Education's death row: the standardization network and a persistently lowest achieving school in the era of Common Core

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EDUCATION’S DEATH ROW:
THE STANDARDIZATION NETWORK AND
A PERSISTENTLY LOWEST ACHIEVING SCHOOL
IN THE ERA OF COMMON CORE

by

Valarie J. Karas

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Department of Literacy Teaching and Learning
2020
ABSTRACT

In 2010, New York State both adopted the Common Core Learning Standards and identified the State’s first 67 “persistently lowest achieving” schools, the most severe failure designation available under the State’s accountability system as based upon standardized test performance and/or graduation rates (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2015; NYSED, 2010a). The Common Core Learning Standards were advertised as a pathway to a high-quality education for all American students (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2015; Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). However, a public uproar occurred in the late summer of 2013 following the release of standardized “Common Core” test scores which showed an increase in the number of New York State students who failed those exams (Riede, 2013). During protests and in public forums, “Common Core” became synonymous with standardization while parents and educators decried “Common Core” as a one size fits all approach to education that undermined teacher autonomy, ignored students’ unique learning needs, drained enjoyment from schooling, and made children feel like failures (Gralla, 2013; MertMelfa, 2013a, 2013b). By 2015, the New York State Education department claimed an increased number of schools had failed to meet standardized expectations as well (Cuomo, 2015). The State’s “persistently lowest achieving” failure designation became known as the “priority” label and 178 schools across New York State existed as “priority” schools in 2015 (Cuomo, 2015). Therefore, since 2010, both students and schools have increasingly experienced educational failure as defined by standardized measures. This close empirical study utilizes Actor Network Theory (or ANT) to analyze standardization as a network of power and discover how the network operates across time and place – from 2010 to 2018 across local, state, and national contexts of practice – to reform American education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to my family and the numerous educators who made it possible for me to realize my goals. First, I would like to acknowledge the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Margaret Sheehy, for her unwavering commitment to my research aspirations and her tremendous contributions to this study. Margi, your unique approach to educational research has produced a body of work that illuminates the field and brought clarity to my own experiences as an educator. It has been an honor to work so closely with you. Along with my dissertation committee chair, I would like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. James Collins and Dr. Jaime Puccioni, for their knowledge, experience, and encouragement. I am grateful for the time they devoted to providing thoughtful feedback to refine my work.

I am eternally grateful for my family, especially my parents, Bruce and Valarie Bennett, my husband, Joe Karas, and my son, Bennett Karas. Dad, you will forever be my hero. I am so thankful for the 24 years of memories you gave me and I know you are still with me but I miss you. You told me I could do anything I put my mind to and I believed you because you believed in me. Not a day goes by that I don’t think of you and hope I make you proud. Mom, this dissertation is thousands of words I wrote, yet there are no words to adequately describe how much I love and appreciate you. There is no better mother, stronger woman, or louder cheerleader for my success than you. Joe, the love of my life, you truly are a saint. Thank you for always being in my corner, for over twenty years of your undying love and devotion, and for being the incredible father, husband, and man you are. Bennett, my life is dedicated to you as is this dissertation.

Many thanks to Dr. Denise Nessel for inspiring my practice long before I was lucky enough to meet her or somehow convince her to be my mentor and friend. Denise, you entered
my life when I was a first-year teacher and you continue to be with me through the many lessons you’ve taught me each time I walk into a classroom.

My sincere appreciation goes to the professors in the Department of Literacy Teaching and Learning of the University at Albany for investing in my knowledge and furthering my understanding of literacy and education in ways I hope are justly reflected within this dissertation. To Dr. Peter Johnston and Dr. Donna Scanlon: Once upon a time, a fan was blessed with the opportunity to learn from her idols. Being your student has been a dream come true. I also thank my friends and fellow doctoral students within the department, especially Tracy Pontin and Patti Rand, for their understanding, motivation, and companionship throughout this journey.

Finally, Hackett Student (2012): Whoever you are or however many you are, I acknowledge you.
DEDICATION

For my son, Bennett.

You are my greatest accomplishment and nothing, not a Ph.D. or anything else in the world, could be greater than you. Nothing makes me prouder than being your mom.

You are, simply and completely, my everything and my reason for everything.

I love you more...
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 – Background and Context

On December 9, 2010, William S. Hackett Middle School in Albany, NY was among the first schools named “persistently lowest achieving” (PLA) by the New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2010a). As the most severe accountability designation, the persistently lowest achieving label was reserved for schools which had cycled through every other failure category available for years without meeting the State’s expectations (NYSED, 2010a). This history of repeated failure at persistently lowest achieving schools may explain why December 9, 2010 is unremarkable in my memory despite the fact that I was a Hackett Middle School teacher at the time. However, several moments from the months and years that followed this announcement are seared into my memory. For example, when pressure to standardize practices across the school seemed to intensity after 2010, I remember wondering whether this was due to our new failure status or in preparation for the new Common Core Learning Standards, which were adopted by New York State that same year (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2015). In my opinion then and in my recollection now, they hadn’t been discussed in detail at school. I remember reading Hackett’s “Joint Intervention Team” (JIT) Report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011) when it was publicly released by the New York State Education Department in July of 2011 and finding it so foreign to my experience that I wondered if I was reading about a different school. At the last faculty meeting of the school year in June of 2012, I remember our teacher’s union conducting a revote about an initiative the Hackett teachers previously voted down. “We need a yes”, one union leader said before explaining the initiative as a practice the school was expected to implement under our improvement agreement with the State. I remember that moment as
validation of both the powerlessness I felt and my sense that something was happening – something I didn’t fully understand.

Later, while reading about Actor Network Theory (ANT) as a doctoral student, John Law (2009) explained that without an understanding of the many unique, often hidden actors operating in concert across a fully functioning network, it might be experienced as a mysterious phenomenon and his words leapt off the page:

Something seismic is happening here. A vital metaphorical and explanatory shift is taking place. We are no longer dealing with construction, social or otherwise: there is no stable prime mover, social or individual, to construct anything, no builder, no puppeteer […] Rather we are dealing with enactment or performance. In this heterogeneous world, everything plays its part, relationally. (Law, 2009, p. 151)

In learning about Actor Network Theory, I learned that my feelings of powerless as well as my confusion regarding the reports published about Hackett and the pervasive pressure I noticed there to standardize practice or implement specific school-wide reforms signified that I was an unwitting actor in a network of power operating at the school (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1996; 2005; Law, 1992; 2009). Actor Network theorist Bruno Latour saw all ANT researchers as network actors because the very act of producing research about a network made them a part of it (Latour, 1988; Latour, 1996). According to Latour (1996), Actor Network Theory is particularly useful for human actors seeking to understand their own experiences in power networks and he explained ANT research as “the land of opportunity at last opened for actors which are primum interpares”, meaning equal to all other network actors – both human and nonhuman. Thus, Actor Network Theory is capable of considering a researcher’s personal experiences without prioritizing them. However, this is not a study of my personal experiences. For this study, I ultimately decided to include only publicly available documentary data in my data analysis and,
therefore, excluded personal accounts, including my own. I made this decision after coming to understand standards-based education reforms as an American political agenda which has historically relied upon public support rather than irrefutable evidence to carry implementation forward (Allington, 2002; Hursh, 2008; 2013; Ravitch, 2002; Young, 2018). My decision provided an opportunity to see the standardization network as I had not seen it before – from the publics’ perspective.

   Actor Network Theory makes invisible networks visible through network tracing (Latour, 1996). Researchers often begin network tracing by latching on to a human or non-human actor they can “see”, such as an actor who hints that something is happening by being particularly active, noisy, or mired in controversy (Callon, 1986). Actors never work in isolation but, instead, are linked together through collaborative work (Law, 1992). Due to their connections, each actor introduces the researcher to additional actors and as they do, the network comes into view (Latour, 1996). Consequently, network tracing enables ANT researchers to not only identify the actors within a network, but also how they work together to operationalize a network and, therefore, how the network functions. In this study, I began network tracing with the public release of William S. Hackett Middle School’s “Joint Intervention Team” (JIT) Report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011), however, the actors I met through network tracing and their collaborative efforts to standardize education tell a story that is relevant to all contexts of teaching and learning.

1.2 – Defining Standardization and Standardization as Defining

   This close empirical study utilizes Actor Network Theory (or ANT) to analyze standardization as a network of power and discover how the network operates and fosters change
in education. Derived from Tara Fenwick’s explanation of standard-setting practices, standardization is defined in this study as “aligning practice to conform to standards” (Fenwick, 2010a, p. 119). According to Tara Fenwick: “Standards aspire to ensure consistency and comparability in the everyday conduct that occurs at diverse locations in which a whole constellation of relations meet and weave together in particular ways to constitute practice” (Fenwick, 2010a, p. 119). Therefore, the implementation of education standards naturally requires standardization, or aligning practice to conform to standards. As such, the introduction of the Common Core Learning Standards in states across America demanded the reorganization of educational practice to align with those standards at national, state, and local levels. In fact, widespread demands to align practice with standards are reflected in legislation aimed at education reform. As evidenced by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, American education reform has been tied to federal funding and mandates the standardization of local schools in every state of the nation. Each of these legislative acts required states to adopt standards, align assessments and materials to those standards, conform to prescribed definitions of success and failure as measured by standardized tests, and develop systems to hold “failing” schools accountable. As seen in these legislative examples, there are two different types of standards states and schools are expected to meet: academic content standards as well as academic achievement standards.

First, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 demand that curricular standards in the subjects areas of English language arts and mathematics are adopted and that student proficiency of those standards is measured by standardized tests. Much attention has been given to this,
especially in the wake of states adopting the Common Core Learning Standards. When the Common Core Learning Standards for English language arts and mathematics were adopted by New York State in 2010, the standards themselves appeared to offer the promise of a high-quality education for all America students and were presented as a pathway to college and career readiness (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2015). However, a public uproar occurred in the late summer of 2013 following the release of state test scores which showed that an increasing number of students in schools across New York State had failed these exams (Riede, 2013). The test booklets themselves were emblazoned with the words "Common Core" (NYSED, 2013b). Common Core was blamed. Protest signs and cries to "Stop Common Core" were commonplace. In public forums, teachers decried demands for standardized practices, the loss of academic freedom, and their inability to teach students as they saw fit. Parents claimed Common Core was “one size fits all”, had drained the enjoyment from schooling, and made their children feel like failures (MertMelfa, 2013a, 2013b; Gralla, 2013). Grass-roots movements emerged encouraging parents and students to resist government intrusion into their local schools by “opting out” of standardized tests and refusing to participate in the exams (Dewitt, 2013; MertMelfa, 2013a, 2013b). Indeed, a wealth of research supports the concerns of those protestors and indicates that standards-based education reforms require standardization and, consequently, infiltrate local teaching and learning by design (Avery & Haines, 2017; Davies & Guppy, 1997; Edwards, 2002; Hamilton, 2009; Hamilton, 2011; Nespor, 2002; Nespor, 2004; Ozga, 2009; Supovitz & Reinkordt, 2017). The implementation of both standards and high-stakes testing to measure those standards has been well-researched and has been found to lead educators to rely upon scripted curricula (Goatley & Hinchman, 2013; Street, 2011; Teale, Hoffman, Paciga, Lisy, Richardson, & Berkel, 2009) and to narrow curricula, tailoring what is taught to what is likely to
be on the test (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006; Ivey, 2011; Maksimovic & Vuletic, 2017). Abundant research indicates that standardized curriculum threatens student creativity (Block, 2001; Brandt, 2002; Fortunato, 2017), diminishes teacher autonomy (Delpit, 2003; Erss, Kalmus, & Autio, 2016; Johnston, Afflerbach, & Weiss, 1993; Johnston, Allington, Guice, & Brooks, 1998; Jones & Egley, 2004; Rapp, 2002), and ignores individual student development (Clay, 1991; Clay, 2001; Paris, 2005; Reigeluth, 1997; Shepard & Smith, 1986; Smith, 1976). This study does not question the ramifications of standardization as the consequences of standardizing education have been well documented. Instead, this study recognizes the downfalls of standardization but questions how schools become standardized and whether standardization is realized in some schools yet fails to take hold in others. The debate over standardization, which reached a fever-pitch in 2013, is also examined in this study. Though federal legislation mandating standards, standardized testing, and accountability systems dates back to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the public outrage seen twelve years later in the name of “Common Core” has been mentioned yet not analyzed in any available research studies (Blakeslee, 2013; Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). Unlike other studies, this study examines standardization as a networked process of power to discover how it emerged, how it functions, the unique activity it generates, and how it transforms education locally, state-wide, and nation-wide.

The second “standard” states must meet as mandated by federal legislation is the standard of success. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 all require states to conform to prescribed levels of acceptable performance in order to identify and intervene in schools deemed “failing”. In 2010, John King, Commissioner of the New York State Department of Education, named 67 schools identified as "Persistently Lowest Achieving" (PLA) due to performance on the state's
standardized tests and/or graduation rates (NYSED, 2010a). At this level of accountability in New York State, PLA schools were forced to choose an intervention model, one of which was school closure (NYSED, 2010a). By 2015, in New York State alone, 178 schools were identified as “Priority” schools. This label, formerly known as “Persistently Lowest Achieving”, persisted as the most severe failure designation available in the state accountability system, remained tied to test scores and graduation rates, and continued to trigger increased government intervention in these schools as well as consequences, including firing staff and closure (Cuomo, 2015). Ample research has demonstrated that failure labeling promotes the standardization of teaching and learning as evidenced by the many ways “failing” schools reorder their practices in the name of passing high-stakes exams (Hursh, 2008; 2013; Kozol, 2005; Nespor, 1997; Rex & Nelson, 2004; Seher, 2011; Stillman, 2009). The aforementioned ramifications of standardizing curricula has been well-documented within “failing” schools, such as the narrowing of curriculum, loss of teacher autonomy, and indifference to student development or creativity (Kazajian & Choi, 2016; Kozol, 2005; Nespor, 1997; Nichols & Parsons, 2010; Rex & Nelson, 2004; Seher, 2011; Stillman, 2009). In addition to this, research supports that failure labeling is internalized by the students and staff within “failing” schools (Harlen & Crick, 2003; Johnston & Costello, 2005; Kozol, 2005; McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2009; Nespor, 1997) and promotes public perceptions of schools and those teaching and learning within them as either “good” or “bad” (Johnston & Costello, 2005; McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Raptis, 2012; Sheehy, 2010; Wissman, 2009). Further, researchers studying “failing” schools have found particular stress and fear amongst educators in regards to standardized tests (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick,2009; Kozol, 2005; Nespor, 1997) as well as extreme measures taken to pass those tests, including cheating (Blakeslee, 2013; Koretz, 2017), replacing recess and after-school
opportunities with test preparation (Koyama, 2010; Kozol, 2005; Nespor, 1997), and focusing solely on the tested subjects of reading and mathematics to the point where other subjects, including the arts, are eliminated from schooling (Diamond, 2007; Kozol, 2005; Nespor, 1997). Jonathan Kozol’s 2005 book, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, comments upon the injustices he found in the “failing” urban schools he visited. Kozol (2005) discovered that these schools were places where not only "aesthetics", such as music and art classes, had been removed from the day but recess and even content subjects, such as history and science, were also pushed aside:

The virtual exclusion of aesthetics from the daily lives of children in these schools is seldom mentioned when officials boast that they have pumped the scores on standardized exams by three or four percentage points by drilling children for as many as five hours a day. (Kozol, 2005, p119)

In 2010, the first 67 schools identified as “Persistently Lowest Achieving” in New York State all resided in just seven urban districts: Albany, Buffalo, New York City, Poughkeepsie, Rochester, Schenectady, and Syracuse (NYSED, 2010a). The disparate consequences of standardization upon urban schools, impoverished communities, and communities of people of color have not gone unnoticed by researchers (Borg, Plumlee, & Stranahan, 2007; Diamond, 2007; Hursh, 2008; Hursh, 2013; Kozol, 2005; Nespor, 1997; Seher, 2011; Wissman, 2009). Again, this study does not dispute the wealth of research which cites the ills of standardization or the particularly harsh consequences of standardization facing schools deemed “failures”. However, existing research of standardization in failing schools portrays standardization as an effect of accountability whereas this research views accountability as a network actor which, along with a host of other actors, operationalizes the standardization network. This difference in perspective allows for a broad view of standardization as a network of power, one in which *all* schools are
enrolled regardless of their accountability “label” and shows that the fate of all schools as well as schooling itself is inextricably connected.

1.3 – Actor Network Theory and Standardization as a Network of Power

Actor Network Theory recognizes that a network emerges and is operationalized by any “political project aimed at social engineering” (Latour, 2005, p. 13). As mentioned, the introduction of the Common Core Learning Standards as well as the failure labeling of schools in states across America demanded standardization, or aligning practice to conform to standards, at national, state, and local levels. By law, student mastery of the Common Core Learning Standards was measured by standardized tests and, in turn, those tests were the basis of state accountability systems. Thus, standards-based education reform necessitated an effective standardization network to realize the goals of legislated policies. According to Tara Fenwick, …practices of developing and integrating educational standards are not only politically contested, but actively produce and order the texts, identities, objects and bodies that assemble to become educational practices – practices of pedagogy, assessment, administration, public relations, policy making, and so forth… (Fenwick, 2010a, p. 119)

Through the lens of Actor Network Theory (ANT), curriculum and materials implemented to align with standards, tests used to determine the extent to which the standards are met, and policies that hold schools accountable for meeting standards are seen as actors within the standardization network because ANT recognizes that both human and non-human actors impact the way a network functions (Law, 1992). Via Actor Network Theory, actors are data that can be traced across the standardization network to reveal how the actors perform to order, stabilize, and expand the network (Latour, 1996).
The ordering of practice to align with standards creates controversy and nodes of activity, such as the aforementioned “Common Core” protests of 2013, which assist researchers in tracing and analyzing networks (Latour, 2005). According to Actor Network theorist Bruno Latour (2005), controversy generates particularly noisy and visible nodes of activity within a network which are ripe with “new and interesting data” (Latour, 2005, p. 31). Tracing actors across such an active network readily uncovers the “process of translation” or the process by which networks emerge, stabilize, and are enacted. The “process of translation” includes four “moments” – problematization, interference, enrollment, and mobilization – and each of these moments demonstrate how the ordering of practice is occurring (Hamilton, 2011, p. 9). In close empirical studies which employ ANT, like this one, researchers are tasked with discovering these four moments in data to reveal how network problems are presented and defined through problematization, how the interventions aimed at solving those problems are prescribed through interference, how network actors align with the problem’s definition and consequential interventions during enrollment, and how the original problem eventually becomes the foundation for the solidification of truths and viewpoints via mobilization (Callon, 1986).

Although an active, noisy network offers a wealth of data, it can also be vast, messy, and overwhelming (Fenwick, 2010a). According to Fenwick (2010a), “the trick” to coherent network analysis utilizing ANT “is to follow the interplays that occur at the most local levels of practice” (Fenwick, 2010a, p. 130). While no other studies have traced the standardization network through “Persistently Lowest Achieving” schools, other researchers have effectively used Actor Network Theory to uncover how policy-based networks of power transform localized levels of practice (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2009; 2011; Koyama, 2010; Nespor, 2002). Network tracing often begins with very specific contexts and timeframes yet is not bound by time or place
In fact, the durability of a network is exemplified in its ability to "extend to other locations and domains" (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 14). Therefore, the focus and entry point into the standardization network in this study is William S. Hackett Middle School, a school in Albany, New York which was one of the first schools labeled “persistently lowest achieving” under the state’s accountability program in 2010 (NYSED, 2010a). However, following the actors at work in Hackett’s local practices reveals other actors, as expected, which operate across the state and the nation both before and beyond 2010.

1.4 – Research Questions

This study provides a unique opportunity to reveal how standardization operates as a network of power across time and place. In light of ongoing federal government mandates that all states commit to education standards and hold schools accountable for meeting specified performance standards, network tracing in this study begins at a cross-roads in New York State: 2010, the year New York State both adopted the Common Core Learning Standards and simultaneously identified the first “persistently lowest achieving” schools (NYSED, 2010a; Common Core Standards Initiative, 2015). Accordingly, the study traces the network of standardization using data derived from William S. Hackett Middle School as an entry point to the network and focuses upon publicly available documentary data generated between 2010 and 2018. This span of years provides an ample timeframe to learn how the standardization network functions using the following research questions:

1. How did the standardization network operate at William S. Hackett Middle School between 2010 and 2018?

2. How can actors intervene in the standardization network?
These questions are answered through the analysis of Actor Network Theory “moments of translation” at the local, state, and national levels as discovered in documentary data related to standardization, or aligning practice to conform to standards. These questions address far more than the Common Core Standards or even reactions to the standards themselves and consider the vast network of standardization, including actors and activity within the network, as well as the way power is structured, operationalized, and maintained to ensure the effectiveness of the network. Additionally, the questions reflect an understanding that the standardization network, like all networks viewed through an ANT lens, cannot be restricted to time or place and have the potential to connect vast, seemingly unrelated contexts and settings.

