes, 1992). Reflecting upon a fuller range of educational practices can enable practitioners and policymakers to embrace a more multidimensional definition of equity in schools and policy. Rather than narrowly defining equity, practitioners and decisionmakers can acknowledge how political actions and normative practices within them can inhibit or advance racial equity.

ORCID iD

Laura E. Hernández  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0372-937X>

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

This research was supported with funding provided by the National Academy of Education and the National Academy of Education/Dissertation Fellowship Program.

¹Other political theories, such as Advocacy Coalition Framework, shed light on how coalitions advance their agendas, but these tend to examine how allies who share core policy beliefs pursue priorities. In contrast, urban regime theory investigates how leaders engage and persuade diverse stakeholders who may carry variable beliefs and priorities to advance their initiatives.

²I used pseudonyms for individuals and the locale as well as alphanumeric names for each CMO to maintain the confidentiality of the study's participants.

³Small networks are those that operate three or fewer schools while medium-sized networks are those managing between four and nine schools. Large CMOs are those operating between 10 or 30 schools, and extra-large CMOs support the operation of 30 or more sites (Miron et al., 2021).

⁴Of the two more recently established CMOs, B3, which operated two schools, was established in 2007 while the other, B6, opened the doors of its two affiliated schools in 2014.

References

- 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>
- Apfelbaum, E. P., Pauker, K., Sommers, S. R., & Ambady, N. (2010). In blind pursuit of racial equality? *Psychological Science*, 21(11), 1587–1592. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610384741>
- Appiah, K. A. (2000). Racial identity and racial identification. In L. Back & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Theories of race and racism: A reader* (pp. 632–640). Routledge.
- Baldrige, B. J. (2016). “It’s like this Myth of the Supernegro”: Resisting narratives of damage and struggle in the neoliberal educational policy context. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 20(6), 781–795. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1248819>
- Block, C. (2016). The impact of color-blind racial ideology on maintaining racial disparities in organizations. In H. A. Neville, M. E. Gallardo, & D. W. Sue (Eds.), *The myth of racial color blindness: Manifestations, dynamics, and impact* (pp. 243–259). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14754-015>
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). Racial attitudes or racial ideology? An alternative paradigm for examining actors’ racial views. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 8(1), 63–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310306082>
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2012). The invisible weight of whiteness: The racial grammar of everyday life in contemporary America. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(2), 173–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.613997>
- Bowler, S., & Segura, G. (2011). *The future is ours: Minority politics, political behavior, and the multiracial era of American politics*. CQ Press.
- Brown, A. L., & Donnor, J. K. (2012). Toward a new narrative on Black males, education, and public policy. In *The education of Black males in a “post-racial” world* (pp. 25–40). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315872667>
- Bulkley, K. E. (2007). Bringing the private into the public: Changing the rules of the game and new regime politics in Philadelphia public education. *Educational Policy*, 21(1), 155–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904806297192>
- Buras, K. L. (2011). Race, charter schools, and conscious capitalism: On the spatial politics of whiteness as property (and the unconscionable assault on black New

