

# Taking Charge of Choice:



## Mayoral Control of Charter Schools in Crossroads

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# Adoption

- In 2001, state became the 38th to pass a charter school law, ending a 7-year debate.
- 1st state to grant a mayor charter authorizing authority (sponsorship)
- 2007-08: 16 charter schools in Crossroads authorized by Mayor Jackson



# Key Questions

- How did charter school politics intersect with social and political contexts in Crossroads?
- What explains the timing of the charter school adoption in this state?
- How (and why) did stakeholders' interests coalesce to produce mayoral chartering authority?
- What are the implications of this “mayoral control” for choice policy?



# Project Focus:

- Policy formulation
  - Problem identification/goal-setting
  - Policy networks, entrepreneurs & interest group politics
- Policy implementation
  - Capacity building
  - Accountability
- Policy implications
  - Competition
  - Innovation diffusion
  - Sustainability



# Methods: Qualitative Case Study

## Document review

Policy reports, school accountability reports, press releases, newsletters, mayoral speeches, legislative hearing testimony, newspaper articles and editorials (*Crossroads Star*)

## Interviews (28)

Purposeful sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

Snowball/chain sampling (Patton, 2002)



# Interviews

- Education policy staff (Governor, State Supt)
- Elected officials (former mayors; House & Senate)
- School district officials
- Education association leaders/lobbyists
- Mayor's staff: Charter School Office
- Mayor's Charter School Board members
- Charter school operators/founders
- Business leaders
- Foundation officers
- Philanthropists
- University administrators/researchers



# Data Analysis

## Interviews

- Transcribed verbatim
- Pattern coding across/within stakeholder groups (Fetterman, 1989; Yin, 1989)
- Coding strategies: iterative & theory-driven
- Inductive and deductive (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

## Documents & Field Notes

- Pattern coding and document summaries: general descriptive categories using constant comparative method (Patton, 2003)



# Public Policymaking Process (Kingdon, 1995)

## Problem Stream

- Problem definition

- Agenda setting

## Policy Stream

- Policy communities/issue networks

- Policy entrepreneurs

## Political Stream

- Changes in administration

- Changes in legislative control



# “Window of Opportunity”

- What **problems** were associated with the charter school “solution?”
- What were the educational and political priorities of the **policy communities** involved in the charter school initiative?
- What role did the **new Crossroads mayor** play?
- What role did **policy entrepreneurs** play in this policymaking process?



# Paddling upstream

- Culture of insularity and incremental policymaking:

“People will say that Missouri is the “Show-Me” state, but I think our state has a bit of that, especially when it comes to education. People are a little reticent to embrace a new idea as the newest and greatest until they really have some reason to think it is a good, new idea.”

(Senator Terry Landers, R)



# Problems Identified: economic, educational, operational

- Population decline in city
- Concerns about economic vitality, ability to attract business
- Low high school graduation rates in CPS
- Achievement gap
- Lack of innovation; excessive rules and regulations
- Absence of accountability, responsiveness



# Solution:

## Innovation & Accountability

- “The idea of freedom with accountability was to me like as American as you could get. We are going to treat teachers as professionals. We are going to cut you free of a lot of these rules and regulations that may not be tied to student learning and in exchange, we are going to hold you accountable for what you do. So I think the whole idea of innovation, the idea of serving different populations... (Senator Landers)



# The other solution...

- Privatization
- Expanded parental options
- Market-based reforms
  - Vouchers
  - Tuition tax credits
- Charters as “middle ground”



# Charter School Coalitions

- Republicans in the state legislature
- Chamber of Commerce
- Think Tank
- Philanthropists
- Foundations
- National Charter School Associations (CER, NACS)
- Democrats in the state legislature
- Teacher unions
- Education associations (school boards, urban school districts, superintendents)



# Role of Policy Entrepreneur

“... could be in or out of government, in elected or appointed positions, in interest groups or research organizations. But their defining characteristic, much as in the case of a business entrepreneur, is their willingness to invest their resources -- time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money -- in the hope of a future return.” (Kingdon, 1995, p. 122)



## Senator Landers: Policy entrepreneur and “mother of the movement”

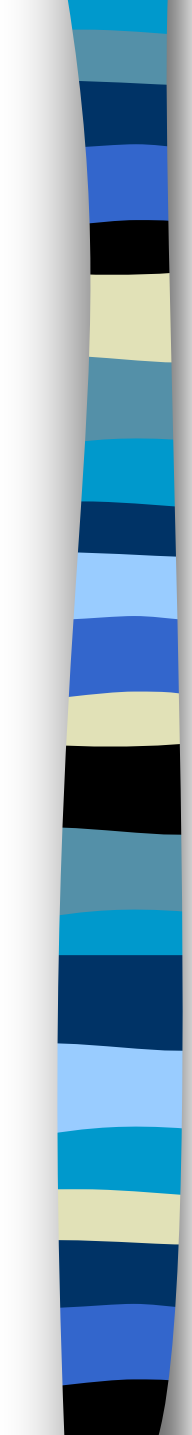
“Among the activities that policy entrepreneurs engage in, the most important include identifying problems, networking in policy circles, shaping the terms of policy debates, and building coalitions to support policy change.”  
(Mintrom, 2000, p.57)



## Political Streams; Shifting currents

Crossroads mayoral election: First Democrat elected in 32 years:

“More than anything, the quality of our schools will determine the success of our city for generations to come. We need to enable our schools to be more innovative and creative...I intend to work through the remainder of the legislative session to get a strong charter school law for Crossroads children.” (State of the City Address, Mayor Jackson, Feb. 22, 2001).



# Taking Charge of Choice: Advocate, Broker, and Accountability Agent

- “A mayor is uniquely positioned to tap into the community resources necessary to make charter schools thrive. A sponsor must evaluate charter school proposals and hold the schools accountable for their performance...A mayor is accountable to the public for all decisions and the decisions I might make as a charter school sponsor would be no exception.”



# Deal or No Deal?

The politics of charter school law adoption: bargains and trade-offs

*Quid:* The 1995 CPS “school reform” law is repealed; full collective bargaining rights restored for CPS

*pro quo:* House Democrats join the STA in support of the state charter school bill, with mayor of Crossroads named as authorizer, collective bargaining rights retained for conversions, and teacher licensure requirements maintained. (Level playing field?)



# Political Landscape: Seedbed for “middle ground”

- **Political** leadership: Previous mayor’s “eight years of failure”: support for Catholic schools, CPS “school reforms (‘95), voucher and tuition tax credit advocacy
- **Business** leadership: 1st U.S. city to establish privately-funded school voucher program
- **Foundation** leadership
- **Think Tank** leadership



# Policy Implications

- Model for mayoral control/charter authorizing
  - Civic capacity built around new accountability structures (annual reports, regular site visits)
  - Principles of transparency, rigor and capacity-building
- Innovation diffusion?
  - New charters in adjacent Crossroads districts
  - KIPP/CPS collaboration
  - MindTrust initiatives (Teach for America)
- Competition?
  - Calls for moratorium; claims of experimentation, parent drain, and unfair comparisons



# Why policy contexts matter: An agenda for charter school policy research

- Sustainability of charter school programs, role of internal & external policy networks: Phase II of charter school movement?
- Vouchers and tuition tax credits: new battleground for “free market”-driven policy networks?
- Policy entrepreneurs and charter school founders: enduring legacy or lost leadership?
- Mayoral control and charter school policy: a new regime?