1.5 – Significance of the Study

A review of standardization literature revealed a need for a study which acknowledges standardization as a networked process of power that operates across time and place and in which both human and non-human actors operate to transform education. This study, like the aforementioned studies of standardization and those further detailed in the full literature review, recognizes the powerful role educational materials and resources play in standardizing education, considers the controversies that exist or arise in the network, and focuses upon a local education context to analyze standardization. However, due to the use of Actor Network Theory, this study not only considers the variety of actors which exist in the standardization network, but analyzes how those varied actors collaborate and the tools used to enable the network to function (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Actor Network Theory offers insight into why blame or removing one actor from a network, such as the Common Core Standards themselves, could be ineffective in dismantling the standardization network as a whole: "ANT questions the powerful actors that
appear to emerge in accountability frameworks, and follows the links that brought them into being and that extend them in ways that order educational geographies” (Fenwick, 2010b, p. 182).

Fenwick & Edwards (2010) assert that studies of educational reform should focus on process, how it "works over time", how "actors respond", the "material" or "rhetorical" struggles, and the actual changes produced (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 101). Walz (2006) cites the work of John Dewey to claim:

> For Dewey, experience and the social milieu arise not out of a relationship of dependency upon material, but one in which persons, things, systems, and texts exist in a complex relationship where each is responsible for the construction of each, i.e., that experience is built out of interaction.
> (Walz, 2006, p. 53)

Unlike much of the existing standardization research, this study considers how the standardization network operates in national, state, and local contexts over time because ANT calls for the inclusion of all actors which are discovered through network tracing regardless of that actor’s age or perceived location (Hamilton, 2011). This study is unique in that it is positioned at the intersection of two major events in New York State education: the adoption of the Common Core Standards and the identification of the state’s first “persistently lowest achieving” schools, which included William S. Hackett Middle School (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2015; NYSED, 2010a;). This allows for an abundance of data regarding how this particular school, in the wake of being deemed a “failure” by the New York State Education Department, orders local practice to meet the expectations outlined within the standardization network. However, while this study includes a local focus, a broad view of standardization is revealed as actors are followed within the network. This study is also different
from the majority of existing standardization research because it is concerned more with the process rather than the causes or effects of standardization. Actor Network Theory is utilized in research to uncover “the how” and this study contributes to understanding how networks of power, such as the standardization network, take hold and transform educational practice (Law, 2009). In this research, “the how” is revealed through the study of standardization as a network of power which is processed to foster change at local, state, and national levels over time. This study offers an opportunity to uncover the complexity of the standardization network, reveal the work of actors performing within the network, and expose the process by which standardization is mobilized and education is transformed. This understanding is vital to researchers, educators, and learning communities concerned with the standardization of schools because exposing the network also offers insight into ways concerned parties can effectively intervene to transform it.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 – Standardization through Legislation and Funding

Standardization is defined in this study as *aligning practice to conform to standards*. This definition, derived from the work of Tara Fenwick (2010a), recognizes that standardization can be found wherever standards exist because the existence of standards naturally demands the aligning of practice to conform to them (Fenwick, 2010a; Sheehy, 2013). Education standards alone are powerful enough to foster sweeping change in education practices because they define what is important to the field (Eisner, 1993). That said, since the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB), two types of education standards have been bolstered by government funding and legislation: content-specific standards in the areas of English language arts and mathematics as well as performance standards which determine academic success and failure. Further legislation, including the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* of 2009 (ARRA), and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015 (ESSA), echoed the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 and mandated the standardization of education by requiring states to adopt content-specific standards, align assessments and materials to those standards, conform to prescribed definitions of success and failure as determined by standardized measures, and develop systems to hold “failing” schools accountable.

The origins of NCLB can be traced back to the 1965 Title I *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" and, in 2001, Title I was revised and reauthorized under President George W. Bush as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Liu, 2008; Sonnenberg & Provasnik, 2007; Young, 2018). This legislation is supported by federal Title I money and, in 1965, the primary goal of the legislation was to provide additional
funding to impoverished school communities (Liu, 2008, p. 975). The statement of purpose for Title I under the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act asserts that Title I funds are intended to support: “…the special education needs of children of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local education agencies to support adequate educational programs” (ESEA, 1965, SEC. 1001). In 1966, the National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children advocated for a continued focus of Title I upon areas of concentrated poverty and again, in 1976, the House Committee on Education and Labor pushed back against Senate efforts to allocate 75% of Title I funds toward reading and math initiatives, stressing the importance of using Title I funds to support economically disadvantaged communities rather than mandate specific education reforms (Young, 2018). The United States Department of Education claims that Title I is "the largest elementary and secondary education program, [which] supplements State and local funding for low-achieving children, especially in high-poverty schools" (USDOE, 2013a). The National Center for Educational Statistics calculates the amount of Title I funding each district should receive and advises the United States Department of Education accordingly. Title I eligible students are those between the ages of 5 and 17 who are living within families at or below poverty level, those whose families are considered above poverty level but who receive other types of assistance through the Social Security Act, and/or those living within government institutions or foster homes (Sonnenberg & Provasnik, 2007). In theory, districts with the highest number of students meeting the aforementioned criteria should be slated to receive the most funding. At a minimum, districts with at least ten children (representing at least 2% of the overall district student population) in at least one of these categories will qualify for a "basic" Title I grant (Sonnenberg & Provasnik, 2007). However, once revised and rebranded as the No
Child Left Behind Act in 2001, the legislation was wielded as a vehicle of standards-based reform and schools were required to conform to the mandates of the act in order to receive Title I funding (Liu, 2008). Liu (2008) claims Title I funding is not appropriately siphoned to the neediest districts, and further, local funding (such as taxpayer dollars) often leave the most impoverished districts at a disadvantage. This does not account for the funds "low-achieving" schools, which are also often located in poor communities, must disproportionately devote to NCLB mandates, such the demand that labeled schools provide tutoring to students who did receive a proficient score state exams (Koyama, 2010). The statement of purpose for Title I legislation under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 demonstrates a clear shift from utilizing Title I funds to support impoverished school communities toward the promotion of standards-based reforms: "The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (NCLB, 2001, SEC.1001). Under NCLB, states were mandated to adopt standards, align those standards with assessments, curricula, and materials, categorize assessment results by student demographics, implement accountability systems, and hold schools accountable for failure (NCLB, 2001, SEC.1001). Logically and historically, increased mandates also equated to an increase in financial support for school districts; however, this did not happen under NCLB and, in fact, 2011 brought 5.4 billion dollars in funding cuts to education (Blakeslee, 2013). Additionally, in a time of financial crisis and an era of declining school funding coupled with increasing mandates, the Obama administration used money allocated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to place states in a position to conform to "Race to the Top" initiatives and compete for much-needed funds (Hursh, 2013). Young (2018) asserts that the No
*Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 set the stage for the additional standards-based reform legislation that followed:

The nation’s schools complied with yearly testing, grew accustomed to the use of data for accountability and instructional purposes, and trained the next generation of teachers and leaders under a federalized system of standards, testing, and outcome-based accountability. Without proof that standards improve student achievement, the call continued for higher, more rigorous, common standards as an essential step in reforms. (Young, 2018, p. 83-84)

Therefore, despite a lack of evidence to support standards-based education reforms, they became legislatively mandated and linked to Title I funding through the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 under President Bush and, likewise, despite a lack of evidence to support whether the standards-based reforms had been effective, they were again mandated in order to receive education funding through the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* of 2009 and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015 under President Obama (Young, 2018).

A review of literature regarding standardization reveals common themes. Ample research investigates standardization as a reform that relies upon public perception rather than credible evidence. A wealth of research also focuses upon specific reforms mentioned in standards-based legislation, including standardized tests, standardized instruction, and accountability. As such, the remainder of this literature review is categorized according to those themes - Standardization through Perception, Standardization through Testing, Standardization through Instruction, and Standardization through Accountability – and is followed by a summary of the literature.
2.2 – Standardization through Perception

Throughout the history of the American education system, research supports that standardization, defined in this study as *aligning practice to conform to standards*, is presented as a solution to claims of educational failure. Richard Allington (2002) noted that rhetoric regarding standardization and failing schools can be traced to the 1930's in the United States and that such rhetoric has traditionally lead to federal intervention aimed at "fixing" what policy-makers believe to be wrong with the education system. Diane Ravitch discussed the progressivism of the 1930s and 1940s, which began to emphasize testing, education as a science, and educational improvement. She sees sociologist James Coleman's 1966 report, "Equality of Educational Opportunity" as the first step toward standardization which directly linked student achievement with schools. This report analyzed the effects of school resources on student performance and, according to Ravitch (2002), began to create an ideological divide between educators, who called for additional resources to aid deficiencies, and policymakers, who called for standards-based, systemic changes to the field of education. The National Assessment of Educational Progress and international assessments, which began in the 1970s, only contributed to this divide as the public pressured officials, such as state governors, to intervene and foster educational improvement (Ravitch, 2002). By the 1980s, education had become a main policy and budgetary focus in states across the nation (Ravitch, 2002). Many researchers, including Allington (2002), Diamond (2007), Hursh (2013), and Young (2018), pinpoint a 1983 government report on the state of American education, titled *A Nation at Risk*, as a strong early example of government problematization of American schooling. Hursh (2013), claims *A Nation at Risk* not only placed blame on teachers and schools for educational failure, but for American economic failure as well, and did so without conclusive evidence that schools were truly failing.
Further, according to Hursh (2013), standards-based reform advocates continue to wage a war for public support by portraying teachers as self-serving while portraying policymakers as those who are "only interested in doing what is best for the children, fighting for children's civil rights" and even "invoking Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement" (Hursh, 2013, p. 6). While standards-based reforms have been legislatively mandated as a solution to the failures of the education system, researchers repeatedly conclude that such reforms are based upon perceptions of school failure, rather than any actual evidence of failure and, further, highlight a lack of evidence that educational standardization improves academic outcomes (Allington, 2002; Hursh, 2008; 2013; Ravitch, 2002, Young, 2018).

Young (2018) traced America’s standards-based education reform movement back to the industrial revolution, finding that an “Efficiency Movement” arose in approximately 1913 as a result of the perceived efficiency of industry practices (Young, 2018, p. 75). The “Efficiency Movement”, marked by attempts to apply standardized industry practices to American education, eventually transformed into an “Excellence Movement”, marked by attempts to determine the characteristics of effective schools and use those characteristics to create education standards for broad implementation across the country (Young, 2018, p. 77). The focus upon standards promoted during the “Excellence Movement”, in turn, lead to the creation of standards and mandates via legislation to implement those standards found in the current “Standards Movement” (Young, 2018, p. 78). Young (2018) traced the evidence used to support the goals of each movement and consistently found that education reforms have been historically carried forth by political agendas and rhetoric which lacked sufficient data to support both the necessity of the reforms prior to implementation as well as the effectiveness of those reforms once implemented (Young, 2018). For example, Young (2018) asserts that the “Efficiency
“Movement” was an answer to education critics who postulated that there were no true measures of whether American education was effective (Young, 2018, p. 75). As a result, standardized approaches to production which worked during the industrial revolution were applied to education during the “Efficiency Movement” without evidence, or even an investigation, regarding the effects this could have upon students (Young, 2018, p. 76). Leading up to the “Excellence Movement”, critics used James Coleman’s 1966 report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, to support notions of school failure and call for further investigation into best practices in education (Young, 2018, p. 77). Despite the fact that Coleman’s 1966 report, as well as research regarding effective schools that followed, repeatedly warned against misreading findings as suggestions or attempts to apply practices deemed successful in one school to all schools, such reports were cited to support broad government policy (Young, 2018). Young (2018) shows that in addition to a general lack of solid evidence to support education reform, when evidence was provided to bolster calls for change or improvement, it was typically in the form of standardized test results and, even then, was often misused, misinterpreted, or misrepresented (Young, 2018). In some cases, standardized test results used as evidence to support claims of school failure as well as the effectiveness of standardized practices were widely publicized by political officials yet later debunked by researchers with little publicity (Young, 2018). Even data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a standardized assessment used repeatedly to support claims that American students are falling behind, has been reanalyzed and refuted by researchers who claim NAEP results actually show increases in American student performance rather than declines (Young, 2018). According to Young (2018), the American people were not made aware of the various ways the research and information used to support claims of school failure or the effectiveness of education
standardization could be interpreted. In other words, the American public has repeatedly heard that schools are failing and that standardization is a viable remedy to failure without credible evidence that a problem actually exists in the field of education or that standardization could improve schools. Despite this, legislation such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015 mandated standardized practices as a solution to educational failure (Young, 2018). As such, Young’s (2018) analysis of American education reform movements and the information used to support those movements concludes: “Since results and analysis were not thoroughly considered, and decisions based on evidence is not what occurred in the political realm of education reform during the era of the Excellence or Standards Movement, results from political actions warrant review” (Young, 2018, p. 87).

In their study of the rise of fall of the Common Core Standards, Supovitz & McGuinn (2019) contend that government policies are informed by politics rather than facts, stating: “At the center of the policymaking process is a complex set of interactions among politicians, policymakers, interest groups, and perceptions of public preferences, all nestled within a political milieu” (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019, p. 454). The researchers interviewed representatives of 19 interest groups which supported the Common Core Standards to analyze the methods Common Core advocates used to promote the standards as well as their perceptions regarding why the Common Core Standards lost public and political support in 2013 (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). Their findings show that because promotion of the Common Core Standards emphasized solidifying support through perception rather than evidence, they lost support when publicity, opinions, and beliefs about the standards became overwhelmingly negative in 2013 (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). The study reveals that Common Core advocates focused upon influence over evidence and used positive messages to promote the standards, including that they were of higher
quality than existing state standards, would better prepare students for college and career, would position the United States to be more economically competitive, align with education accountability, promote educational equity for disadvantaged students, were state-led and voluntarily adopted, and that they would ensure consistency across states while also enabling collaboration between states (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). These messages were directed toward federal, state, and school district policymakers, the public, the business community, and educators (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). Common Core advocacy groups utilized a range of tactics to publicize their positive messages about Common Core and reach their target audiences, including guides, toolkits, presentations, social media, blogs, podcasts, videos, TV and radio ads, newspaper op-ed columns, lobbying, testifying at committee hearings, and sponsoring polls (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). Interviews revealed an understanding amongst the participants that perception is paramount to the success or failure of policy and the researchers identified three types of “factors” that worked to shape perceptions of the Common Core Standards and undermine the efforts of Common Core advocacy groups: policy factors, strategic factors, and contextual factors (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019, p. 470). Participants noted that it wasn’t the content of the Common Core Standards themselves that drew the most opposition, but the way “Common Core” became branded and woven into concerns about federal overstep into state matters, data collection and privacy, over-testing, curricula, and even the Obama administration (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). Common Core advocates “lamented that information could not fight ideology very effectively, and CCSS opponents often relied on passionate rhetorical arguments rather than debate the standards on the merits” (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019, p. 471). The researchers add:

Standards are chosen by reformers as a powerful lever to catalyze change because they are connected to so many different areas of education and have implications for
so many aspects of the education system, including funding, curriculum, assessment, and the organization of instructional time. Ironically, these very reasons also created the opportunity for opponents of reform to attack the implications of the reform rather than the reform itself. (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019, p. 471)

This finding is important in that it recognizes an understanding amongst Common Core advocates that adopting the standards would require standardization and thereby usher in wide-spread changes to every facet of education. Therefore, “Common Core” became synonymous with standardization and the standards themselves could not be untangled from their standardized implications. The study also revealed that reform efforts, such as those implemented through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, traditionally targeted and impacted low-performing, less privileged schools whereas reforms associated with the Common Core Standards challenged all schools (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). For the first time, policy pressures impacted schools and communities typically regarded as high-performing and this “mobilized wealthier, better informed, and more politically powerful suburban parents to voice their discontent to policymakers, school administrators, and the media” (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019, p. 472). In terms of strategy, the Common Core advocates who participated in the study reflected upon their efforts to garner public and political support, suggesting in hindsight that more could have been done to bring their message to a wider audience (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). They did not, however, feel that additional evidence to support the Common Core Standards or attempts to educate target audiences with facts would have been beneficial, with one participant stating, “If all we do is educate and ignore the politics, the political games that are being played in the name of the Common Core, we will not win” (Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019, p. 477). Supovitz & McGuinn (2019) demonstrates that education policies are constructed and deconstructed not with
an emphasis on evidence, but through campaigns which utilize rhetoric to influence public and political perceptions and solidify an ideology.

In *Place Stories: Time, Space, and Literacy in Two Classrooms*, Sheehy (2010) studied two middle schools – one in Ohio and another in New York – and utilized spatial theory to illuminate schools and classrooms as socio-political constructs, explaining that teaching rarely, if ever, occurs in “politically vacuous” spaces (Sheehy, 2010, p. xv). Throughout *Place Stories*, Sheehy (2010) shows that reality and truth is created in educational settings and uncovers this through narrations of school practices as well as discourse analysis of interviews, interactions, meetings, and documents. Perception, comprised of traditions, history, discourses, and beliefs, contributes to the social processes that form educational spaces which are nearly impervious to dissenting ideas and value some ideas as “sacred” while rejecting others as “blasphemous”:

“That is how space works: It veils certain realities while promoting others; it smothers some ideas while providing others fresh air; and it makes things that feel wrong, that hurt people, seem right” (Sheehy, 2010, p. xv). It isn’t only ideas which are valued or rejected within spaces and Sheehy (2010) points out how standardization has been powerful enough to categorize groups of people as belonging or not belonging:

In New York, where I live, standardization has become such an effective technique of organizing schools around traditional conceptions of knowledge that one could easily construct a map from test results that would demarcate middle and upper class neighborhoods as members of a valued tradition while redlining poor neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color to marginal camps. (Sheehy, 2010, p. 4)

In an analysis of discourse found in New York newspapers, Sheehy (2010) discovered school rankings based upon test scores and perceptions that passing standardized tests indicated learning was taking place within classrooms while failure on those exams indicated “something is wrong
inside classrooms” (Sheehy, 2010, p. 109). These perceptions do matter according to Sheehy (2010) and create realities within schools as standardized testing becomes a main priority: students are seen as and referred to by numbers corresponding to their level of performance on the exams and educators focus their efforts - including professional development, lesson planning, and assessment - upon increasing scores (Sheehy, 2010). In one school which had been publicly ranked as poor performing, Sheehy (2010) focused upon science instruction and found that practice tests became a basis for lessons, standardized materials were voluntarily adopted by teachers, and one teacher expressed support for teaching the “same exact content, in the same manner” (Sheehy, 2010, p. 111). In this “system of standardization”, pressure to improve scores existed, content distribution was prioritized, and instruction was paced according to content coverage rather than the pace of student learning or mastery of that content (Sheehy, 2010, p. 129-130). While well-established and stabilized, educational spaces are not completely immune to change; instead, they are subject to the same processes that created them and, therefore, contesting spaces helps to destabilize them as they exist and make room for a new possibilities (Sheehy, 2010). Since educational spaces are imagined, they too can be reimagined (Sheehy, 2010). However, Sheehy (2010), suggests that efforts to change the current realities of education often fall short because they fail to recognize how power influences practice (Sheehy, 2010). She argues that a wealth of educational research is too micro, localized, and focused upon the classroom. This creates an illusion that modification can or should occur at the classroom level and ignores the systemic transformation needed to produce genuine change (Sheehy, 2010). Likewise, a macro, global, focus leads to an emphasis upon how broad concepts, such as policy or “best practice”, could be wielded to change the existing condition of education (Sheehy, 2010, p. xiv). A lens that is too wide or too narrow fails to capture the
process of power operating across educational contexts and misses opportunities to make connections across time and place (Sheehy, 2010). Sheehy (2010) advocates for additional research which can link diverse groups and attend to nodes of activity occurring where those groups intersect: “When we connect the dots between school practices and city politics, between values and the monuments erected and maintained via the curriculum and tests that keep those values viable – then we can reimagine the teaching profession: pre-K to the university” (Sheehy, 2010, p. xv).