- Orleans). *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(2), 296–331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/63/haer.81.2.6l42343qqw360j03>
- Casey, L., Di Carlo, M., Bond, B., & Quintero, E. (2015). *The state of teacher diversity in American education*. Albert Shanker Institute.
- Center for Research on Education Outcomes. (2013). *National charter school study 2013*. https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/ncss_2013_final_draft.pdf
- Chavez, L. (2013). *The Latino threat: Constructing immigrants, citizens, and the nation* (2nd edition). Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804786188>
- Cheng, A., Hitt, C., Kisida, B., & Mills, J. N. (2017). “No excuses” charter schools: A meta-analysis of the experimental evidence on student achievement. *Journal of School Choice*, 11(2), 209–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2017.1286210>
- Colby, S., & Wicoff, K. (2006). *Aspire public schools: From 10 schools to 6-million kids*. Bridgespan Group.
- Cox, O. C. (2000). Race relations: Its meaning, beginning, and progress. In L. Back & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Theories of race and racism: A reader* (pp. 96–103). Routledge.
- DiMartino, C., & Jessen, S. B. (2018). *Selling school: The marketing of public education*. Teachers College Press.
- Dixson, A. D., Buras, K. L., & Jeffers, E. K. (2015). The color of reform: Race, education reform, and charter schools in post-Katrina New Orleans. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(3), 288–299. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557826>
- Dumas, M. J. (2013). “Waiting for Superman” to save Black people: Racial representation and the official antiracism of neoliberal school reform. *Discourse (Abingdon)*, 34(4), 531–547. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.822621>
- Dumas, M. J., Dixon, A. D., & Mayorga, E. (2016). Educational policy and the cultural politics of race: Introduction to the special issue. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815616488>
- Farrell, C., Nayfack, M. B., Smith, J., & Wohlstetter, P. (2013). One size does not fit all: Understanding the variation in charter management scale-up. *Journal of Educational Change*, 15(1), 77–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-013-9216-7>
- Farrell, C., Wohlstetter, P., & Smith, J. (2012). Charter management organizations: An emerging approach to scaling up what works. *Educational Policy*, 26(4), 499–532. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904811417587>
- Felix, E. R., & Trinidad, A. (2020). The decentralization of race: Tracing the dilution of racial equity in educational policy. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 33(4), 465–490. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1681538>
- Flores, N. (2016). A tale of two visions: Hegemonic whiteness and bilingual education. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 13–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815616482>
- Furgeson, J., Gill, B., Haimson, J., Killewald, A., McCullough, M., Nichols-Barrer, I., Verbitsky-Savitz, N., Teh, B., Bowen, M., & Demeritt, A. (2012). *Charter-school management organizations: Diverse strategies and diverse student impacts*. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED528536.pdf>
- Gillborn, D. (2005). Education policy as an act of white supremacy: Whiteness, critical race theory and education reform. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(4), 485–505. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500132346>
- Gleason, P. M., Tuttle, C. C., Gill, B., Nichols-Barrer, I., & Teh, B. (2013). Do KIPP schools boost student achievement? *Education Finance & Policy*, 9(1), 36–58. https://doi.org/10.1162/EDFP_a_00119
- Golann, J. W. (2015). The paradox of success at a no-excuses school. *Sociology of Education*, 88(2), 103–119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040714567866>

- Hachfeld, A., Hahn, A., Schroeder, S., Anders, Y., & Kunter, M. (2015). Should teachers be colorblind? How multicultural and egalitarian beliefs differentially relate to aspects of teachers' professional competence for teaching in diverse classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 48(May), 44–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.02.001>
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- Haney López, I. (2014). *Dog whistle politics: How coded racial appeals have reinvented racism and wrecked the middle class*. Oxford University Press.
- Haney López, I. (2019). *Merge left: Fusing race and class, winning elections, and saving America*. The New Press.
- Henig, J. R., Hula, R. C., Orr, M., & Pedescleaux, D. S. (2001). *The color of school reform: Race, politics, and the challenge of urban education*. Princeton University Press.
- Henry, K. L. (2019). Heretical discourses in post-Katrina charter school applications. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(6), 2609–2643. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219853811>
- Hernández, L. E. (2016). Race and racelessness in CMO marketing: Exploring charter management organizations' racial construction and its implications. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 91(1), 47–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2016.1119566>
- Hernández, L. E. (2017). *Managing the brand: Racial politics, strategic messaging, and coalition-building efforts of charter management organizations*. University of California, Berkeley. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2wr7q0wt>
- Holoien, D. S., & Shelton, J. N. (2012). You deplete me: The cognitive costs of color-blindness on ethnic minorities. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(2), 562–565. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.09.010>
- Horan, C. (2002). Racializing regime politics. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 24(1), 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9906.00112>
- Hutchison, P. A. (2011). *The political economy of colorblindness: Neoliberalism and the reproduction of racial inequality in the United States* [Doctoral dissertation, George Mason University]. <http://mars.gmu.edu/handle/1920/6035>
- Kolb, S. M. (2012). Grounded theory and the constant comparative method: Valid research strategies for educators. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 3(1), 83–86. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC135409>
- Kretchmar, K., Sondel, B., & Ferrare, J. J. (2014). Mapping the terrain: Teach For America, charter school reform, and corporate sponsorship. *Journal of Education Policy*, 29(6), 742–759. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2014.880812>
- Lake, R., Bowen, M., Demeritt, A., McCullough, M., Haimson, J., & Gill, B. (2012). *Learning from charter school management organizations: Strategies for student behavior and teacher coaching*. Mathematica Policy Research. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED530801>
- Lake, R., Dussault, B., Bowen, M., Demeritt, A., & Hill, B. (2010). *Learning from charter school management organizations: Strategies for student behavior and teacher coaching*. Center on Reinventing Public Education. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED530801.pdf>
- Lakoff, G. (2014). *The ALL NEW don't think of an elephant! Know your values and frame the debate*. Chelsea Green.
- Lewis, A. E. (2004). "What group?" Studying whites and whiteness in the era of "color-blindness." *Sociological Theory*, 22(4), 623–646. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0735-2751.2004.00237.x>
- Lubienski, C., & Weitzel, P. C. (Eds.). (2010). *The charter school experiment: Expectations, evidence, and implications*. Harvard Education Press.