Although Raptis (2012) is a study based in Canada, the content and findings make important contributions to understanding standardization through perception in the American education system and show that standardization, wherever it is found, operates similarly and without regard for national boundaries. Additionally, Raptis (2012) provides a rare example of evidence trumping perception and demonstrates how a well-established tradition can be destabilized and changed as Sheehy (2010) suggested. In 1998, the Fraser Institute, a Canadian research and education organization, began analyzing the test results of high schools in British Columbia, ranking those schools based upon a weighted system the institute created, and publishing those ranking as a School Report Card (Raptis, 2012). Raptis (2012) used critical discourse analysis to examine 738 texts which mentioned the school rankings released by the Fraser Institute, the majority of which came from the media and a small number (less than 10%) which were published in journals, magazines, or independently. Raptis (2012) states, “What is striking about these discourses is the extent to which they rested on assertions unsupported by evidence” (Raptis, 2012, p. 190). Therefore, Raptis (2012) was interested in how the Fraser Institute’s school rankings became accepted as “true” accounts of school quality and, later, how that sense of “truth” was undermined. Analysis uncovered that the Fraser Institute made “three
key – but not entirely accurate – arguments” which likely “won over the public and the press” (Raptis, 2012, p. 194). The institute claimed their rankings were based on the results of government assessments, that publishing the ranking furthered democratic rights of the public to obtain information, and that rankings allowed parents to make informed choices which would, through school choice policies, result in a better education system (Raptis, 2012). These three arguments were especially logical within the political context of Canada at that time, which Raptis (2012) calls “accountability-focused” and “socio-political” (Raptis, 2012, p. 194). The rankings themselves were also confused with actual test results, which, in the political climate of the times, carried the perception of being accurate representations of student achievement (Raptis, 2012). The public perception that the rankings were credible was also solidified by the positive reviews the rankings received, although the majority of those reviews were written by representatives from the Fraser Institute (Raptis, 2012). While the formulas and methodology behind the ranking were criticized, that criticism did not receive the same media coverage as the praise and criticism was met with simplistic arguments that again reinforced the “truth” of the rankings, such as “the truth hurts” (Raptis, 2012, p. 195). Some arguments against the Fraser Institute’s School Report Card rankings appeared to fall on deaf ears, such as the argument that standardized testing damages student creativity, and could not rattle the public trust assigned to quantifiable scores (Raptis, 2012). The Fraser Institute’s School Report Card was published without public scrutiny for twelve years (Raptis, 2012). Meanwhile, the schools deemed low-performing were also high-poverty and these schools suffered consequences such as enrollment declines as the parents of high-achieving students executed their school choice rights and moved their children to higher-ranking schools (Raptis, 2012). In 2010, a letter published in the *Times-Colonist* newspaper titled “The Case” used the Fraser Institute’s own methodology to make the
case that the rankings were not credible and outlined the negative implications the ranking had upon the schools erroneously ranked low-achieving (Raptis, 2012, p. 196). As a result, the newspaper decided to no longer publish the Fraser Institute’s *School Report Card* rankings (Raptis, 2012). Raptis (2012) demonstrates that education reform initiatives become realities that are constructed through rhetoric which solidifies public perception and frames the acceptance of certain ideas as “truth”. Like Raptis (2012), numerous research supports that education reform is carried forth by perception rather than evidence (Allington, 2002; Hursh, 2013; Sheehy, 2010; Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019; Young, 2018). However, Raptis (2012) presents an instance when evidence, even if it did not rattle long-held public perception, resulted in a visible change of practice. The extent to which the letter contributed to the construction of new “truths” in the realm of education is unknown, however, a new reality where statistically questionable rankings no longer appear in the newspaper was realized as a result of the letter’s arguments. The letter’s author was able to publicly undermine the Fraser Institute’s claims of quantifiable credibility by exposing and debunking the institute’s own methodology. Therefore, perceptions about the rankings were open to construction and deconstruction in the same manner – through an “evidence-based” argument based upon the same data (Raptis, 2012). Raptis (2012) demonstrates the importance of understanding what holds a particular reality together in order to unravel it.

### 2.3 – Standardization through Testing

(ARRA), and *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015 (ESSA) mandate standardized assessments, define acceptable performance on those measures, and require states to hold schools accountable for failure. In a review and commentary about literacy assessment practices, Johnston & Costello (2005) assert: “Although there are occasional studies claiming that high-stakes testing has no negative effects, or even some positive effects on children’s learning, there are many more studies showing the opposite and with greater specificity” (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p. 258). Concerns about the ramifications of high-stakes standardized testing are not limited to researchers or confined to the realm of literacy. Rapp (2002) surveyed 191 National Board certified teachers in Ohio and showed that these nationally-recognized educators were concerned about and overwhelmingly against the ways standardized test results were used in NCLB mandates. For example, 96% claimed standardized measures were not "the best" assessments, 96% did not believe in rewards and punishments for teachers, and 97% did not support linkages between funding and standardized test performance (Rapp, 2002). A 2004 New York State Education Department (NYSED) Policy Brief regarding "The Impact of High Stakes Exams on Students and Teachers" cited Rapp's (2002) study and called it "disturbing" that "virtually all (97 percent) of the sampled teachers feel that tests negatively affected students' love of learning and that 6 out of 7 sampled teachers said that the quality of education has declined in their classes since the institution of high-stakes tests" (NYSED, 2004, p. 12). This admission stands in stark contrast to the rest of the brief, which claims that high-stakes tests motivate students ("children from disadvantaged backgrounds generally work harder"), the majority of teachers are "neutral" in terms of testing perceptions, and data is inconclusive regarding whether high-stakes testing increased the numbers of students dropping out of high school (NYSED, 2004, p. 9). The brief concludes that perceptions of high-stakes testing are likely derived from educational values and
those interested in fostering successful futures for students would favor high-stakes testing, even if it resulted in an emphasis upon test prep and sacrificed teacher autonomy:

Whether one views the net result as positive or negative probably depends on where one sits and what one values. For example, if one believes that the prime purpose of an education is to provide future workers with the tools to successfully compete in the nation’s economy, the fact that teacher autonomy and flexibility has been reduced in preparing students for high-stakes exams may not prove to be a compelling rationale for overturning such policy prescriptions. (NYSED, 2004, p. 13)

NYSED (2004) uses standardized test results to assert that testing in New York State is beneficial, claiming "the two states with the longest record of curriculum-based exit exams - New York and North Carolina - have historically performed higher than the rest of the nation after controlling for individual demographic, school, and state characteristics" (NYSED, 2004, p. 7). Rapp’s (2002) findings are supported by similar research, however, such as Jones & Egley’s (2004) survey of 708 third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers in Florida. Those teachers also expressed great concern over how tests were used to define success and failure, the accuracy of standardized tests, how such testing may narrow curriculum and the scope of teaching and learning, and what accountability pressure might do to student and teacher motivation. While the teachers were not resistant to accountability, 79 percent of those surveyed did not believe high-stakes testing would lead education in a positive direction (Jones & Egley, 2004). Additionally, Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick’s (2009) survey of over 100 teachers revealed that 85 percent of those teachers were concerned with the growing emphasis placed on student test scores.

Hursh (2008) supports that concerns about the validity and application of standardized tests results are not without merit and exposes standardized testing as deceptive and harmful to teaching and learning. With a focus upon standardized practices in the state of New York, Hursh (2008) equates standardized testing to a “de facto state curriculum” which pressures teachers to
whittle down their instruction, emphasize what they believe will be on the test, and often emphasizes not only certain skills and concepts, but favors entire content areas while neglecting others (Hursh, 2008, p. 71). Standards-based reforms prescribed at the state-level echo national initiatives, such as those supported by NCLB, and are repeatedly rationalized as solutions to failure using standardized assessment data which not only lacks credibility, but has been manipulated to support political agendas (Hursh, 2008). Hursh (2008) describes how a host of tactics can be employed to produce misleading educational results, including the adjustment of cut scores, or the scores used to determine performance levels, to manufacture academic improvement or decline as well as simply modifying exams to be easier or more challenging. Even the Regents exams students are required to pass in order to graduate high school in New York state are open to manipulation and can be "varied depending on whether the State Education Department wants to increase the graduation rate, and therefore makes the exam easier, or wants to appear rigorous and tough, and therefore makes the exam more difficult" (Hursh, 2008, p. 78). He discovered consistent, valid criticism that New York state’s tests were riddled with “poorly constructed, misleading, or erroneous questions" (Hursh, 2008, p. 78). According to Hursh (2008), New York education policy "reveals how little the state values innovative, challenging, interdisciplinary curriculum, particularly for its urban students” and limits the ways students can demonstrate proficiency, which has been particularly damaging to urban students (Hursh, 2008, p. 76). He supports his assertions with the case of urban schools in New York City, 28 of which collaboratively formed the "Performance Standards Consortium" in the early 1990s and worked to create an "innovative, rigorous, non-Regents program for all students" and did not rely upon standardized measures but instead assessed students with "exhibits, portfolios, and performances" (Hursh, 2008, p. 73). The group aimed to offer quality
experiences and assessments rather than ascribe to the "two track system" dominating high schools across the nation. Under that “two track system”, students likely to attend college took Regents courses, their accompanying Regents assessments, and received Regents diplomas. Those not as likely to extend their education beyond high school enrolled in "easier" courses and received a "local" education diploma upon graduation (Hurst, 2008, p. 74). However, in the late 1990s, New York State demanded that schools submit their students to five Regents exams to qualify for graduation (Hurst, 2008). While that number was lowered to two required Regents exams for "Consortium" schools by 2005, Hurst (2008) submits that the damage to the schools’ innovative programs had been done and that New York State had effectively "undermined student academic success at all schools and increased the achievement gap between white students and students of color" (Hurst, 2008, p. 76). In other words, government policy defined success and failure according to standardized measures, replaced all performance-based measures of achievement with standards-based measures, and created the very “achievement gap” later presented as a problem which could be solved through standardization. Likewise, rather than increasing the graduation rate in New York, Hurst (2008) points out the marked decreases in graduation rates in the wake of mandated standardized testing, especially for students of color and those with disabilities (Hurst, 2008).

Hurst’s (2008) finding that standardized testing actually served to perpetuate high-school drop-out rates amongst minority students is also supported in the work of Borg, Plumlee, and Stranahan (2007). In at least 18 states, high school testing failure immediately disqualified a student for graduation regardless of the other requirements they met (Borg et al., 2007). Even in states like Florida, where students were allowed to re-take high school exit exams a number of times, the researchers questioned how an initial failure might contribute to greater probabilities
that students would fail repeatedly and withdraw from high school out of frustration (Borg et al., 2007). The researchers assert that the effects of high-stakes testing are "clearly adverse to minorities" and claim their "analysis shows that such effects are indeed predictable, quantifiable, and manifested nonrandomly in the student population" (Borg et al., 2007, p. 702). Findings regarding the negative consequences of standardized testing are wide-spread and are not limited to secondary students, students in tested grades, or even tested content areas. The effects of high-stakes testing were reported to have trickled down to the youngest of children by numerous researchers (Bordignon & Lam, 2004; Graue, 2009; Kozol, 2005). In order to prepare Kindergarten students to pass the standardized tests they would encounter in later grades, Graue (2009) estimated that Kindergarteners spent four to six times more of their day on math or reading than they did on play and nearly half an hour a day on test preparation (Graue, 2009). Anthony, Assel, & Williams (2007) commented that the skills assessed by standardized tests, even in the earliest years of schooling, "are routinely the focus of published preschool curricula and researcher-developed preschool intervention projects" (Anthony et al., 2007, p. 432).

Blakeslee (2013) investigated the history, use, and effects of standardized testing and asserts that standardized testing lacks validity, has been politically manipulated, and has had sweeping consequences that extend beyond tested grades or content areas. Additionally, Blakeslee (2013) highlights many diverse actors operating within a vast standardization network, including politicians, legislation, tests, lobbyists, CEOs of testing companies, contracts, parents, students, educators, media, propaganda, teaching strategies, and curricular materials. Blakeslee (2013) asserts that No Child Left Behind mandates were likely conceived in 1993 by Sandy Kress, a lawyer from Dallas who would later serve as an education advisor to President George W. Bush (Blakeslee, 2013, p. 214). In 1993, Kress was involved in the Texas-based "Educational
Economic Policy Center”, which outlined how testing and accountability could "fix" ailing schools, and “close the achievement gap” between the performance of white and minority students through the use of "performance subgroups”, or the differentiation of student test results by demographic factors (Blakeslee, 2013, p. 214). Blakeslee (2013) demonstrates that educational assessment manipulation was a political tactic adopted by George W. Bush on his presidential campaign trail, whereby he claimed that testing, accountability, and standardization had closed the “achievement gap” in Texas and could do the same for the nation (Blakeslee, 2013, p. 126). Bush called this the “Texas Miracle”, however, Blakeslee (2013) states: "Houston school district's putative academic successes, including its astonishingly low dropout rate, have been debunked as statistical chicanery" (Blakeslee, 2013, p. 126). Similarly, in 2010, New York Mayor Bloomberg boasted that the "achievement gap" in New York City was closing, however, it was changes to assessment cut scores, or the scores which determine levels of student achievement, which were actually producing those results (Blakeslee, 2013, p. 220). Despite serious concerns about the validity of standardized tests and the manipulation of test results, they were used to define educational success and failure and served as the backbone for accountability systems (Blakeslee, 2013). Failure came with steep consequences for both students and educators, including grade retention, the inability to graduate, state sanctions, staff dismissal, and school closure (Blakeslee, 2013). To avoid these consequences, schools made great efforts to pass the tests and those efforts included testing pep-rallies, an emphasis upon test preparation, implementing “drill and kill” strategies, replacing non-tested classes such as art or physical education with more test-based instruction in tested subjects, especially in the weeks leading up to exams, and even cheating (Blakeslee, 2013, p. 214). The consequences of high-stakes test failure, while traditionally harsh for low-performing schools, particularly urban schools and
communities of people of color, became the subject of protest in 2013 when test scores dropped at traditionally high-performing schools, especially those in predominantly white, suburban areas (Blakeslee, 2013). In Texas, Blakeslee (2013) notes that these unexpected results spurred a middle-class revolt which turned the tide against testing and prompted political officials, even those who once supported standardized testing and the accountability systems that came along with them, to question the validity of the results (Blakeslee, 2013). Sandy Kress referred to the performance of students in Texas in comparison to students from other states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to support the effectiveness of the standards-based reform initiatives that took hold there before implementation across the country via No Child Left Behind (Blakeslee, 2013, p. 221). Blakeslee (2013), however, contends that even NAEP results are not foolproof and that Texas has exempted students with disabilities and English language learners at rates higher than others states. In one instance, on a NAEP fourth grade reading assessment, the Texas exemption rate was twice the national average (Blakeslee, 2013, p. 222). Further, a 2016 United States Department of Education study was unable to determine a relationship between standards-based reforms and NAEP performance (Dragoset, Thomas, Herrmann, Deke, James-Burdumy, Graczewski, Boyle, Tanenbaum, Giffin, & Upton, 2016).

Dragoset et al. (2016) interviewed representatives from departments of education in each state to study the implementation of Race to the Top (RTTT) initiatives (Dragoset et al., 2016, p. 12). In addition to these interviews, the researchers compared student NAEP results over time in an effort to determine how state Race to the Top (RTTT) implementation impacted student achievement scores (Dragoset et al., 2016). According to the study, while states that received RTTT grants adopted the policies promoted through that initiative, even states which did not receive a grant had started to integrate RTTT reforms (Dragoset et al., 2016). However, despite
nationwide RTTT implementation, Dragoset et al. (2016) was unable to conclude whether student performance had improved, stating that the relationship to NAEP outcomes could be interpreted as being positive, negative, or of no consequence at all (Dragoset, et al., 2016). The study points out the difficulty in isolating the causes of increases or decreases in student performance on standardized measures, finding that conclusions depended upon the assumptions researchers made about patterns of student achievement and could not fully account for other changes which may have occurred alongside RTTT implementation (Dragoset et al., 2016).

2.4 – Standardization through Instruction

Standardization, by any definition, even as defined in this study (aligning practice to conform to standards), implies conformity. It should come as no surprise then that standardized instruction, curricula, and materials are a result of aligning practice to conform to standards or that they are uniform in the interest of aligning to standards rather than differentiated according to the needs of individual students. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was a profound piece of standards-based reform legislation for numerous reasons. In part, it was profound because it effectively linked federal Title I funding with reform mandates and transformed the purpose of Title I from a vehicle to deliver support to impoverished school communities into a vehicle for standardization (Liu, 2008). The requirements of NCLB legislation, which forced states to adopt standards, align those standards with assessments, curricula, and materials, categorize assessment results by student demographics, implement accountability systems, and hold schools accountable for failure, were profound in their ability to alter every aspect of education (Young, 2018). It provided a roadmap for effectively mandating reform which was repeated in additional education legislation (Young, 2018). Although the legislation targets English language arts and
mathematics, studies show ramifications for every other content area traditionally taught in schools, including subjects such as the arts and physical education, which were not mentioned in the legislation (Blakeslee, 2013; Hursh, 2008; 2013). Further, NCLB took profound action in prioritizing certain types of instruction, particularly literacy instruction described in the legislation as “scientifically-based”, and specifically appropriated nearly a billion dollars for “Reading First” initiatives (NCLB, 2001, SEC.1002).

To obtain a “Reading First” grant intended to bolster literacy programs in low-performing schools, states were required to submit an application to the federal government. The application was reviewed and either approved or denied by an “expert panel” which determined whether the state’s proposed literacy plan aligned with the “essential reading components” outlined by the federal government (Healy, 2007, p. 150). Applications denied because they were not “scientifically-based” included one rejected because “Readers and Writers Workshop” was part of the instructional plan (Healy, 2007, p. 153). “Scientifically-based” assessments which could be reported in relation to state and national standardized assessments were also a requirement for “Reading First” schools (Healy, 2007). Most state plans implemented DIBELS, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessment, which is standardized and was approved although it did not account for all of the “essential reading components” outlined by the government (Healy, 2007, 162). According to Healy (2007), while scripted, pre-packaged literacy programs were not required, the approval process prioritized them and states wrote them into their plans in the interest of securing funding: “The approval process for state grants discouraged states from investing in individualized programs and encouraged them to pick commercially-created curricula that had been approved in other states” (Healy, 2007, p. 161). Through “Reading First”, the federal government took unprecedented action to control local
teaching and learning, resulting in nation-wide shifts toward common, uniform literacy instruction rather than individualized, differentiated literacy instruction (Healy, 2007).

Teale, Hoffman, Paciga, Lisy, Richardson, & Berkel (2009) claim that standardized assessments such as DIBELS, used in many “Reading First” schools, do not paint a clear picture of student performance nor clarify what is important in reading instruction, yet became "a blueprint for primary grades reading curriculum in thousands of schools, thus effectively reducing what is taught to what is measured on the test" (Teal et al., 2009, p. 92). Additionally, the researchers warn against the use of standardized programs typically used in “Reading First” schools which prioritize uniformity over individualization and fail to consider significant elements of literacy development, such as engagement, motivation, and comprehension, while prioritizing phonics instruction and skills taught isolation:

The grave danger is that without such an emphasis, although many children who attend Reading First schools (primarily children who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch) may actually not suffer severely in their reading achievement in grades 1 or 2; they will very likely experience profound difficulties in reaching the literacy levels necessary for success in the intermediate grades and beyond - but by then it will be too late to help most of them read and write well. (Teale et al., 2009, p. 90)

Perhaps no segment of the educational field has contributed more evidence against the standardization of instruction than literacy researchers. In fact, the field of literacy education has produced a body of work that spans decades and engages in productive debate (including an infamous whole language vs. phonics debate) about literacy development and effective literacy practices. One finding has remained constant, however: that the way literacy develops is unique to each individual and, therefore, quality literacy instruction is not standardized.

In 1976, Frank Smith criticized the designers of instructional programs who, through such programs, "break down complex tasks into series of discrete and simple steps" (Smith,
He advised against standardization, asserting that children's differences be taken into consideration when attempting to teach complex tasks, namely the teaching of reading, and warned against overly general instruction for all students, stating: "What might be a good idea with a few children in a limited context becomes inflated into a foolproof system for teaching entire populations the whole time" (Smith, 1976, p. 7). He was also wary of instruction which is tied to holding anyone "accountable' for progress or regression in literacy" or which promotes the "basics" of reading (Smith, 1976, p. 8). According to Smith, instruction focused on decoding and phonics asks students to "learn words the hard way" when they should actually be learning about words through immersion in a written language and "in situations that generate pleasure and assurance rather than bewilderment and apprehension" (Smith, 1976, p. 8).

Marie Clay (2001) points out that standardized programs teach children in a way which anticipates children to learn in a sequential, step by step order, meaning that the use of such programs provides opportunities to learn certain concepts while others are suspended. According to Clay, it is illogical to assume that all children will learn and understand the same concepts in the same order (Clay, 2001). Additionally, due to the varying ways in which children develop, ability gaps which could present themselves in a cohort of students at age five generally level out by the third grade (Shepard & Smith, 1986).

Scott Paris (2005) examined what factors are important to childhood literacy development and reveals that standardizing literacy curricula conflicts with the uniqueness of literacy development in each student. He recognized the differences in development among children who are very young and that these children learn at different rates. He explained that constrained skills may be learned at different times but will be learned by everyone eventually.
Unconstrained skills develop throughout one's life. Therefore, it is often inappropriate to teach in lock-step with a scripted literacy program or to measure "mastery" of skills:

...alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, and oral reading fluency are constrained both theoretically and methodologically, unlike vocabulary and comprehension. They all develop from nonexistent to high or ceiling levels in childhood. One consequence of these developmental trajectories of mastery is that the distributions of data are highly variable and unstable over time for constrained skills. (Paris, 2005, p 187)

Marie Clay repeatedly argued that the very nature of learning how to read and write demands continuous change, changes which often occur quickly in the early years regardless of the child's experiences in the classroom (Clay, 1991; Clay, 2001). The process of learning how to read and write can be marked by print identification and the narrowing of possibilities which are "checked against a young child's limited knowledge of reading" (Clay, 1991, p. 310). Ken Goodman, in a 1967 article, supports Clay's assertion that learning to read involves "narrowing possibilities":

Reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves an interaction between thought and language. Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time. (Goodman, 1967, p. 130)

He mentions how each reader brings his or her own experiences to the text and refutes theories which aim to pin reading down as a "precise process". According to Goodman (1967), reading is much more than the sequential learning of letters, then words, followed by phrases. It's a messy process, one that comes together differently for different people.

Johnston, Afflerbach, & Weiss (1993) interviewed 50 teachers working within schools that held vastly different expectations for literacy instruction, ranging from schools that greatly supported teacher autonomy to those that strictly required and monitored the use of basal literacy
programs (Johnston et al., 1993). Johnston et al. (1993) noted that teachers who used basal programs, especially those pressured to do so, knew less about children’s literature, literacy development, and methods of assessing literacy progress, and spoke about their students in less detail than teachers who did not rely on scripted materials (Johnston, et al., 1993). Teachers in the most highly controlled environments utilized standardized literacy curricula and emphasized isolated skills and standardized testing whereas teachers with a great amount of autonomy focused upon a wealth of indicators of literacy development in relation to individual students (Johnston et al., 1993). In a published discussion, Allington and McGill-Franzen (2000) acknowledge that exceptional educators use various materials but emphasize their beliefs that "our most effective teachers teach children, not materials" (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000, p. 146). Additional research (Johnston, Allington, Guice, & Brooke, 1998; Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006; Ivey, 2011), recognizing the importance of the materials used in fostering literacy acquisition, has asserted that standardized reading programs as well as standardized texts are not aligned with rich literacy instruction and suggests that students, not teachers and certainly not the government, should decide upon the materials utilized in the classroom.

Since literacy instruction was a target of reform under No Child Left Behind, Goatley & Hinchman (2013) hoped the adoption of the Common Core Standards would offer "opportunities and great potential for re-envisioning literacy practices": "In leaving behind a decade focused on primary grade Reading First and Striving Reader interventions, there is the promise of renewed attention to such areas as writing, disciplinary literacy, informational texts, comprehension, and technology" (Goatley & Hinchman, 2013, p. 59). The researchers advocate for a rich interpretation and implementation of the standards and a thorough understanding of the complexity of literacy which would acknowledge that literacy instruction cannot be scripted nor
fully captured by standardized measures (Goatley & Hinchman, 2013, p. 63). Even absent a mandate to use prescribed curriculum, however, the researchers point out the pressure upon schools and districts to adopt and mandate the use of standardized materials:

In the rush to implement the Common Core State Standards on a tight timeline in an age of stingy school budgets, local school officials might feel pressured to skip the rich professional development steps. Instead, they may implement rigid use of a scripted published curriculum that purports to address the standards "correctly", claims that lack significant merit in this age of aspirational standards. (Goatley & Hinchman, 2013, p. 61)

However, following the adoption of the Common Core Standards, the wide-spread implementation of standardized curriculum did occur, not only in the area of literacy, but in mathematics as well. A RAND institute study (Kaufman, Davis, Wang, Thompson, Pane, Pfrommer, & Harris, 2017) concurs that implementation of the Common Core Standards presented challenges to publishing companies, which needed to revamp their materials or programs to align with the standards, as well as school districts, which sought alignment to the standards while operating within budget constraints. The answer for many schools became “open educational resources”, or free, public curriculum materials, pioneered by the New York State Department of Education through their EngageNY website in the form of comprehensive English language arts and mathematics “modules” that included pacing guides, unit plans, and lesson plans (Kaufman et al., 2017, x). Using Google Analytics, an October, 2015 survey of the American Teacher Panel, and interviews with teachers, the study found that the English language arts and mathematics curriculum offered through EngageNY was primarily used in New York State but was also used in every state across the nation and “teachers in states that adopted Common Core or similar standards were 65 percent more likely to use EngageNY than those in non-Common Core states” (Kaufman et al., 2017, ix). The research does not draw conclusions
about how the curriculum was actually implemented within individual classrooms, but does find that mathematics materials were used “at about three times the rate” of English language arts materials and “our survey data suggests that ELA teachers may have used EngageNY materials more comprehensively” (Kaufman et al., 2017, xi). Open access to EngageNY materials was not a significant factor in teachers’ choice to use them, however, state standards, district recommendations, and assessments were influential (Kaufman et al., 2017). Over eighty percent of teachers said their school district either recommended or required use of EngageNY materials; fifty percent said use of the materials was a district mandate (Kaufman et al., 2017). When broken down by content area, only 16% of mathematics teachers and 3% of English language arts teachers reported that their school district neither recommended nor required the use of EngageNY materials (Kaufman et al., 2017).

Timberlake, Thomas, & Barrett (2017) note that some teachers state their school districts not only mandated the use of the EngageNY modules, but required teachers to implement them “without deviation or differentiation” (Timberlake, Thomas, & Barrett, 2017, p. 47).

The New York State Education Department describes the modules as resources and “optional curricular materials.” The scripted lessons are suggested “guides” to enable teachers to visualize the delivery of equitable instruction across districts and NYSED reminds the public that “it is important to note that the lessons are not scripts” [emphasis in the original]. However, anecdotal reports of teachers being required to maintain strict fidelity to the scripts regardless of students' response to them suggested to us that the implementation was proceeding quite differently on the ground. (Timberlake, Thomas, & Barrett, 2017, p. 47)

With an interest in investigating “the impact of scripted materials on teaching a diverse student population”, the researchers interviewed teachers using the EngageNY modules within districts which either required fidelity to the scripts or allowed teachers to adapt them as they
saw fit (Timberlake, Thomas, & Barrett, 2017, p. 47-48). The study revealed confusion about uniformity and equity. One teacher, for example, thought providing students with the same lessons, instruction, and materials and holding them to the same standards would result in increased academic performance and the majority of teachers interviewed described special education students as needing to “catch up” rather than in need of modifications due to documented learning disabilities (Timberlake, Thomas, & Barrett, 2017, p. 50). According to the researchers, the prevalence of scripted curricula which, as in the case of the EngageNY materials, is promoted as being aligned to higher standards, more rigorous, and more challenging, gives the perception that uniformity will result in progress for all students without regard for what actually is rigorous or challenging for each student (Timberlake, Thomas, & Barrett, 2017). Similarly, an emphasis upon uniform, scripted curricula sends the message that teacher autonomy and differentiation is unnecessary because scripted materials can somehow address the needs of diverse students (Timberlake, Thomas, & Barrett, 2017). These assertions are supported by Cramer, Little, & McHatton (2017) who contend that the focus upon standardization in recent education reform, while presented as a solution to educational inequity, has emphasized the uniformity of teaching and learning. Not only does this detract from attending to the unique needs of students, it ignores the potential of culturally responsive teaching and undermines formal, individualized goals created for students with special needs through Individualized Education Plans (Cramer, Little, & McHatton, 2018).

2.5 – Standardization through Accountability

Cramer, Little, & McHatton (2017) note that standardization was ushered into schools through legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act and the Every Student Succeeds Act,
resulted in the adoption of the Common Core Standards in states across the nation, prompted far-reaching changes in curriculum and instruction to align with those standards, and mandated accountability systems which punished or closed schools (Cramer, Little, & McHatton, 2017). Using a critical race theory perspective, the researchers argue that standardization has had a disparate and negative impact upon urban communities which primarily serve minority populations (Cramer, Little, & McHatton, 2017). Accountability systems not only served to measure overall student mastery of the Common Core Standards, but categorized student results on standardized exams by demographically-based subgroups. In theory, this held schools accountable for ensuring all students made sufficient progress but, in practice, this painted economically disadvantaged, minority, and special education students as the culprits for school failure (Cramer, Little, & McHatton, 2017). Copious amounts of research support the harmful effects of standards-based accountability systems upon schools deemed under-performing, which are overwhelmingly located within impoverished urban areas and minority communities. In fact, the vast majority of standardization studies, including research cited in all sections of this literature review, mention the disparate consequences of standardization to schools serving urban, poor, and minority populations regardless of whether these disparities were the intended focus of the research. Literature cites 2013 as a turning point in America’s standards-based reform movement due to a revolt against the standardization policies lead by mostly white, suburban parents (Blakeslee, 2013; Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). However, the consequences of standards-based reforms for schools within poor or minority communities was well documented prior to 2013.

Jonathan Kozol (2005) visited schools across the county and particularly focused upon his observations of urban schools deemed failures by the government in his book The Shame of
the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America. According to Kozol (2005), some educators were taking anxiety medication to handle the pressure of not performing according to government expectations and, further:

The tests, however, like it or not, are hanging there like sharpened swords above the heads of principals and teachers, and since the scores, when they are finally released, are widely publicized in press accounts and on TV (the lowest-scoring schools are often named in horror stories in the tabloid newspapers - "Halls of Shame...the worst...the dirty dozen," for example, says the New York Post above a story on twelve of the city's lowest scoring schools), educators live in terror of the day the scores come out. (Kozol, 2005, p. 122)

He observed that concerns about passing standardized exams extended to all grades and content areas, regardless of whether a government-issued exam was required (Kozol, 2005). He also discovered that “low-performing” schools became places where not only "aesthetics", such as music and art classes, had been removed from the day, but recess and even content subjects, such as history and science, were also pushed aside in the name of increasing test performance:

The virtual exclusion of aesthetics from the daily lives of children in these schools is seldom mentioned when officials boast that they have pumped the scores on standardized exams by three or four percentage points by drilling children for as many as five hours a day. (Kozol, 2005, p. 119)

Kozol (2005) touched upon an obvious difference between many "failing" schools and those considered successful: the hidden perceptions of the school's children. According to Kozol (2005), the potential of children in high-performing areas is simply assumed and, as such, there is no need for the "self-help mantras" and exercises he noticed in schools deemed failures where "hope must be constructed therapeutically because so much of it has been destroyed by the conditions of internment in which we have placed these children" and further goes on to state: "It is harder to convince young people they 'can learn' when they are cordoned off by a society
that isn't sure they really can" (Kozol, 2005, p. 37). Kozol (2005) questioned the overarching agenda of conformity and standardization he found at work in “under-performing” schools:

Many of the brightest, most creative, independent-minded, and ambitious kids I know are not "team players" and don't want to be and, indeed, would lose the very essence of what makes them full, complex, and interesting people if they were. There will, I am afraid, be fewer fascinating mavericks, fewer penetrating questioners, and fewer powerful dissenters coming from our inner-city schools before too long if this agenda cannot be reversed. (Kozol, 2005, p. 106)

Kozol (2005) documented not only the conditions within “failing” schools, but also the negative, often personal, impact to the educators and students teaching and learning within schools deemed failures. Similar ramifications of failure labeling are supported by other researchers. Johnston & Costello (2005) argue that "accountability pressure on teachers is counter-productive, especially when teachers already have an internal accountability system" (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p. 258). Across five years, Johnston, Allington, Guice, & Brooks (1998) studied four high-poverty school districts attempting to implement a more literature-based approach to literacy instruction (Johnston et al., 1998). The researchers repeatedly found a focus upon standardized test scores which promoted an emphasis upon standardized curricula and detracted from literature-based instruction (Johnston et al., 1998). In districts which prioritized standardized assessments, administrators typically described their teachers as "lazy and not very smart" and over the course of the study, administrators in such districts were charged with test manipulation, signaling “not merely trickle-down pressure – it was veritably hydraulic” (Johnston, Allington, Guice, & Brooke, 1998, p. 93-94). Johnston et al. (1998) found that although there was a great deal of discussion about "the need for change" within the schools they studied, there was rarely support for such change:

We found that individual teachers largely carried the burden of change on
their backs. They were expected to change with little in the way of guidance, little in the way of professional development opportunities, and few opportunities to explore change or reflect upon it. (Johnston et al., 1998, p. 90)

This occurs, the researchers emphasize, despite the fact that "changing schools means changing the culture" and that "the only schools in which change efforts continue are those in which teachers had some power in the decision making" (Johnston et al., 1998, p. 98). Rather than encouraging reflection, the schools under the most pressure often wield more control over teachers and classrooms, which often leads to "more controlling teaching" and "less engaging relationships with students". Thus, in highly restrictive schools, teachers manage students much in the same way as they are managed by school administrators and the government and exhibit behavior which can be characterized as controlling and restrictive (Johnston et al., 1998, p. 89). Ultimately, attempts to focus upon students were undermined within a system more focused upon conformity to state mandates and the avoidance of adverse government punishment (Johnston et al., 1998).

Commentary written by Nichols & Parsons (2010) recognizes that accountability measures often serve as a wedge between teachers and their schools and that the "teachers who know the schools best and care the most are systemically removed from efficacy within those schools" (p. 2): "Accountability has placed teachers in a position where they respond rather than lead, and this position is hardly conducive to a democratic voice" (Nichols & Parsons, 2010, p. 9). Diamond (2007) discovered that pressure limits teacher innovation and caused teachers to emphasize the teaching of ELA and Math (tested subjects) and that teaching was characterized by a focus on certain skills and pacing which ensured topics would be covered before the state exams. Other content areas, such as Social Studies and Science were either taught sporadically or after the state tests (Diamond, 2007). Stillman (2009) showed that teachers working in
identified schools often encounter "internal conflicts" regarding how they would truly like to teach and how they feel they must teach in order to prove their students proficient on standardized tests. Such conflicts, "along with facing the daily pressures that accompanied working in an underperforming school, took a heavy emotional toll on teachers" (Stillman, 2009, p. 155). It shouldn't be surprising then that teachers working in identified schools are more than forty percent more likely to leave the school and almost seventy percent more likely to request a transfer within the same district to an unidentified school (Feng, Figlio, & Sass, 2010).

McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez (2009) state:

...teachers internalize the underperforming label assigned to their schools. They view it as a reflection of the caliber of their work and their contribution to students' success or failure. In addition, it affects their morale. They perceive themselves as being looked down upon not only by the "president", as one teacher put it, but more importantly, by their local community." (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2009, p. 16)

The researchers documented the experiences of teachers and administrators working in "underperforming" schools in Massachusetts:

When teachers and administrators first heard MADOE [the Massachusetts Department of Education] targeted their school for intervention many expressed a sense of inequity, arguing that the state ignored myriad factors that affected student learning but which school personnel considered outside their control. (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2009, p. 13)

These teachers and administrators also believed the State's designation and intrusion into schools and classrooms negatively affected the schools and the overall education of students. They noted that such designations come with a "stigma" and parents often opted to pull their children from identified schools and enroll them elsewhere. In addition, they believed state interventions were ineffective because state departments of education (in this case the Massachusetts Department of
Education) "never fully understood their schools, in part because they spent little time" in them (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2009, p. 19).

Lisa Delpit (2003) wrote about her frustrations in watching an urban district shut down a writing program due to accountability pressure despite the fact that teachers found the program beneficial for students. Teachers, knowing the program was in jeopardy, spoke about why they believed it to be an effective and worthwhile initiative at district meetings. However, "the project was defunded because the teachers couldn't show that an entire school's test scores went up because one of the school's teachers participated in the writing project" (Delpit, 2003, p. 15). Delpit (2003) tells the stories of teachers exasperated with the restrictions of mandated curricula. In one district, "supervisors" were hired to ensure the strict adherence to a newly-adopted scripted program. Delpit shows teachers as courageous thinkers who are determined to do what is right for their students. She insists: "We have to cease attempting to build "teacher-proof" schools with scripted low-level instruction and instead seek to develop (and retain) perceiving and thinking teachers who challenge their students with high-quality, interactive, and thoughtful instruction" (Delpit, 2003, p. 17).

Identification of schools as failures also translates to treating students as failures, and often leads even researchers to seek out how to "fix" the children or their families, or to explain failure in terms of learning and social deficiencies (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Efforts to contextualize these perceived failures result in depictions of students' lives that are "miserable and unproductive" and make it seem that the nation in general is "wrong" for these students (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 5). The researchers explain that an "urge to help invites an hysterical description of the problem and American descriptions and explanations in turn leave the people who are in need of help actually worse off for our effort" (McDermott & Varenne,
Kelly Wissman (2009) claims that even researchers use a rhetoric of school failure, especially when discussing the standardized test scores of students from urban areas. She notes that researchers use "metaphors of disease", such as "intervention", "triage", and "treatment" when suggesting ways in which students might be better supported (Wissman, 2009, p. 150).

Researchers Brown & Brown (2012) contend that such rhetoric is difficult to counter. They analyzed “oppositional culture theory” and “cultural difference theory”, both counter-discourses which protest a deficit perspective of African American performance in educational settings (Brown & Brown, 2012). The researchers demonstrate how these specific counter-discourses “can ironically re-inscribe these students (as well as the family, community, and cultural/racial groups from which they come) in static, homogenizing ways”, “unintentionally open the possibility to homogenize African Americans in a social discourse of specialized need and intervention”, and position African American students as “different and deviant from what is considered normal” (Brown & Brown, 2012, p. 12-13). Brown & Brown (2012) find that any discourse (even well-intentioned or counter-discourses) can become harmful when used to frame decisions about how to educate specific groups of students, noting that not all African American students have the same experiences or needs and cannot be grouped into one racially-defined educational category (Brown & Brown, 2012, p. 22).

Research demonstrates that the standardization movement disproportionately impacted schools serving impoverished, minority populations while also portraying the people in those communities as deficient and, further, that “success” for “failing” schools did not come without sacrifice. Rachel Seher’s (2011) work demonstrates that even when schools succeed according to state standards, they often fail the students they serve. Seher (2011) tells the story of one New York City school which, under the punitive pressures of accountability, standardized curriculum,
instruction, discipline, texts, projects, and assignments in the name of meeting the state’s accountability expectations. While the school later received accolades for their performance on standardized measures and was, therefore, characterized as one of the most progressive schools in New York City, Seher found that the school’s students often felt “disconnected, frustrated, anxious, and powerless in school” (Seher, 2011. p. 174). Seher (2011) shows that schools deemed failing are faced with the decision to continually endure the consequences of failure (which includes the firing of staff and school closure) or conform to a system of standardization which ignores the uniqueness of students and are, therefore, in a “no win” situation. How this situation is possible, however, is often overlooked in research.

According to Sheehy (2013), the obvious differences in the way standards-based reforms have impacted “failing” versus “successful” schools calls attention to what is possible, or isn’t, within each context. She used “a geographic explanation of context – the social, relational processes, imaginings, and artifacts that distinguish one classroom and one school from another” to explore the differences between urban schools in Manhattan, NY and Albany, NY (Sheehy, 2013, p. 400). Sheehy (2013) explains school as an imagined space created by complex processes which include human actions that both enables and restricts possibilities. She notes that standard implementation was intended to promote equality but legislation (such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 which funded Race to the Top) that mandated accountability coupled with high-stakes testing actually served to distort teaching in places deemed failures (Sheehy, 2013). For example, in Albany, NY, where educators are often under accountability pressure and face consequences such as the loss of jobs or school closure, the standardized tests that dictate success or failure becomes a priority. Tested content areas, therefore, become emphasized and time spent in
content areas such as the arts is sacrificed (Sheehy, 2013). In Manhattan, however, the competitive nature of enrolling in certain schools prioritizes entrance requirements for students. As such, students engage in reading, writing, analysis, and expressing their explanations because proficiency in those areas is valued in the acceptance process (Sheehy, 2013). As shown by Sheehy (2013), while schools in Manhattan and Albany are both places of education, they operate by different rules and expectations. In both cases, marginalization is a consequence of failure to meet those expectations. In Manhattan, however, failure is individualized and could mean a student is denied acceptance to a competitive public school whereas in Albany, school-wide failure means state intervention, the firing of staff, and possible school closure (Sheehy, 2013). In Albany, where entire schools can fail, entire groups or communities can be marginalized. However, there are cases where marginalized segments of a population have created a new “center” from a position on the fringes (Sheehy, 2013, p. 406). Sheehy (2013) provides several examples of this, including a group of ELL teachers serving a largely Vietnamese community who were housed in a separate school building and became largely unknown to other teachers within their district but made their space into an immigration center for their school community (Sheehy, 2013, p. 406). Where some possibilities are cordoned off, other possibilities emerge and marginalized groups which have been deemed “the other” can create new realities (Sheehy, 2013, p. 406). This doesn’t always happen, however. In Albany, schools deemed failures must still answer to state (and federal) expectations and in an effort to avoid consequences outlined in standards-based education reform, school-wide practices are impacted (Sheehy, 2013). Sheehy (2013) calls the borders created by the narrowing of possibilities “thick” or “thin” and some are more permeable than others, saying “standards do not create thick borders, practices do” (Sheehy, 2013, p. 406):
Migration of ideas, people, and the objects across specific school borders needs further study. We need to know the mechanisms of ideas’ routes in and out of schools. We need to know what, if anything, impedes movement in thin places. We need to know what enables movement. We need to know the same of thick places. We need to foreground those processes in our research reports so that the binary of pedagogy/policy that is so tightly wrapped around ‘school knowledge’ is broken. (Sheehy, 2013, p. 407).