- Menjívar, C., & Kil, S. H. (2002). For their own good: Benevolent rhetoric and exclusionary language in public officials' discourse on immigrant-related issues. *Social Justice*, 29(1/2), 160–176. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29768126>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Mills, C. W. (1999). *The racial contract*. Cornell University Press.
- Miron, G., & Gulosino, C. (2013). *Profiles for for-profit and nonprofit education management organizations* (14th ed.). National Education Policy Center. <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/emo-profiles-11-12.pdf>
- Miron, G., Gulosino, C., Shank, C., Elgeberi, N., Davidson, C., Hernandez de Alvarez, F., Jurdzy, B., Larsen, J., Pham, D., Ruder, K., Urdapilleta, L., & Urshel, J. (2021). *Profiles of for-profit and nonprofit education management organizations: Fifteenth edition*. National Education Policy Center. https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/RB%20Miron%20EMO%20complete_2.pdf
- Oakes, J. (1992). Can tracking research inform practice? Technical, normative, and political considerations. *Educational Researcher*, 21(4), 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X021004012>
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2009). Thinking through race and racism. *Contemporary Sociology*, 38(2), 121–125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009430610903800205>
- Orr, M. (1996). Urban politics and school reform: The case of Baltimore. *Urban Affairs Review*, 31(3), 314–345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107808749603100302>
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Reckhow, S. (2012). *Follow the money: How foundation dollars change public school politics*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199937738.001.0001>
- Richeson, J. A., & Nussbaum, R. J. (2004). The impact of multiculturalism versus color-blindness on racial bias. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 40(3), 417–423. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2003.09.002>
- Robinson, C. J. (2019). *Cedric J. Robinson: On racial capitalism, Black internationalism, and cultures of resistance*. Pluto Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvr0qs8p>
- Saltman, K. J. (2015). The austerity school: Grit, character, and the privatization of public education. *Symploke*, 22(1), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.5250/symploke.22.1-2.0041>
- Sasaki, S. J., & Vorauer, J. D. (2013). Ignoring versus exploring differences between groups: Effects of salient color-blindness and multiculturalism on intergroup attitudes and behavior. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7(4), 246–259. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12021>
- Scott, D. M. (1997). *Contempt and pity: Social policy and the image of the damaged Black psyche, 1880-1996*. University of North Carolina Press. <https://doi.org/10.5149/uncp/9780807846353>
- Scott, J. T. (2008). Managers of choice. In W. Feinberg & C. Lubienski (Eds.), *School choice policies and outcomes: Empirical and philosophical perspectives* (pp. 149–176). SUNY Press.
- Scott, J. T. (2009). The politics of venture philanthropy in charter school policy and advocacy. *Educational Policy*, 23(1), 106–136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904808328531>
- Scott, J. T. (2013). School choice and the empowerment imperative. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 88(1), 60–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2013.752635>