In New York, while the implementation of standards may have intended to promote equality, schools deemed failures have become increasingly restricted places of thick borders, resulting in greater educational disparity between “failing” schools that operate under strict constraints and “successful” schools that operate with a greater degree of freedom (Sheehy, 2013). Where borders are thick, an understanding of how to thin them is vital to educational freedom and demands an understanding of school geography – “the ideas, things, and people that are able to flow in and out of classroom buildings” – as well as how power and politics influence teaching and learning (Sheehy, 2013, p. 409).

2.6 – Summary of Standardization Literature

As Sheehy (2013) points out, standards-based reforms, while likely well-intentioned, have resulted in greater educational disparity and research which illuminates standardization as a process of power to uncover how it operates is needed but lacking. Further, as Sheehy (2010) asserted, numerous studies investigating standardization adopts a macro lens and analyzes, for example, the origins of national policy or federal versus state roles in creating education policy. Conversely, much of the research about standardization utilizes a micro lens to investigate the practices of a specific classroom, the impact of standardization upon a particular school, or tell the stories of a small group of educators or students. Similarly, many studies focus upon an
aspect of standards-based reform legislation, such as standardized testing, standardized instruction, or accountability systems, whereas this study views standardization as a vast network of power that employs testing, instruction, and accountability as actors which enable the network to function. The entry point for the study is also micro in that tracing the standardization network begins at William S. Hackett Middle School in Albany, NY, one of the first schools labeled “Persistently Lowest Achieving” in New York State (NYSED, 2010a). However, tracing the standardization network through Hackett Middle School connects the local context of the school to state and national contexts. As Sheehy (2010) suggested, there is a need for studies which connect macro and micro contexts in the field of education and this study hopes to contribute to fulfilling that need. That said, a review of literature regarding standardization does reveal a wealth of valuable historic and current research contributions on the topic which, taken together, inform this study and provide important understandings, especially regarding the causes and effects of standardization.

Previous research demonstrates that standardization is often presented as a solution to problems in the American education system without clear evidence to support the existence of a specific problem or that standardization could be a viable solution (Allington, 2002, Diamond, 2007; Hursh, 2013; Ravitch, 2002; Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019; Young, 2018). Therefore, educational realities are shaped through rhetoric, perception, beliefs, public opinion, and political influence (Brown & Brown, 2012; Raptis, 2012; Sheehy, 2010; Sheehy, 2013). Alone, the adoption of standards is enough to change practice because adopting standards naturally results in alignment of practice to conform to them (Eisner, 1993; Fenwick, 2010a; Sheehy, 2013; Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). However, since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, standards-based reforms have been additionally bolstered by legislative mandates that are tied to school
funding and require states to hold schools accountable for failure to meet prescribed expectations (Blakeslee, 2013; Hursh, 2013; Liu, 2008; Sheehy, 2013; Sonnenberg & Provasnik, 2007).

Numerous researchers document that standardized testing, because it is linked to punitive accountability systems and is, therefore, high-stakes, results in narrow curricula, prioritizes test preparation, and influences educational materials, and find, additionally, that such consequences are not limited to tested grades or content areas but extend to entire school communities (Anthony et al., 2007; Blakeslee, 2013; Bordignon & Lam, 2004; Graue, 2009; Hursh, 2008; Hursh, 2013; Johnston & Costello, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Sheehy, 2010; Sheehy, 2013). While the emphasis placed upon standardized tests and the negative ramifications of them is documented in ample research, there is evidence that both the tests themselves and the data garnered from their results are subjects of political manipulation, meaning that failure can be created or deleted according to political will (Blakeslee, 2013; Hursh, 2008; Young, 2018).

In an effort to align with standards, pass standardized exams, and avoid punishment associated with failure, standardized instructional practices are also prioritized (Allington, 2002; Anthony et al., 2007; Blakeslee, 2013; Bordignon & Lam, 2004; Graue, 2009; Hursh, 2008; Hursh, 2013; Johnston et al., 1998; Johnston & Costello, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Sheehy, 2010; Sheehy, 2013; Teale et al., 2009). Consequently, research demonstrates that standardized instructional practices are not only promoted through standards-based legislation, but are also widely mandated by districts and schools (Healy, 2007; Kaufman et al., 2017; Timberlake et al.; 2017). On the contrary, an abundance of studies conducted over decades, especially from researchers in the field of literacy, assert that individualization and differentiation are the hallmarks of quality instruction (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000; Clay, 1991; Clay, 2001;
Researchers assert that despite the theoretical intentions outlined in standards-based reform legislation, such as ensuring high-quality instruction for all, educational equality, improving academic achievement, and preparing graduates for college or career, the reforms have had unintended, contrary consequences in practice, including higher drop-out rates (Hursh, 2008; Borg et al., 2007), less attention to student needs (Cramer et al., 2017; Delpit, 2003; Seher, 2011; Timberlake et al., 2017); and no indication of recent academic improvement even according to National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, which standards-based reformers refer to as a reliable measure (Blakeslee, 2013; Drago et al., 2016). Further, the pervasive, negative consequences of standardization documented in abundant research are actually amplified in schools deemed failures, the majority of which serve minority populations (Borg et al., 2007; Delpit, 2003; Feng et al., 2010, Johnston et al., 1998; Johnston & Costello, 2005; Kozol, 2005; McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2009; Raptis, 2012; Sheehy, 2013; Stillman, 2009). In “failing” schools, educator advocacy on behalf of students is muffled, teacher autonomy is diminished or eliminated, and instructional differentiation is traded for standardization in the name of meeting government demands (Cramer et al., 2017; Delpit, 2003; Diamond, 2007; Johnston et al., 1998; Kozol, 2005; Nichols & Parsons, 2010; Seher, 2011; Timberlake et al., 2017). This standards-over-students approach not only distorts practice, but impacts the individuals who are teaching and learning within “failing” schools, often emotionally and personally (Feng et al., 2010; McDermott & Varenne, 1995; McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2009; Stillman, 2009; Wissman, 2009). For groups labeled as “failures”, the rhetoric
that they are under-performing and somehow deficient is difficult to reverse and even the best attempts to do so can re-inscribe them as different, separate, “others” (Brown & Brown, 2012).

Taken together, the body of research regarding standardization has provided the field with knowledge of the causes and effects of standardization which provides a solid foundation upon which to build a close empirical study such as this one. With an understanding that standardization is commonly posed as a solution to problems in the American education system and an understanding of the well-documented adverse effects of standardization, especially upon schools labeled as failures, this study seeks to understand how standardization operates as a networked process of power across time and place. Rather than contest the findings of the aforementioned research, the goal of this study is to investigate how a myriad of actors come together to make the dismal conditions uncovered in schools, especially “failing” schools, possible.
3.1 – Theoretical Framework: Actor Network Theory (ANT)

AT was developed by students of science and technology and their claim that it is utterly impossible to understand what holds the society together without reinjecting in its fabric the facts manufactured by natural and social sciences and the artifacts designed by engineers. (Latour, 1996, p. 3)

Arising out of Paris sometime between 1978 and 1982, the term Actor Network Theory (ANT) was first coined by Michael Callon and borrows from "sociologists of scientific knowledge", such as Thomas Kuhn (Law, 2009, p. 142-143). According to John Law (2009), Actor Network Theory is "a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities, and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generate effect of webs of relations within which they are located" (Law, 2009, p. 141). ANT, therefore, sees the world in terms of networks which are made up of both human and non-human actors. ANT is most concerned with how those actors assemble, the connections between them, and how they work to fulfill network goals. Walz (2006) cites the work of Callon (1986), Latour (1984), and Law (1986) as the first studies involving ANT, which demonstrate that finding individual actors within a network and paying close attention to the connections between them reveals the construction as well as the effects of those networks (Walz, 2006). ANT is particularly useful in studying what appears to be a phenomenon because it allows researchers to dig into vague, unquantifiable, intangible occurrences without assumption (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). By paying close attention to the actors within a network, ANT researchers are able to sort out what is important in that network, including how an apparent phenomenon is put together.
and operationalized (Latour, 1996). ANT asserts that nearly everything we accept as reality, even the very nature of society, is created by the workings of human and non-human actors which are linked together in networks (Law, 1992). Law (1992) further claims ANT is "all about power" but sees power, as well as knowledge, truth, and society itself, as network effects (Law, 1992, p. 6). To explain, Law (1992) offers the following:

…”knowledge", then, is embodied in a variety of material forms. But where does it come from? The actor-network answer is that it is the end product a lot of hard work in which heterogeneous bits and pieces [...] that would like to make off on their own are juxtaposed into a pattered network which overcomes their resistance. In short, it is a material matter but also a matter of organising and ordering those materials. (Law, 1992, p. 2)

ANT researchers, then, understand that actors within a network never stand alone or work in isolation. Instead, they are connected and it is the way they assemble and work in concert that can reveal how any entity is constructed and functions (Law, 1992). Consequently, ANT research has the potential to not only reveal how the actors and operations of a network are put together, but how they can be taken apart, reorganized, and recreated with different intentions to produce new realities (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

3.2 – Networks of Power

Latour (1996) explains that networks should be visualized as having "as many dimensions as they have connections" (Latour, 1996, p. 3). He further elaborates: "AT claims that modern societies cannot be described without recognizing them as having a fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary character that is never captured by the notions of levels, layers, territories, spheres, categories, structure, systems" (Latour, 1996, p. 3). A network’s reach, therefore, is unlimited and has no innate boundaries (Latour, 1996). In fact, the strength and
durability of a network is exemplified in its ability to extend itself (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). There is no “center” of a network; rather, it is comprised of network actors and the connections between those actors (Law, 2009). Networks are never complete; they are always moving, circulating, and growing (Latour, 1996). While networks can be described as complex, messy, and intangible, researchers have provided straightforward, understandable definitions of networks (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). According to Fenwick & Edwards (2010), a "network is an assemblage of materials brought together and linked through processes of translation that perform a particular function" (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 12). In other words, a network is a group of human and non-human actors which are processed and connected to meet specific goals. Through the lens of Actor Network Theory (ANT), networks can be found nearly anywhere and exist, often unrecognized, in our daily lives. However, our modern, common examples of networks, including telephone, internet, and technology networks, merely carry and transmit information and, therefore, are different from an actor network with the major difference being an actor network’s power to create, change, transform, and translate not only information, but realities and truths (Hamilton, 2011; Latour, 1996).

3.3 – Network Actors

Network actors, both human and non-human, are busy at work. They operationalize a network and their efforts ensure that a network functions successfully and in accordance with the network’s goals (Hamiton, 2011). Actor Network Theory does not assume that human actors possess more power, exert more force, or carry more weight than non-human, material actors (Law, 2009). ANT recognizes that humans can change things just as things can change humans and, therefore, the potential impact of humans and inanimate objects within a network is equal
(Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). ANT also rejects any notion that actors which are prominent in a network are also the most powerful (Fenwick, 2010). This recognition is important for studies of policy networks which often contain prominent actors, such as political figures, because it levels the playing field and allows all actors to be approached objectively (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). It also helps to ensure that actors cannot hide behind other, more visible actors and, thereby, escape analysis (Law, 1992). Through the lens of ANT, it is not the power of individual actors that matters, but the work actors produce together (Law, 2009). As such, ANT analysis emphasize the connections and collaboration between actors rather than their isolated qualities (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

Obviously, non-human, material actors are ignorant to the role they play within a network but it is possible for human beings to be enrolled in a network without their knowledge or consent and to be equally unaware of their role or how their work contributes to a network’s stability (Koyama, 2010). Even when human actors are aware, or become aware, of their role within a network, they may not be aware of the other actors operating in the network and, therefore, contesting their role means contesting a network still partially hidden, operating in the darkness (Law, 1992). There are ways the network can become concealed, such as the “appearance of unity” (Law, 1992, p. 5). When actors are lumped together, it is more difficult to identify the myriad of actors that contribute to a network and, therefore, simplification can actually make a network disappear (Law, 1992). Law (1992), asks: "Why is it that the networks which make up the actor come to be deleted, or concealed from view? And why is this sometimes not the case?" (Law, 1992, p. 5). He explains:

The argument runs like this. All phenomena are the effect or the product of heterogeneous networks. But in practice we do not cope with endless network ramification. Indeed, much of the time we are not even in a
position to detect network complexities. So, what is happening? The answer is that if a network acts as a single block, then it disappears, to be replaced by the action itself and the seemingly simple author of that action. At the same time, the way in which the effect is generated is also effaced: for the time being, it is neither visible nor relevant. So it is that something much simpler -- a working television, a well-managed bank or a healthy body -- comes, for a time, to mask the networks that produce it. (Law, 1992, p. 5)

Actor Network Theory focuses upon illuminating the network by identifying the actors operating within it without assuming one actor is somehow more powerful or important than another (Law, 2009). ANT calls attention to how disparate actors are linked, what they do, and the products of their work because ANT recognizes that a network can only be dismantled once the way it is assembled is fully understood (Latour, 1996).

3.4 – ANT in Previous Studies of Policy as a Networked Process of Power

Research conducted by Hamilton (2009; 2011), Koyama (2010), and Nespor (2002) utilized Actor Network Theory to analyze government policy as networked processes of power. Researchers utilizing ANT accomplish network illumination through network tracing. They latch onto an actor they can see and use that actor as an entry point to the network. Since actors within a network are connected, researchers then allow the actor to introduce them to other actors. Across these studies of policy as networks of power, researchers demonstrate that policies must successfully endure the four step “process of translation” before they are fully realized, which includes (1) problematization, or claims of problems and crisis in a field along with suggested policy solutions, (2) interference, or interventions aligned with policy solutions to resolve the problem, (3) enrollment, whereby human and non-human actors are organized into
detailed roles in order to carry out prescribed interventions, and (4) mobilization, the moment when policies are accepted as viable solutions, thereby validating the success of the policies as well as the existence of the original problem (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2011). This study will also investigate government policy and how a power network is processed, but with a unique focus upon the standardization network within, and extending to state and national contexts beyond, a local “persistently lowest achieving” school.

While not an investigation of government policy, Michael Callon’s 1986 study, *Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay*, is included here because it offers a useful model of network tracing and the application of the process of translation as a research method. As an ANT pioneer and expert, Michael Callon’s work is valuable to ANT researchers and this study has particularly informed policy-focused ANT research (such as Hamilton, 2011). Callon (1986) explains that reality is created through moments of translation and as Callon asserts, “…reality is a process. Like a chemical body, it passes through successive states” (Callon, 1986, p. 207). According to Callon (1986), the process of translation:

…consists of four moments which can in reality overlap. These moments constitute the different phases of a general process called translation, during which the identity of actors, the possibility of interaction and the margins of manoeuvre are negotiated and delimited. (Callon, 1986, p. 203)

The first moment of translation, problematization, is thoroughly explained in Callon’s (1986) analysis of three researchers and their studies of scallops. First, he shows how researchers jumped to conclusions in their studies. Rather than simply pinpoint questions which could lead to further understanding of their topic, they made broad generalizations about the behavior of sea
scallops in Japan and, based on those observations, created a project to cultivate scallops in France without regard for the fact that the sea scallops they observed in Japan were a different species from those living in French waters (Callon, 1986). The researchers state there is a lack of information in the scientific community about the particular species of scallops they propose to work with in France and their efforts there could contribute to the field. They reinforce fears of fishermen about the supply of scallops in light of their economic importance to the group (Callon, 1986). Therefore, the researchers argue, their work would solve two problems: it would provide additional research and bolster economic opportunity for fishermen though they provide no concrete evidence that either problem exists or that their methods are viable solutions even if they did (Callon, 1986). In the problematization stage, the three researchers he studied used commentaries to define a problem, solutions to the problem, and actors within the network. Their characterizations of network actors were presented as factual, with fishermen painted as over-zealous and profit-seeking pillagers of scallops. Scientific colleagues, as a group, were presented as ignorant yet interested actors while the scallops themselves are the focus of study and the group needing support and intervention (Callon, 1986). The researchers he studied not only defined the actors, but also defined how they relate to one another in the network, thereby categorizing group association (Callon, 1986). They fostered problematization, quite simply, by constantly repeating their arguments throughout their work (Callon, 1986). Problematization then, as demonstrated in Callon (1986) involves presenting a problem, defining how the problem can be solved, and defining the actors within the network.

In the stage of interessement, or interference as it is referred to in this study, the researchers Callon (1986) studied worked to intervene in a pre-existing network, further define the roles of actors, and prescribe interventions that would solve the problem they presented
(Callon, 1986). There are numerous ways the three researchers could have interfered in this network. However, Callon (1986) notes that interference commonly occurs by force, seduction, or solicitation (Callon, 1986, p.209). In the case of the researchers seeking to domesticate sea scallops in France, interference involved physically forcing the scallops into their proposed holding containers for cultivation (Callon, 1986). Otherwise, interference was accomplished mainly through solicitation. The scallop researchers held meetings to solicit the support of actors within the network and while full support from all actors rarely occurs, it also isn’t required for interference to be successful (Callon, 1986). The researchers were successful in garnering support from some other scientists and fishermen union representatives and moved forward with their project. The prescribed interventions and detailed actor roles achieved during interference provide a structure for enrolling additional actors into the project if necessary (Callon, 1986).

While successful problematization and interference are necessary for any social project to be actualized, they are theoretical stages whereas enrollment is an action stage – the moment when theory is put practice (Callon, 1986). Through enrollment, additional actors are pulled into the network or, if they already existed within that network, they are assigned a role that aligns with the project’s agenda (Callon, 1986). Callon (1986) states that enrollment can occur in a number of ways, including “physical violence…seduction, transaction, [and] consent without discussion” (Callon, 1986, p. 214). But, actors can resist enrollment, too. They can disengage and refuse to play their part, attempt to disrupt the project, or attempt to escape and disentangle themselves from the network (Callon, 1986). The biggest obstacle to enrollment for the scallop researchers was the sea scallops because they did not behave the same as those the researchers had observed in Japan. This was especially challenging because the researchers’ entire project, as built in the moment of problematization, rested upon the faulty premise that they would but
few did (Callon, 1986). As they continued trying to replicate in France what they’d observed in 
Japan, the researchers wrote about their findings, appearing to contribute important insight into 
what works – or doesn’t – in the domestication of sea scallops. However, most of their findings 
had already been documented in the field and predicted their struggles (Callon, 1986). They 
prepared for questions from other scientists and were able to pacify those who attended a 
scientific conference with claims that the project was successful because a limited number of the 
scallops acted according to their predictions (Callon, 1986). The fishermen believed the 
researchers’ claims of success (Callon, 1986).

Achievement of the fourth moment described by Callon (1986), mobilization, depends 
on successful problematization, interference, and enrollment. In the moment of mobilization, 
the researchers were able to hold the project up as a success on their own terms, according to 
their own definitions of success. It didn’t take every actor to accomplish this, either – a limited 
number of scallops that cooperated, a group of other researchers who were pacified by the 
explanations presented at the scientific conference, and fisherman union representatives who 
accepted their findings (Callon, 1986). Though the few were speaking for the many, new 
knowledge was constructed and “truths” were accepted: yes, the scallops in France behave like 
those in Japan; yes, new research accepted by the scientific community was contributed to the 
field; and, yes, the cultivation methods implemented by the researchers are working (Callon, 
1986). This enabled the three researchers act as experts speaking on behalf of the scallops, the 
scientific community, and the fishermen as these “truths” became widespread. Thus, the 
network is mobilized for a time (Callon, 1986). In the words of Callon (1986), mobilization is 
successful when “only voices speaking in unison will be heard” (Callon, 1986, p. 223). A 
mobilized network has the ability to extend itself to other domains, ensure a consistent message,
and conceal the variety of actors it contains as well as how they operate by limiting actors who represent and speak for the network. Further, in mobilization, realities and universal truths are solidified (Callon, 1986). Mobilization is accomplished when the truths asserted by the network are accepted and this validates both the existence of the initial problem, the effectiveness of the prescribed interventions, and the need for ongoing network efforts (Callon, 1986). It is insulated but not impenetrable. Since networks are created and changed through the process of translation, they remain vulnerable to that process. It is possible to alter a network through dissent and controversy, whereby the actors contest those speaking on their behalf and new voices emerge in hopes of creating a new reality through the process of translation: “As the aphorism says, traduttore-traditore, from translation to treason there is only a short step” (Callon, 1986, p. 224).

Callon (1986) is an important ANT study because it so clearly demonstrates a method of network tracing and analysis through the process of translation and the effectiveness of it. Callon (1986) began network tracing using a localized actor he could “see”: the work of the three researchers he studied (Callon, 1986). Callon (1986) could “see” them because they were doing something and that’s what actors do. They move; they’re active; they do things. In the case of Callon (1986), the work conducted by the three scallop researchers was the activity that caught his attention and, as an ANT theorist, he recognized something was happening and the efforts of actors was making it happen (Callon, 1986). Of course, the three researchers are actors but because ANT recognizes that actors aren’t always human, the research they produced is an actor unto itself (Callon, 1986). It was this actor, the research, that also leads Callon (1986) to other actors – other materials or people also doing things. Callon (1986) learned about the scallops, fishermen working in French waters, and other scientists – three groups of actors lumped together and defined with broad generalizations within that study but nonetheless active and
moving. In reading the research, Callon (1986) also found that problems were asserted and solutions were posed – evidence of problematization. He followed each new actor he discover wherever they lead him – from the waters of Japan to the waters of France, to conferences, and to meetings – and, along the way, looked for evidence of moments of translation. This network tracing and translation analysis allowed Callon (1986) to not only describe who or what was operating within the network, but how power functioned and could be turned over within it. This method has been effective in other ANT studies of policy as networks of power, such as Hamilton (2009; 2011), Koyama (2010), and Nespor (2002).

Mary Hamilton's 2009 and 2011 work concerns adult literacy learning, Individualized Learning Plans, and the Skills for Life policies of the UK. Utilizing Actor Network Theory, she claims "ANT has evolved a set of conceptual and methodological tools that can be used to excavate the detailed unfolding of social projects like a policy intervention" (Hamilton, 2011, p. 5). Her 2009 study, Putting Words in their Mouths, investigates the Individual Learning Plans, or ILPs, adult literacy students create with their tutors. While the ILP is intended to draw out the goals of the adult student and an action plan on the part of the tutor, Hamilton traced ILP-related data, such as guidance documents, example ILPs, and interviews with tutors, and shows how the process is twisted by being entangled within a government policy network (Hamilton, 2009). Therefore, Hamilton (2009) entered the policy network at a local entry point she could “see” – the Individual Learning Plan practices and artifacts of an adult literacy program operating within the UK. From that entry point, Hamilton (2009) traced the network and both discovered and explained connections between the local context of the adult literacy program and the national context of federal literacy policy (Hamilton, 2009). The “problem” of adult illiteracy in the UK was met with calls for further standardization of tutoring practices (Hamilton, 2009).
prescribed intervention was further standardization of adult literacy programs in the UK, including standardized, required Individual Learning Plan (ILP) categories, "SMART" goals, and progress monitoring (Hamilton, 2009). Tutors were enrolled within the network to craft the ILPs according to government mandates while also attempting to make the program meaningful and beneficial for their students (Hamilton, 2009). By illuminating policy as a network of power, Hamilton (2009) demonstrates how adult literacy instruction became much more about meeting the goals outlined by government policy than meeting the intrinsic goals of the adult learner.

Hamilton's 2011 study, Unruly Practices, investigates the UK’s “Skills for Life” policies through narratives about the UK’s International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), the “GetOn!” media campaign, and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) created for adult students attending literacy programs (Hamilton, 2011). Again, using practices and artifacts associated with Individual Learning Plans, Hamilton (2011) enters the policy network at a localized, micro level of practice. Network tracing reveals connections between ILPs and macro, national policies exemplified in the UK’s “GetOn!” literacy campaign as well as a national literacy survey (Hamilton, 2011). Analyzing ANT’s process of translation, Hamilton (2011) uncovers what she calls a "breathtaking statistical slight of hand" of the International Adult Literacy Survey (Hamilton, 2011, p. 19). She specifically details how the survey itself played a role in the problematization of adult literacy, contributing to metaphors which promoted a rhetoric of failure and which was "productively mobilised - and added to - by the Skills of Life Policy to problematise and establish a crisis view of literacy as a deficit inherent in individuals" (Hamilton, 2011, p. 15). Adult illiteracy was also problematized though media commercials which featured a “gremlin” that chastised parents who could not read or write well enough to
help their children with homework and played upon the pre-existing anxieties of adults who struggle to read or write proficiently (Hamilton, 2011). She found that interventions aimed at solving the problem of adult illiteracy were actually counter to research-based findings about how adults learn and acquire new skills (Hamilton, 2011). In terms of enrollment, Hamilton (2011) asserts that English language learners in the UK were able to escape the negative ramifications of the government’s literacy campaign and initiatives because they were not a focus of such policies due to the government’s apathy toward individuals and groups of people learning English as a new language. While those attempting to learn the language remained in need of English language courses, they were able to escape the UK’s literacy policy network and the initiatives that distorted the literacy instruction for other adult learners (Hamilton, 2011). Hamilton’s (2009; 2011) analysis of policy-based networks of power shows that policies endure stages. The process begins with a supposed crisis, then a policy is introduced as a solution, interventions are created and followed, and results are reported to support the “truth” that the policy was and is necessary, effectually creating “knowledge that eventually becomes unquestioned truth” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 24).

Jan Nespor’s 2002 study, *Networks and Contexts of Reform*, tells the story of a parent, Mrs. Tuttle, who became concerned with the quality of her child’s education in the 1990’s, namely that the expectations for her youngest child did not seem as high as it had been for her older children (Nespor, 2002). In comparing the school work her older children completed in a particular grade to the assignments of her youngest child, Mrs. Tuttle became convinced that adhering to grade-level standards would address the discrepancies she noted (Nespor, 2002). Mrs. Tuttle’s locally-based protest propelled her to became fully engaged in the standardization network, even serving as a member of state-wide education boards and, eventually, as an active
participant in national initiatives to adopt and implement standards. Nespor (2002) enters the policy network through the very micro, personal experiences of Mrs. Tuttle (Nespor, 2002). However, Mrs. Tuttle, as one actor in a larger network of power, connects Nespor (2002) to human and non-human actors in macro, state and national education contexts and illuminates standardization as a network of power that operates across time and place. Nespor (2002) reveals that the policies Mrs. Tuttle supported were ultimately implemented state-wide and followed the process of translation seen in other ANT studies of power networks: Mrs. Tuttle’s journey began with a problem, namely her perception of low-expectations in her child’s school which she generalized broadly to all schools and the experiences of all students. Mrs. Tuttle then took part in creating the policies and standardized interventions intended to solve the problem and enrolled other actors in taking specific implementation steps (Nespor, 2002). In time, Mrs. Tuttle’s collaborative efforts with other actors informed Common Core Learning initiatives, which included standardized curriculum and standardized testing state-wide (Nespor, 2002). Interestingly, the study reveals how Mrs. Tuttle, a parent who wanted a say in the education her child received, took part in standardizing schooling for other people’s children (Nespor, 2002).

Jill Koyama’s Making Failure Pay (2010) traces the accountability network through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Koyama (2010) enters the network through Supplemental Education Services, or SES, providers tasked with providing additional instruction, often in the form of tutoring, to students attending “failing” schools. While Supplemental Education Service providers operate at localized levels of practice within specific schools, the services were mandated by NCLB and Koyama (2010) was able to clearly connect micro and macro contexts by showing the connections between NCLB and the SES providers operating within schools. Koyama (2010) found that the very providers tasked with improving student achievement in
“failing schools” often did not meet the same standards as the schools. While the conduct and operation of the SES providers was an important investigation within the study, it is Koyama’s claim that “failure was made to matter moment by moment, action by action, activity by activity, association by association, and topology by topology” that most significantly highlights how she leveraged Actor Network Theory to uncover how policy functioned as a network of power across time and place (Koyoma, 2010, p. 629). According to Koyama, “ethnographically examining processes and the problems that frame them is a way to make failure matter less by revealing how it came to such prominence and is maintained through the actions of adults, not children” (Koyoma, 2010, p. 668-669).

In her study, as in other studies of policy as a networked process of power, Koyoma attends to the process of translation, revealing that NCLB was actualized with claims of a problem, namely the underachievement of “failing” schools, followed by a policy solution which prescribed the addition of Supplemental Education Services to those schools, both human and non-human actors were enrolled to accomplish SES implementation irrespective of the quality of SES instruction when compared to the instruction the schools could offer, and evidence supporting the need for ongoing Supplemental Education Services, regardless of the cost to the school or actual impact upon student performance, could be manipulated and validated. The focus upon failure within the network made failure matter, overshadowed successes, eclipsed injustices, distorted instruction, enabled the substandard practices of SES providers, and perpetuated the very failure NCLB policies set out to eradicate. Like other aforementioned ANT research (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2009; 2011; Nespor, 2002), Koyama (2010) utilizes a localized entry point to reveal actors across time and place – wherever they are found – and analyzes the process of translation through network tracing. In other words, the network is uncovered by recording the movement of the network, where it goes, and what the
actors do (Latour, 1996). Koyama (2010) encourages researchers to "study policy itself as a sociocultural process, in all its fluctuating manifestations, as it moves across systems, organizations, and institutions, both in and out of formal educational contexts" (Koyama, 2010, p. 663).

3.5 – ANT in This Study

One reason to apply Actor Network Theory to this study of standardization as a network of power is precisely because the approach seeks not to explain why, but how (Law, 2009). This is particularly useful in this study, which questions how power functions within the standardization network. As determined in a review of literature on the topic, there remains great opportunity to contribute to the body of research about standardization through exploring standardization as a networked process of power to uncover how standardization occurs in educational settings. ANT is adept at making the unseen, seen and ANT researchers accomplish this through network tracing, which reveals the many varied actors within a network and how they operate, as well as identifying how power networks are processed through the process of translation. As evidenced by the work of Hamilton (2009; 2011), Koyoma (2010), and Nespor (2002), ANT is useful in illuminating both the actors and operations of complicated government policy networks. Likewise, ANT is useful in this study due to the vastness and complexity of the standardization network as well as the number of prominent actors and nodes of controversial activity that exist within the network. ANT is not restricted by what Latour (1996) termed the "tyranny of distance" (Latour, 1996, p. 4). Latour (1996) explains that networks are not bound by time or place so, of course, a federal education law, a state education policy, and a local lesson plan can operate as actors within the standardization network regardless of their perceived
location. Without a focus upon “scale” or “levels” – macro, micro, local, state, national – an ANT researcher is free to study all contexts of practice simply by following the actors wherever they lead (Latour, 1996, p. 6). According to Hamilton (2011): “ANT is useful for tracing connections between the local and the global, linking disparate contexts, local action with systemic, without assuming a generic layer of social structure” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 7). ANT, therefore, aligns well with my goal to investigate whether discourses and activity (social practices) differ across geographic regions as well as the nature of that activity. Utilizing ANT, my focus as a researcher can remain upon tracing actors wherever they may lead with an understanding that no matter where a researcher enters the network, actors from far-flung locations and distant times could be discovered (Hamilton, 2011). In this study, similar to other policy studies employing ANT (Hamilton, 2009; 2011; Koyama, 2010; Nespor, 2002) the standardization network is entered at a local level of practice: William S. Hackett Middle School in Albany, NY which was identified as “Persistently Lowest Achieving” by the New York State Education Department in 2010 (NYSED, 2010a). ANT does not limit the actors which can be discovered from that entry point and anticipates that actors will be revealed across time and place (Hamilton, 2011). This allows me to reveal and connect the standardization network’s actors and operations across local, state, and national contexts and, therefore, ANT uniquely leverages the vastness of the network without being overwhelmed by it (Hamilton, 2011). In fact, ANT is especially useful for studies, this one included, investigating data that stretches across time and place rather than maintaining a localized viewpoint (Hamilton, 2011). ANT has the exceptional ability to simultaneously, closely investigate local practice while keeping an eye on the global forces that create local realities, which is an important element of this study (Hamilton, 2011).
ANT also leverages the complex controversies that arise within the standardization network by viewing them as data-rich “nodes of activity” (Latour, 2005, p. 31). I am particularly interested in controversies surrounding Common Core as well as the nodes of activity generated by those controversies and ANT offers ways to approach active networks. While a great deal of data is churned up by noisy, chaotic networks, a researcher’s approach to analysis remains consistent through the use of ANT (Fenwick, 2010a). The researcher maintains a focus upon tracing the network via the network’s actors and identifying moments of problematization, interference, enrollment, and mobilization to explain how the process of translation is occurring within the network (Callon, 1986). Therefore, the application of ANT provides focus in the analysis of messy, busy networks, such as the standardization network.

The standardization network is not only riddled with controversy, but is punctuated by prominent actors which emerge across all contexts of practice. These actors are helpful in signaling that something is happening or, as Law (2009) states:

Something seismic is happening here. A vital metaphorical and explanatory shift is taking place. We are no longer dealing with construction, social or otherwise: there is no stable prime mover, social or individual, to construct anything, no builder, no puppeteer [...] Rather we are dealing with enactment or performance. In this heterogeneous world, everything plays its part, relationally. (Law, 2009, p. 151)

Therefore, prominent actors in the standardization network, such as specific federal laws, certain politicians, or education department officials, are beneficial in that they draw attention to the existence of the network. However, such prominent actors also threaten to eclipse the network, thereby further masking the many varied actors within the network and how the network functions (Law, 1992). In ANT studies, power is not assumed or assigned to any particular actors at the outset and all actors are subject to the same analysis (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).
The ANT researcher’s interest is in who or what the actors are and then what actors are doing to reach network goals (Walz, 2006).

3.6 – Data Collection and Analysis: Network Tracing

In this and similar studies, such as Hamilton (2009; 2011), Koyama (2010), and Nespor (2002), the standardization network is accessed at a local level of practice but the act of network tracing reveals actors operating across the state and nation. As Hamilton (2009) explains, through network tracing, ANT affords researchers to an opportunity to notice the connections between micro and macro contexts of practice. By examining even the most seemingly minute and isolated actors within a network, such as a simple assessment document, ANT researchers uncover other actors – such as additional artifacts, network discourses, and beliefs – and thereby, illuminate the network itself (Hamilton, 2009). This occurs because ANT recognizes that actors, no matter how outwardly insignificant, operate in concert with other actors within a network. Actors reveal other actors because they are linked together and disclose information about the greater network because it is the collaborative work of actors that enables the network to function (Hamilton, 2009; Latour, 1996).

The following example is intended to briefly demonstrate how I have conducted network tracing in this study and how an actor reveals additional actors across time and place. The publicly available data about William S. Hackett Middle School, a “Persistently Lowest Achieving” school in Albany, NY, is the entry point to the standardization network in this study. As evidenced by the work of previous researchers, public perception matters within the standardization network (Allington, 2002; Ravitch, 2002; Sheehy, 2010, Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019). Therefore, this study’s focus upon publicly available data enables a unique consideration
of actors with public access. Network tracing begins with an article in the local newspaper as well as the newspaper’s blog regarding Hackett’s failure (Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). Conversation about Hackett amongst members of the public ensued in blog comments (Waldman, 2011b). The article linked readers to the Joint Intervention Team (JIT) report about the school, which was posted to the New York State Department of Education website (NYSED/ACSD, 2011). This introduces the school’s federally-supported School Improvement Grant and, further, to mandates of national Title I legislation (CSDA, 2011). Therefore, as demonstrated in this brief example, micro data, such as a newspaper article about a local school in Albany, NY, efficiently reveals connections to federal legislation which is an actor geographically centered in Washington, D.C. but operating on a macro scale nation-wide. Starting locally in Albany, NY, this study traces the standardization network over time, throughout New York State, and across the country.

3.7 – Methodological Approach: Translation Analysis

Whereas tracing a network reveals actors across time and place, which is a valuable endeavor for any researcher seeking to understand the variety of actors operating within a network, I further analyze moments of translation to understand how power operates within the standardization network. The combination of network tracing and translation analysis, can be found in the work of Callon (1986), Hamilton (2009; 2011), Koyama (2010) and Nespor (2002), promotes an understanding of not only who or what the actors are, but how they work to operationalize, reinforce, and extend standardization over time within both micro and macro contexts. Actors are discovered through network tracing simply by doing something, which forces ANT researchers to consider that anything might matter (Latour, 1996). According to
Latour (1996), “Once you grant [actors] everything, they also give you back the explanatory powers you abandoned” (Latour, 1996, p. 11). In this study, once I identify actors through network tracing, analysis involves discovering and explaining evidence of moments of translation within the data (Callon, 1986). Applying an analysis of translation as a method further helps to organize the data obtained from active, vast networks such as the standardization network (Callon, 1986). Through the use of the process of translation as a method, I present and explain data related to the standardization network with a narrative analysis describing how moments of translation are demonstrated by that data. Such commentary details the movement of actors and how problematization, interference, enrollment, or mobilization is happening. This approach to analyzing the process of translation is similar to Callon’s (1986) and Hamilton’s (2011) because the narrative analysis provides a clear view of what the actors are doing and how they are doing it. According to Hamilton (2011), narratives are “typical device[s] of ANT analysis” and are not “storytelling for the sake of it or to grab attention” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 46). Instead, telling a network’s story through narrative explanations of the process of translation is a “motivated methodology for attending to the back-room workings of social technologies in the making” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 46).

According to Fenwick & Edwards (2010), studying translation is the analysis of "how things come to (dis)connect and change"; "what happens when entities, human and nonhuman, come together and connect, changing one another to form links" (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 9). Hamilton (2011) states “translation is achieved” through moments discovered in data “whereby the messy, complexities of everyday life are ordered and simplified for the purposes of the project at hand” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 9). In other words, a network’s power to inform, and even invent, reality is realized through the moments of translation whereby a variety of actors are
assembled and organized toward a particular end. The process of translation is comprised of four vital steps: problematization, interference, enrollment, and mobilization (Callon, 1986; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

First, during problematization, a policy is presented as a solution to a problem, regardless of whether concrete evidence can support the existence of the problem or the predicted effectiveness of the solution (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2011). As the first step in the process of translation, problematization is an imaginative construct – the dream of a social project with aspirations to foster change, though it has yet to come true (Hamilton, 2011). In the problematization stage, problems and solutions can appear to be mere suggestions or, conversely, aggressive accusations followed by demands. However, this stage is also akin to the brainstorming phase of a project because defining a problem and associated solutions acts as the foundation for building a functional network (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2011). Such definitions also begin to identify which actors will be useful to furthering network operations, the terms of network acceptance or rejection, and the roles available for actors to play (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2011).

Second, via interference, interventions are outlined to carry out the policy and, thereby, solve the problem (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2011). If problematization is a network’s foundation, interference can be viewed as the network’s frame. It shapes the network with additional, detailed definitions that describe what actors will accomplish and exactly how they will accomplish it (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2011). This is the stage when borders, as discussed in Sheehy’s work (2010; 2013), are created and thickened to define what is possible within the network. The prescribed action steps set forth during the stage of interference position actors, box them in, direct their movement in accordance with network goals, restrict their ability to
dissent from the network’s agenda, and limit opportunities for competing forces to disrupt network activity (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2011). Still, in the problematization and interferences stages, a network resembles a shell – a foundation and a frame – and exists theoretically but has not yet been implemented through practice (Hamilton, 2011).

Third, actors are enrolled, organized, and their roles are further tailored to implementing the proposed interventions (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2011). For a network to reach the enrollment stage, which is the first stage in which theory is actively applied to practice, the previous stages of problematization and interference must be successful, meaning that at least some “truths” and beliefs are widely accepted, particularly the common belief that a problem exists, a resolution is necessary, and the proposed interventions might help to solve the problem (Hamilton, 2011). In the stage of enrollment, then, actors deemed necessary for the network to operate are pulled into the network and actors, both human and nonhuman, can be enrolled without their knowledge or consent (Koyama, 2010). The foundation built through problematization followed by the frame built via interference provides structure to ensure that enrolled actors will play their part and, thereby, continue contributing to the network or become rejected if they fail to conform to the network’s agenda (Callon, 1986). In some cases, actors do realize they have been enrolled in a network and use several tactics to escape. One disentanglement tactic ANT theorists Callon & Law (2003) call “NIMBY” or “not in my backyard”: “People want the convenience of a motorway, or even a nuclear power plant, but they don’t want it in their back yard. Everyone agrees in general that this or that is a good idea, but no one wants it near them” (Callon & Law, 2003, p. 9).