- Scott, J. T., & DiMartino, C. (2010). Hybridized, franchised, duplicated, and replicated: Charter schools and management organizations. In C. A. Lubienski & P. C. Weitzel (Eds.), *The charter school experiment: Expectations, evidence, and implications* (pp. 171–196). Harvard Education Press.
- Shipp, D. (2003). Pulling together: Civic capacity and urban school reform. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(4), 841–878. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312040004841>
- Shipp, D. (2012). Empowered or beleaguered? Principals' accountability under New York City's diverse provider regime. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 20, 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v20n1.2012>
- Sondel, B. (2015). Raising citizens or raising test scores? Teach For America, “no excuses” charters, and the development of the neoliberal citizen. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 43(3), 289–313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2015.1064505>
- Stone, C. N. (1989). *Regime politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946–1988*. University Press of Kansas.
- Stone, C. N. (2008a). Civic capacity and urban education. In M. Orr & V. C. Johnson (Eds.), *Power in the city: Clarence Stone and the politics of inequality* (pp. 203–225). University Press of Kansas.
- Stone, C. N. (2008b). Urban regimes and the capacity to govern: A political economy approach. In M. Orr & V. C. Johnson (Eds.), *Power in the city: Clarence Stone and the politics of inequality* (pp. 76–107). University Press of Kansas.
- Tettegah, S. Y. (2016). The good, the bad, and the ugly: Color-blind racial ideology and lack of empathy. In H. A. Neville, M. E. Gallardo, & D. W. Sue (Eds.), *The myth of racial color blindness: Manifestations, dynamics, and impact* (pp. 175–190). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14754-011>
- Tompkins-Stange, M. E. (2017). *Policy patrons: Philanthropy, education reform, and the politics of influence*. Harvard Education Press.
- Torres, A. C. (2014). Is this work sustainable? Teacher turnover and perceptions of workload in charter management organizations. *Urban Education*, 51(8), 891–914. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914549367>
- Trujillo, T. M., Hernández, L. E., Jarrell, T., & Kissell, R. (2014). Community schools as urban district reform: Analyzing Oakland's policy landscape through oral histories. *Urban Education*, 49(8), 895–929. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914557644>
- van Dijk, T. A. (1997). Chapter 1: The study of discourse. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as structure and process* (pp. 1–34). Sage.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2002). Discourse and racism. In D. Goldberg & J. Solomos (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to racial and ethnic studies* (Vol. 10, pp. 145–159). Blackwell.
- Vasquez Heilig, J., Williams, A., McNeil, L. M., & Lee, C. (2011). Is choice a panacea? An analysis of Black secondary student attrition from KIPP, other private charters, and urban districts. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 2(2). <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0vs9d4fr>
- Vorauer, J. D., Gagnon, A., & Sasaki, S. J. (2009). Salient intergroup ideology and intergroup interaction. *Psychological Science*, 20(7), 838–845. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02369.x>
- Welton, A. D., Diem, S., & Holme, J. J. (2015). Color conscious, cultural blindness: Suburban school districts and demographic change. *Education and Urban Society*, 47(6), 695–722. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124513510734>
- White, T. (2018). Teachers of color and urban charter schools: Race, school culture, and teacher turnover in the charter sector. *Journal of Transformative Leadership & Policy Studies*, 7(1), 27–42. <https://doi.org/10.36851/jtlps.v7i1.496>

- Wohlstetter, P., Smith, J., & Farrell, C. C. (2013). *Choices and challenges: Charter school performance in perspective*. Harvard Education Press.
- Wohlstetter, P., Smith, J., Farrell, C. C., Hentschke, G. C., & Hirman, J. (2011). How funding shapes the growth of charter management organizations: Is the tail wagging the dog? *Journal of Education Finance*, 37(2), 150–174. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jef.2011.0019>
- Wolsko, C., Park, B., Judd, C. M., & Wittenbrink, B. (2000). Framing interethnic ideology: Effects of multicultural and color-blind perspectives on judgments of groups and individuals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(4), 635–654. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.78.4.635>
- Woodworth, J. L., Raymond, M. E., Han, C., Negassi, Y., & Richardson, W. P. (2017). *Charter management organizations*. Center for Research on Education Outcomes. https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/cmo_final.pdf
- Yin, R. K. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage.

Manuscript received February 1, 2020

Final revision received December 1, 2021

Accepted December 16, 2021