Essentially, certain actors work to disentangle themselves from the network rather than to dismantle the network as a whole. In fact, they validate the network and agree with elements of
it, but in the interest of self-preservation, use otherness to resist any negative impact the network might have upon them, instead suggesting consequences should be applied to others (Callon & Law, 2003). Rarefaction, another disentanglement tactic, is described as withholding information used within the network to assess success or failure in alignment with the network’s goals (Callon & Law, 2003, p. 2) or creating chaos to destabilize the network (Callon & Law, 2003, p. 13). The disentanglement tactic of proliferation is an attempt to flood the network with so much information that assessment mechanisms measuring conformity to the network’s agenda are overwhelmed and no longer possible (Callon & Law, 2003, p. 2). In other cases, actors escape either due to default or network design, such as the case of English language learners documented in Hamilton’s (2011) study who avoided the consequences of the UK’s literacy policies because they were not included in government-supported adult literacy programs.

Finally, fourth, through mobilization “proof” is provided that the policy succeeded and, therefore, is a solution to the original problem (Callon, 1986; Hamilton, 2011). Ultimately, the process not only validates the need for the policy, but the existence of the problem. Further, the process not only transforms practice, but creates truth and reality even in the most localized, personal examples (Hamilton, 2011). The process of translation must be successful each step of the way for mobilization to occur, meaning a network’s potential to mobilize – to solidify reality and truth – is not realized without successful problematization, interference, and enrollment (Hamilton, 2011). According to Hamilton (2011):

In the final moment of mobilization, the few come to speak as the many. There is one united voice and a new settlement which is no longer questioned. This is the stage at which “black boxing” of previously unstable truths and meanings occurs. Policy has succeeded in imposing a new order on a social field – for the time being.

(Hamilton, 2011, p. 14)
Mobilization, therefore, ensures the message is consistent and that “truths”, actor roles, and methods aimed at resolving identified problems are universally accepted. Callon (1986) is careful to point out that “translation is a process, never a completed accomplishment” and, therefore, it can fail (Callon, 1986, p. 196).

In sum, as similarly demonstrated in aforementioned ANT research, I trace the standardization network over a number of years and across multiple settings by accessing the network locally, through a media account of a failing school in Albany, NY. This actor leads to additional actors (additional materials or people doing things in the network) which I follow across time and place, wherever they lead, to reveal how the standardization network is assembled. Along the way, I analyze and explain moments of translation: problematization (the problem(s) and proposed solution(s)); interference (the plan; what must be done to solve the problem); enrollment (actors playing their part); and mobilization (affirmations of success by the few on behalf of the many). Therefore, through ANT, this study will explain not only how the standardization network was constructed, but the extent to which it was mobilized and how power operates within the network.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS: STANDARDIZATION THROUGH PROBLEMATIZATION

4.1 – Problematizing William S. Hackett Middle School

“Come on people, we all know why these schools are suffering…”
(Phil Lander, 2011)

On July 29, 2011, the Albany Times Union newspaper published an article about a local school, William S. Hackett Middle School in Albany, NY (Waldman, 2011a). As reported in the article, “Hackett Report Sees Deep Flaws”, after years of low performance on New York State exams, the school was labeled “persistently lowest achieving” (PLA) by the State Education Department, which could force Hackett to fire staff, become a charter school, or close altogether (Waldman, 2011a). Due to Hackett’s failure, a Joint Intervention Team (JIT) team was tasked with visiting the school to identify the problems there and offer solutions (Waldman, 2011a).

The Joint Intervention Team documented their findings in a report; as summarized by the newspaper: Separate, unequal schools existed within Hackett – one of white honors students and one of non-honors, mostly minority students. The non-honors students, especially those who were struggling, needed more resources. Many of them came to Hackett reading below grade level, indicating a problem at the elementary schools that should be investigated, too. Teachers were often absent. They had low expectations for students. They gave out worksheets and workbooks, inflated grades, and focused on test prep. Teachers needed to be in their classrooms teaching a more rigorous curriculum. Students weren’t engaged. Implementing strict discipline took up much of the principal’s time. Hackett needed another administrator to handle student behaviors so the principal could focus on academics (Waldman, 2011a).

The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of the Albany City School District (ACSD) were interviewed for the article (Waldman, 2011a). The Superintendent said the district
had already submitted an improvement plan to the State Education Department. The department was expected to accept or reject the plan within a month. He said the goal of the plan was to improve the culture of the school and teacher attendance would become a part of their evaluation process (Waldman, 2011a). According to the Assistant Superintendent, the district would add more co-teachers to classrooms for special education students and English language learners and revise the schedule to make time for students to meet academic advisors. “It’s not as though we’ve been sitting around doing nothing. We recognize there are weaknesses and we’ve been working on those weaknesses”, she said (Waldman, 2011a).

The article (Waldman, 2011a) provided a link to the newspaper’s “Schools Blog” (Waldman, 2011b). There, readers could find the Joint Intervention Team report as it was published on the New York State Department of Education (NYSED) website and comment on the story. Within 18 days, readers posted 43 comments and continued commenting on the story nearly a year later (Waldman, 2011b).

A few commenters identified themselves as Albany City School District parents (Albany Mom, 2011; Chris, 2011), district employees (Josh Furman, 2011; Phil Lander, 2011), charter school supporters (Albany Resident, 2011; Charter School Fan, 2011), a former Albany mayoral candidate (Marlon Anderson Former candidate for Mayor, 2011), a district graduate (amy, 2011), and a Hackett Middle School student (Hackett Student, 2012). In response to the report’s claims of test-driven instruction at Hackett, some comments criticized standardized tests and state mandates (AlJensen, 2011; amy, 2011; curt, 2011; KTT, 2011; hawkny, 2011). One noted, “the culture of teaching to the test will go away when the tests do” (curt, 2011). Another said:

Shame on the SED for claiming that a school spends too much time on the exam they ARE judged on! Why did they come to visit the school in the days leading up to this major state exam? I am sure that every school in the state was
also doing something similar to what Hackett was doing in the days leading up to this exam. (AlJensen, 2011)


According to the comments, Hackett’s failure was caused by students, their parents, teachers, school administrators, or the community as a whole and only one commenter (DM, 2011) refrained from assigning blame: “I just dont understand why these articles make people go back and forth back and forth blaming this…blaming that…am I the only one concerned with the only part that needs to be a concern…our children?” (DM, 2011). Only one individual questioned the validity of the Joint Intervention Team report:

All I know is what I read in SED’s “professionally constructed”, scathing report on Hackett Middle School. 17% + 57% + 21% = 100%, or so they say! If the report’s writer cannot add, is it safe to presume they know anything else? Pretty sloppy investigatory work, if you ask me, all around. (hawkny, 2011)

Only one comment, from Hackett Student (2012), contested Hackett’s failure:

As a student that currently goes to Hackett, i find these comments offensive. I get a high quality education where i am going to school, and the racist comments you all are posting are unacceptable. Its not just white and asian children in the honors classes. And even if that were the situation its not their fault! They are just the children that apply them selves tord that education and their future. Hackett is a strong beautiful place, and it has a lot of good qualitys. It has the best musical chances for their students in the entire district! Which charter schools dont really provide do they? What if it were your child that went to this school and you came online and read these comments from peoplewho DON’T know Hackett and have NEVER experianced. I just want to say that you haven’t been through what some
of these kids have, so ask your selves: DO YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO JUDGE?????
(Hackett Student, 2012)

In response, another poster (Diogenes II, 2012) asked Hackett Student (2012) if he or she had read the Joint Intervention Team report as it was conducted by “objective experts”, and supported that criticisms made within blog comments “WERE true” (Diogenes II, 2012).

It might seem reasonable to believe an objective expert over the purported experiences of an anonymous individual identified as “Hackett Student”. However, individuals comprising the Joint Intervention Team are not identified, either (NYSED/ACSD, 2011). The team is only mentioned in the title of the report: “NYSED/Albany City School District Joint Intervention Team Report and Recommendations” (NYSES/ACSD, 2011). The summary of the report’s findings and suggestions provided in the newspaper is accurate (Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). In the Joint Intervention Team report, two strengths of the school are mentioned, both of which are attributed to the school’s new principal. According to the report, the principal made improvements to the school culture which resulted in improved “safety and order” and “gains in community trust” (NYSED/ACSD, 2011, p. 1). All other findings in Hackett’s Joint Intervention Team report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011) which could be perceived as positive are followed with a negative finding: members of the school wrote an improvement plan but haven’t implemented a way to monitor it (p. 4); social/emotional supports are strong but not “systematically provided” (p. 5); there is a PTA and parents are on school committees but many parents are disengaged (p. 5); the school offers students extracurricular opportunities and community connections through community partnerships but doesn’t give them many opportunities to inform the culture of the school (p. 5); the library has many resources but they are outdated (p. 5); assessment data is collected but not fully utilized (p. 6). The remainder of the JIT report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011) is overwhelmingly negative. In the area of curriculum, for
example, the Joint Intervention Team found: “English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum lacks rigor and is inconsistent in identification of core competencies important at each grade level. Evidence was present to demonstrate that the curriculum has been narrowed to focus on test preparation” (NYSED/ACSD, 2011, p. 2). According to the JIT report, (NYSED/ACSD, 2011), curricula overall lacked rigor, was outdated, inconsistent, and narrow. Hackett’s teachers are characterized as having low expectations, being absent from the classroom, ignorant of instructional or behavior management strategies, and in need of comprehensive professional development and accountability. Hackett’s administrators are portrayed as making progress yet overburdened, making the school in need of another administrator to handle discipline issues so the principal can monitor classroom instruction. The JIT report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011) finds that district leaders are disorganized, inconsistent, unclear about administrators’ roles, and failing to hold teachers accountable. Therefore, the district should organize systems and protocols to define roles, analyze data, and hold teachers accountable. Hackett Middle School students are considered in need of resources as well as intensive academic, behavioral, and social supports. They are at-risk, high-need, bored, and have few opportunities to participate in beneficial learning or contribute to their school and need leadership opportunities. According to the report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011), parents are disengaged and work should be done to foster their participation.

The report indicates that the Joint Intervention Team visit took place over three days, from March 28-30, 2011 (NYSED/ACSD, 2011). It doesn’t explain how the Joint Intervention Team reached their conclusions in that time, however. How many individuals were members of the Joint Intervention Team? What were their roles, titles, backgrounds, or affiliations? Were members of the groups discussed in the report – administrators, teachers, students, and parents –
represented on the Joint Intervention Team? What did the team do in their three days at the school? What information did they analyze? How many individuals did they interview from each group mentioned in the report? What questions did they ask? How many classrooms did they observe? How long did they stay in each classroom? How did they go about summarizing their interviews and observations? How do they define concepts mentioned in their findings, such as school culture, rigor, quality instruction, teacher expectations, parent engagement, and community trust? How did they assess those concepts? Were they privy to information about students, such as their needs, strengths, weaknesses, abilities, or progress? These questions are left unanswered in the Joint Intervention Team report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011).

However, Joint Intervention Team processes released by the New York State Education department in September of 2010 states a Joint Intervention Team is initially “comprised of a senior State Education Department representative and a district representative” (NYSED, 2010c, p. 1). The education department and the district then choose an “outside education expert” with experience “turning around low performing schools” (NYSED, 2010c, p. 1). The outside education expert not only acts as the leader of the JIT review, but is further employed by the district to ensure JIT recommendations are carried out at the school (NYSED, 2010c). “Content area/subgroup specialist(s)” are also listed as a member of a Joint Intervention Team (NYSED, 2010c, p. 1). The Joint Intervention Team review consists of a “pre-visit”, during which team members are introduced, their roles and responsibilities are clarified, protocols and school data are reviewed, and logistics are finalized (NYSED, 2010c, p. 2). For two days, JIT members observe classrooms, interview stakeholders, review documents, and meet together to develop a “collective perspective of findings” (NYSED, 2010c, p. 2). Consensus and debrief meetings follow before the outside education expert writes the Joint Intervention Team report (NYSED,
The information reviewed by team members is explained only as “related documents” and a “data binder” is provided to the team by the district two weeks before the Joint Intervention Team visit, but the contents of that binder are not detailed (NYSED, 2010c, p. 2). While published in October of 2011 and, therefore, after Hackett’s March visit that year, another NYSED document explaining the JIT process elaborates upon the contents of the binder provided to Joint Intervention Team members (NYSED, 2011, p. 1). Information provided to team members must include: directions to the school, school website homepage, building map, class schedule, building organizational flow chart, school budget, state accountability status, state report card, student attendance records, school improvement plan, and government mandated plans for English language learners (NYSED, 2011, p. 1). As such, required academic performance data is limited to state test results and the only student specific data required is attendance records. Other data would need to be requested by the Joint Intervention Team (NYSED, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, while the report’s (NYSED/ACSD, 2011) findings about Hackett Middle School are cited in media coverage (Waldman, 2011a) and public commentary (Waldman, 2011b), the information used to inform those findings remained unclear.

Broad generalizations are presented as facts in the Joint Intervention Team report about the school (NYSED/ACSD, 2011). A lack of “rigor”, high expectations, and challenging work are listed as “findings” with no definition of rigor, no evidence to support that teachers did not have high expectations for their students, and no proof that the observed lessons or products of learning were not challenging considering the needs or abilities of the students in the class. No evidence exists to indicate the individuals conducting the site visit understood what would have been rigorous or challenging for the students they observed. Team member names, titles, or affiliation with the school district, state education department, or any outside agencies are not
documented in the report. Interview questions asked of teachers, students, parents, or any stakeholders during interviews are not documented. Statements made during interviews are not transcribed but are instead lumped together by group and summarized by an anonymous author. There is no indication of the school-related documents reviewed, the length of time team members spent in each classroom, or how many classrooms were visited. It is unknown whether JIT team members observed partial or full lessons. Like the criticisms of the school, the strengths noted in the report, while few, are equally unclear and unsupported. The brief team review (NYSED/ACSD, 2011), with the lofty goal of discovering the causes of and solutions to school failure over three days, were therefore publicly relayed in a vague Joint Intervention Team report which failed to provide important details about the reviewers, interviews, observations, or information that informed the findings and suggestions contained within the report.

Separate or taken together, the newspaper article (Waldman, 2011a), blog (Waldman, 2011b), and Joint Intervention Team report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011) are prime examples of problematization. The clearest evidence of Hackett’s failure is poor standardized test performance (NYSED/ACSD, 2011; Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). However, the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, members of the public purportedly from a variety of sectors, the New York State Education Department, and a Joint Intervention Team agree – Hackett is failing (NYSED/ACSD, 2011; Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). A host of problems exist at the school, all related to groups of actors (NYSED/ACSD, 2011; Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). As evidenced by the school’s JIT report, the problems and, therefore, the solutions are clear, although the evidence is not (NYSED/ACSD, 2011). As expected in the moment of problematization, actors are categorized and characterized: teachers as incompetent, building administrators as
overwhelmed, district administrators as lackadaisical, parents as disengaged, students as struggling (NYSED/ACSD, 2011; Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). If Hackett wants to succeed, student results must improve, teachers must implement new practices and monitor student progress, building administrators must monitor teachers to ensure they are implementing those practices and monitoring their students, district administrators must put systems in place to monitor data and hold teachers accountable for student failure, and parents must take part in what the school is doing (NYSED/ACSD, 2011).

4.2 – Problematizing New York State Schools

"There is going to have to be a death penalty for failing schools...if the school fails, the school has to end." - Governor Andrew M. Cuomo (Lockport, NY – August 29, 2013)

While in Lockport, NY discussing efforts to assist those impacted by Niagara county floods in the summer of 2013, Governor Andrew Cuomo commented upon education in New York and called for a "death penalty for failing schools" (Prohaska, 2013). Those reporting his remarks pointed out the parallels between the Governor's statements and those of other officials across the state, including New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg who, since 2002, supported the closure of 164 failing schools and the advent of 656 smaller schools to take their place (Blain, 2013). Reactions to the Governor's comments highlight the conflicted views regarding the causes of and solutions to failure. As reported that day in The Buffalo News, Samuel L. Radford III, president of Buffalo's District Parent Coordinating Council said, "Amen. Amen. And Amen...whatever we've got to do on the ground or locally to support his 'death penalty' initiative, he's got a partner." (Prohaska, 2013). Yet reaction from the president of the Buffalo Teachers Federation, Philip Rumore, was quite different: "What a choice of words - 'death penalty'. It really shows his orientation. If they gave us the resources we need, we could
provide the smaller classes, we could provide the tutoring, we could provide the services that English language learners need” (Prohaska, 2013). Among the comments posted to a New York Daily News article on the topic was one by an author only identified as "Persam1197", who wrote:

Schools are a reflection of the communities they serve. The "death penalty" is directed at communities that are already under-served and mired in poverty. Shame on you, Mr. Cuomo, for perpetuating the same senseless banter that has reduced our schools to for profit making entities for venture capitalists! (Persam1197, 2013).

Across the state and through the field of education, Governor Cuomo's 2013 "death penalty" call was like a boulder in already troubled waters, simply adding to clashing waves. Educator Jonathan Kozol, who said he counts both Governor Andrew Cuomo and his father (former Governor Mario Cuomo) amongst his friends, also said he was "shocked" by the comments. During a November 7, 2013 visit to the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy in Albany, NY he responded by saying: "You improve a good school by nurturing good teachers and pouring in resources." (Karlin, 2013). The Schuyler Center's CEO, Kate Breslin, also penned a letter to the Albany Times Union which cited advocate Fred LeBrun and claimed:

Failing schools are a symptom of a much larger problem: poverty. It is no coincidence that "failing schools" also have the greatest number of students eligible for free lunch programs (90% in Buffalo as Mr. LeBrun points out), and high numbers of students who face language barriers (noted by Mr. LeBrun in a recent Buffalo News article). (Breslin, 2013).

In a blog entry on her website, Diane Ravitch wrote:

New York Governor Cuomo wants a “death penalty” for “failing schools”. He was referring to the public schools of Buffalo, which is one of the state’s poorest districts. He threatened state takeover, mayoral control, or charters. None of his remedies has ever succeeded. But they will extinguish democracy. Democracy is
not the cause of low achievement. If Cuomo ignores poverty and segregation, he will be spinning wheels. Prediction: he will ignore both. More districts than Buffalo face the death penalty. (Ravitch, 2013)

Indeed, schools facing Governor Cuomo’s death penalty resided in seven districts across New York State, including Albany, Buffalo, New York City, Poughkeepsie, Rochester, Schenectady, and Syracuse (NYSED, 2010a). On December 9, 2010, New York State Education Commissioner David Steiner announced that 67 schools, all located within those seven districts, were persistently lowest achieving (PLA) and William S. Hackett Middle School in Albany, NY was one of them (NYSED, 2010a). Each district containing an identified PLA school, each falling within the "lowest-achieving" 5% of all schools (USDOE, 2009), also landed in the top 5% of nearly 700 New York school districts in terms of amount of suggested Title I funding (USDOE, 2013a). A minimum of 65% of students in these districts qualified for free or reduced lunch in 2012 and in the case of the Poughkeepsie School District, for example, 91% of students qualified for lunch assistance (NYSED, 2012c).

According to Commissioner Steiner, persistently lowest achieving (PLA) schools repeatedly failed to meet the state’s expectations for standardized exam results or acceptable graduation rates (NYSED, 2010a). Therefore, Joint Intervention Team reviews were conducted at PLA schools across New York with results similar to those found at Hackett (King, 2010, p. 5-6). For example, in the Joint Intervention Team Report for PS 6 Buffalo Elementary School of Technology (NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011), conducted from February 9th to the 11th of 2011, findings mention that teachers frequently refer to being forced to follow a “script” and that teachers cited this as an obstacle to attending to the individual needs of their students, yet the report recommends “administrators should hold teachers accountable” for ensuring “teachers respond to the individual needs of their students” (NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011, p. 2-3).
Throughout the report, there is no evidence suggesting the team investigated claims teachers apparently made in their interviews about curriculum scripts, nor questioned who might have been requiring teachers to follow scripts or whether this impeded differentiation. In fact, the report continually cites the beneficial work of administration while demeaning or failing to mention any contributions from classroom teachers. For example, the following finding appears in the category of teaching and learning within the report:

Although the teachers received training in the use of explicit instruction methodology, they are not implementing the methodology. Lessons are not aligned with the needs of students, regardless of whether they are advanced, on grade level, or struggling students. As a result, there is no connection between what teachers teach and what students actually learn in the classroom as evidenced by classroom observations, review of lesson plans, and teacher interviews. (NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011, p. 3).

What was the “explicit instruction methodology” training provided to teachers? Was it training in how to implement scripted curricula? Could that be a reason for lack of differentiation? How many classrooms did investigators visit and what did they observe that lead to this school-wide conclusion regarding a lack of differentiation? Like Hackett’s JIT report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011), numerous questions are left unanswered. In regards to school leadership, the report states:

The administration has made some progress to create a more rigorous learning environment with high expectations for all students. However, classroom observations indicate that teachers are slow to adopt and include pedagogy such as differentiation, explicit instruction and co-teaching as part of their daily lesson plans. (NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011, p. 4).

The JIT for PS 6 Buffalo Elementary School of Technology (NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011) also asserts that the school’s existing instructional coach is “inexperienced” and recommends hiring a
“master coach” to “help accelerate student learning by providing additional support to teachers” and “provide mentoring for the current coach” (NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011, p. 6). Finally, the report suggests that this school “develop and implement a new plan in order to break the cycle of low expectations and accelerate the learning of all students toward meeting and/or exceeding State Standards” (NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011, p. 7). The report is essentially summarized and punctuated with this broad yet unsupported generalization about a “cycle of low expectations” followed by a narrow goal of having students meet or exceed State Standards and, finally, an assertion that changes in staff may be necessary (NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011, p. 7). Despite the obvious vagueness of both the JIT process and the resulting reports, findings regarding the attitudes, abilities, and perceptions of school educators, students, or parents are presented as facts and recommendations call for individuals within the school community to be held accountable or replaced (NYSED/ACSD, 2011; NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011). Regardless, all persistently lowest achieving (PLA) schools identified in 2010, including William S. Hackett Middle School, were expected to use JIT findings and recommendations to inform their school improvement plans (King, 2010; NYSED, 2010c).

On the same day that New York Education Department Commissioner David Steiner identified PLA schools across the state (NYSED, 2010a), the department’s Senior Deputy Commissioner, John King, presented a “Persistently Lowest Achieving Schools Update” (King, 2010) to the New York Board of Regents. He explained the Joint Intervention Team as it had been explained previously (NYSED, 2010c): comprised of an outside education expert, district and state education department representatives, and “appropriate experts” (King, 2010, p. 5). According to King (2010), the purpose of the JIT is not only to identify problems and suggest solutions to inform the plans of PLA schools, but also to assess whether a PLA school is likely to
meet state expectations “after fundamental restructuring or [should] be considered for phase out or closure” (King, 2010, p. 5). Then, he presented the Board of Regents with a summary of JIT reviews conducted across New York State, stating: “To date, Joint Intervention Team (JIT) reviews identified that the following negative conditions exist in Persistently Lowest-Achieving (PLA) schools” (King, 2010, p. 5). The negative conditions he presented include test-driven rather than standards-driven curricula, the absence of research-based, systematic, or differentiated instruction, a general lack of resources, little structure for teacher evaluations, undefined administrative roles, and underutilization of data to drive instruction (King, 2010, p. 5-6). He explained that the identification of PLA schools aligns with Board of Regents, New York State Education Department, and United States Department of Education goals to fix or close failing schools (King, 2010, p 1). King (2010) repeatedly refers to federal Race to the Top and federal School Improvement Grant “guidelines”: PLA schools are required to adopt intervention strategies according to those guidelines; submit plans according to those guidelines; and NYSED will make improvement funds available according to those guidelines (King, 2010, p. 2-3) Further, King (2010) states the federal department of education not only defined the four intervention models a PLA school may choose from, but also set the definition of a persistently lowest achieving school (King, 2010, p. 2).

In drawing parallels between state and federal policies regarding failing schools, King (2010) not only highlights the inter-connectedness of state and federal education initiatives, but also a nearly universal belief in school failure that spans from local communities to the United States government. Similar to the data specific to William S. Hackett Middle School’s failure, a common belief that failure exists in schools - especially those in the poorest areas of the state - emerges. Commentary from the Governor, union leaders, community members, education
experts, and the New York State Department of Education show differing beliefs about the root causes of failure or the actions that should be taken to ensure student success, but no protest against the notion that schools are truly failing.

4.3 – Problematizing American Schools

According to the executive summary of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), upon taking officially taking office in 2001,

President Bush emphasized his deep belief in our public schools but an even greater concern that ‘too many of our neediest children are being left behind’ despite the nearly $200 billion in Federal spending since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. (USDOE, 2002, p. 1)

NCLB, therefore, was framed as a legislative solution to the problem of school failure and, in exchange for continued Title I funding, states were held accountable for implementing NCLB’s mandates and meeting the federal government’s definitions of educational success (NCLB, 2001; USDOE, 2002). NCLB’s targeted improvement efforts required the labeling of “failing” schools and in 2009, the United States Department of Education published "Guidance on School Improvement Grants" (USDOE, 2009), which explains how states should identify and define "persistently lowest achieving" (PLA) schools:

Persistently lowest-achieving schools” means, as determined by the State:

(a) Any Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that —

(i) Is among the lowest-achieving five percent of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring or the lowest-achieving five Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the State, whichever number of schools is greater; or

(ii) Is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 200.19(b) that is less than 60 percent over a number of years;
and

(b) Any secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds that —

(i) Is among the lowest-achieving five percent of secondary schools or the lowest-achieving five secondary schools in the State that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds, whichever number of schools is greater; or

(ii) Is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 200.19(b) that is less than 60 percent over a number of years.

(USDOE, 2009, p. 15)

In other words, persistently lowest achieving schools are those eligible for Title I funds and who perform amongst the lowest 5% of schools in the state and/or graduate less than 60% of their students (USDOE, 2009, p. 15). This federal definition of persistently lowest achieving schools was adopted by New York State (King, 2010). Persistently lowest achieving schools were required to adopt one of four models outlined by the United States Department of Education in 2009 (USDOE, 2009) and echoed by the New York State Department of Education a year later (NYSED, 2010a):

**Turnaround Model**: Requires the firing of the principal and at least 50% of the school's staff, financial and career incentives to retain high quality staff and provide professional development, the use of student data to drive instruction, social and emotional student supports, and increased instructional time (NYSED, 2010a; USDOE, 2009)

**Restart Model**: Calls for the school to become a charter school or be taken over by another educational institution, such as a college or university (NYSED, 2010a; USDOE, 2009).

**Transformation Model**: The transformation and turnaround model are nearly identical in the specific interventions required, such as data driven instruction, social and emotional student supports, and increased instructional time. Half of the staff and the school’s leader must be replaced but in the case of the transformation model, staff firing and replacement isn’t
immediate. Therefore, this model requires schools to use a strict evaluation process to reward and dismiss staff, thereby phasing them out (NYSED, 2010a; USDOE, 2009). This model was later chosen by William S. Hackett Middle School (CSDA, 2011).

**Closure Model:** The school must close and students should be enrolled in higher performing schools within the district (NYSED, 2010a; USDOE, 2009).

After President Obama took office in 2009, the most notable change to NCLB likely came in the form of "waivers", which allowed states to create and submit their own plans for school improvement. The U.S. Education Secretary under President Obama, Arne Duncan, noted:

> America's most sweeping education law—the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as No Child Left Behind—is outmoded and constrains state and district efforts for innovation and reform. The smartest way to fix that is through a reauthorized ESEA law, but Congress has not agreed on a responsible bill. Therefore, the federal government has worked with states to develop waiver agreements that unleash local leaders’ energy for change and ensure equity, protect the most vulnerable students, and encourage standards that keep America competitive. (USDOE, 2013b)

However, the 34 states who applied for and received these waivers (including New York) by 2013, did so

...in exchange for college- and career-ready expectations for all students; differentiated accountability, including targeting the lowest-performing schools, schools with the largest achievement gaps, and other schools with performance challenges for subgroups; and teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that take into account student growth and are used to help teachers and principals improve their practices. (USDOE, 2013b)

Therefore, state plans were effectually aligned to the Obama administration's Race to the Top (RTTT) initiatives and went beyond NCLB's mandates, which previously tied student performance to entire schools and districts, by linking student performance on standardized
measures to individual teacher evaluations (Rich, 2012). Far from President Johnson's 1965 vision of Title I as a means of directing aid to communities entrenched in poverty, President Bush’s NCLB (2001) followed by President Obama’s Race to the Top (USDOE, 2013b) increasingly ensured that schools would compete for that additional support and face consequences for failing to meet government standards (Liu, 2008). Joining the Race to the Top required participating states and schools to conform to federal government mandates dictating the educational experiences afforded to students.

In a May 29, 2012 press release, Board of Regents Chancellor Merryl Tish and New York State Education Commissioner John King announced the approval of New York State's NCLB waiver by the United States Department of Education, claiming the "... Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) (also known as No Child Left Behind or NCLB) waiver granted by the U.S. Education Department gives New York increased flexibility to close the achievement gap and will help accelerate the implementation of the Regents’ reform agenda" (NYSED, 2012a). In the press release, Tish and King assert that while NCLB's aim to "close the achievement gap" would continue to be a focus of New York's efforts, the waiver enabled the state to "align federal funds and requirements with the work we’ve already started through the Regents Reform Agenda and Race to the Top" (NYSED, 2012b). And while Tish states that "some provisions of NCLB wrongly stigmatized high needs schools whose students were making real progress" (NYSED, 2012a), New York's plan does not outline a new path for the state's most "struggling" schools. A NYSED (2012b) document titled "10 Things to Know About NY's ESEA Waiver" includes:

- a focus on the Regents Reform Agenda, college and career readiness, and the Common Core Standards
- plans to align ELA and Math assessments with the Common Core Standards
- a shift in focus from "proficiency" to "growth" - under NCLB, schools were pressured to show that all students were proficient on ELA and Math measures by 2014, whereas the NY plan calls for a 50% reduction in accountability subgroups who are not proficient on such measures by 2017
- implementation of teacher and principal evaluation systems
- flexibility in how federal funds are spent
- new accountability labels - For example, five percent of schools in the state will be named "Priority" and are defined as "the lowest performing schools in the state based on combined ELA and Math performance that are not showing progress or that have had graduation rates below 60% for the last several years" (NYSED, 2012b).

Obviously, the definition of a "priority" school closely matches the definition of a "persistently lowest achieving" school with one striking difference: “progress”. Under New York’s NCLB waiver, entire schools would continue to receive failure labels based upon their passing rates but were also at risk of a failure designation if students did not show growth (NYSED, 2012b). Like persistently lowest achieving schools, priority schools were expected to adopt a federal "turn-around" model by 2014-2015 (NYSED, 2012b). Therefore, New York's waiver plan went above and beyond the accountability mandates of No Child Left Behind. By 2015, 178 New York State schools were identified as “priority” schools, the new name for “persistently lowest achieving” (Cuomo, 2015). “Priority” became the most severe failure designation available in the state education system and remained a label based upon performance on state tests and/or graduation rates (Cuomo, 2015).
4.4 – Problematization: The Foundation of the Standardization Network

The standardization network applies a consistent definition of school success and failure which is re-iterated locally, state-wide, and nationally: performance on standardized exams and graduation rates (King, 2010; NYSED, 2010a; USDOE, 2009). Without credible evidence that standardized data can capture the conditions of schooling or accurately measure academic performance, failure remains largely undisputed by actors. Claims backed by ambiguous reports, questionable narratives, and shoddy research are not uncommon in moments of problematization (Callon, 1986). Joint Intervention Team reports, while subjective and vague, were packaged as factual investigations of local schools which held valid findings and suggestions to remedy school failure (NYSED/ACSD, 2011; NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011). In these reports, educators, students, and parents are categorized, characterizations made about them explain ways they contribute to the problem of failure, and interventions are suggested to explain ways they can be a part of the solution (NYSED/ACSD, 2011; NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011). Consistent with education law, the Commissioner of the New York State Education Department released the names of failing schools (NCLB, 2001; NYSED, 2010a). The Senior Deputy Commissioner summarized negative JIT findings and presented them to the Board of Regents, the governing body of New York state education (King, 2010). Media reports spurred public debate about school failure (Waldman 2011a; 2011b). Actors found across micro and macro education contexts either confirm that school failure exists or do nothing to contest it. In the data presented here, wide-spread acceptance of failure is demonstrated by media accounts and blog comments, politicians, school administrators, state and federal education officials, union and PTA leaders, prominent education authors and researchers, and bipartisan legislative action.
In moments of problematization, definitions play an important role in structuring and relaying the network’s rules. Clear definitions of success, failure, and specific criteria for applying failure labels to schools explain network expectations and exactly how it will determine which schools fall into which category (NYSED 2010a; USDOE, 2009). Thorough, consistent descriptions of intervention models detail the steep consequences of failure as well as the actions those schools must take to align with network expectations (NYSED, 2010a; USDOE, 2009). However, terms which are undefined, subjective, and open to interpretation also serve an important purpose in the standardization network. The word “rigor”, for example, is utilized by actors across all contexts of practice. Federal and state mandates consistently demand rigor: rigorous standards (ESSA, 2015, 129 Stat. 2059; NCLB, 2001, 115 Stat. 1445; NY, 2010a, p. 77; USDOE, 2009), rigorous standardized assessments (NCLB, 2001, 115 Stat. 1448; NY, 2010a, p. 77), rigorous curricula (ESSA, 2015, 129 Stat. 1865; NCLB, 2001, p. 1643), rigorous instruction (ESSA, 2015, 129 Stat. 1865; NCLB, 2001, 115 Stat. 1564; NY, 2010a, p. 22), rigorous educator evaluations (ESSA, 2015, 129 Stat. 1933; NCLB, 2001, 115 Stat. 1548; NY, 2010a, p. 6), rigorous data analysis (NCLB, 2001, 115 Stat. 1551; NY, 2010a, p. 32), and rigorous education research (ESSA, 2015, 129 Stat. 2179; NCLB, 2001, 115 Stat. 1550). According to reports written and repeated about failing schools, curricula and instruction lacked rigor (King, 2010; NYSED/ACSD, 2011; NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011). A definition of the term rigor can be found in The Glossary of Education Reform (Great Schools Partnership, 2019), a resource created and supported by standards-based reform organizations to: “...help journalists, parents, and community members – anyone with an interest or investment in our public schools – understand some of the major reform concepts being discussed by educators, researchers, and policy makers” (Great Schools Partnership, 2019). Further, educators and journalists are encouraged to
use this glossary to promote community understanding of “school-improvement terms, concepts, and strategies” (Great Schools Partnership, 2019). Rigor, according to the glossary: “...is widely used by educators to describe instruction, schoolwork, learning experiences, and educational experiences that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging” ("rigor", 2014). Rigor, then, is a personal and subjective experience, yet the term has been used within the standardization network to demarcate practice expectations. The use of subjective terms positions the network to capriciously accept practices that align with its agenda and reject practices that do not. Therefore, the standardization network can prioritize certain types of instruction, for example, simply by labeling it rigorous. The network can, and has, done this with educational research as well. According to *The Glossary of Education Reform* (Great Schools Partnership, 2019), the term “evidence-based” is synonymous with the terms data-based, research-based, and scientifically-based and means: “...any concept or strategy that is derived from or informed by objective evidence – most commonly, educational research or metrics of school, teacher, and student performance” (“evidence-based”, 2016).

However, practices prioritized within the standardization network as fitting this definition have actually been debated in educational research. In the case of Reading First, for example, the federal government refused to fund state plans on the basis that they were not scientifically-based (Healy, 2007). However, a wealth of education research that existed before the inception of Reading First as well as studies published in response to the initiative sharply contrast with practices the federal government did approve (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000; Clay, 1991; 2001; Dozier et al., 2006; Goatley & Hinchman, 2013; Goodman, 1967; Ivey, 2011; Johnston et al., 1993; 1998; Paris, 2005; Shepard & Smith, 1986; Smith, 1976; Teal et al., 2009). The standardization network’s power to define is not limited to concrete, detailed definitions. Vague,
subjective terms allow the network to include or exclude ideas and information based upon their alignment with the network’s standardization agenda. Definitions also lend power actor grouping and categorization. In moments of problematization, schools were categorized as failing or successful just as practice was categorized as rigorous or lacking rigor. Further, broad characterizations of students as disadvantaged, needy, and vulnerable was accompanied by an “achievement gap” that problematized standardized results by “subgroups”, especially by student race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (NCLB, 2001, SEC. 1001; NYSED, 2012a; 2012b; USDOE, 2013b). NCLB defined the achievement gap as a standardized testing performance gap that existed: “...between minority and non-minority students and between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers” (NCLB, 2001, SEC. 1001). President George W. Bush claimed “too many of our neediest children are being left behind” (USDOE, 2002, p. 1). The Obama administration presented standards-based reforms as a way to “protect the most vulnerable students” (USDOE, 2013b). The definitions set forth in moments of problematization, such as definitions of the achievement gap and student subgroups, were linked up to validate school failure as well as the standardization network’s solutions and presented publicly through legislation, education officials, and politicians. As required by NCLB, accountability labels were publicized for failing schools: 

‘(E) PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION.—The local educational agency shall publish and disseminate information regarding any corrective action the local educational agency takes under this paragraph at a school—“(i) to the public and to the parents of each student enrolled in the school subject to corrective action; “(ii) in an understandable and uniform format and, to the extent practicable, provided in a language that the parents can understand; and “(iii) through such means as the Internet, the media, and public agencies.” (NCLB, 2001, 115 Stat. 1485)

Therefore, ensuring the public received messages about failing schools was required by law.
Although I focus most closely upon standardization network data derived between 2010 and 2018, tracing the standardization network from the identification of William S. Hackett Middle School as one of New York State’s first persistently lowest achieving schools in 2010 introduced actors such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which pre-dates my initial timeframe by nearly ten years. Actor Network Theory anticipates this because it recognizes that neither networks nor network actors are bound by time or place and, therefore, network tracing involves following actors wherever they may lead (Hamilton, 2009; Hamilton, 2011; Latour, 1996). Here, the mature actors and the common-place acceptance of school failure found in the standardization network’s problematization data signifies that the network was previously mobilized. In other words, the standardization network is not a new construct but, instead, is a network of power which has successfully undergone the process of translation over time to craft universal beliefs about the failures of the American education system. The process of translation is never complete and the strongest networks cycle through moments of translation to reinvent themselves and extend their reach (Callon, 1986; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Prior mobilization of the standardization network is supported by research cited in this study’s literature review which highlight that standards-based reforms have flourished for decades. As seen in the data presented here, previous research has documented that both failure claims and standards-based solutions have persisted despite a lack of evidence to support the existence of failure or the success of standards-based interventions (Allington, 2002; Hursh, 2008; 2013; Ravitch, 2002, Young, 2018). The standardization network is capable of protecting itself from opposing forces, as seen in its ability to arbitrarily acknowledge some education research while dismissing or ignoring others. Thus, as I enter the network in 2010, it is playing by its own rules in an insulated, networked reality. The network’s power to define and shame emerge as two
particularly effective problematization tools. Together, they influence public beliefs to secure public support and, in doing so, illuminate how power operates within the standardization network during moments of problematization. As is the case with many politically motivated projects, public perception is the lifeblood of the standardization network (Brown & Brown, 2012; Raptis, 2012; Sheehy, 2010; Sheehy, 2013; Supovitz & McGuinn, 2019; Young, 2018).

The standardization network does not rest upon the shaky evidence it churns up to support claims of problems in American schools or the results of its interventions. Instead, in moments of problematization, it wields its power to unilaterally define what it will accept and then rejects anything that does not meet its expectations or fit its agenda. It is built upon a foundation of effective problematization and solidified public belief in school failure and, therefore, its tactics have a track record of success. The standardization network has already proven itself as a formidable education reformer.
CHAPTER 5
DATA ANALYSIS: STANDARDIZATION THROUGH INTERFERENCE

5.1 – Interference in American Schools

School Improvement Grants (SIGs) were available only to schools identified as failing, were federally funded by Title 1 and supplemented by the federal government’s 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA (Hurlburt, LeFloch, Therriault & Cole, 2011).

Originally touted as an answer to the 2008 recession experienced in the United States, many Americans may not have realized the implications this federal stimulus package would have upon the education of their children. However, the priorities outlined in the ARRA would set the framework for the Obama administration’s competitive Race to the Top initiative:

One of the overall goals of the ARRA is to improve student achievement through school improvement and reform. Within the context of the ARRA, the Investing in Innovation Fund focuses on four key assurances, or education reform areas, that will help achieve this goal: (1) Improvements in teacher effectiveness and ensuring that all schools have effective teachers, (2) gathering information to improve student learning, teacher performance, and college and career readiness through enhanced data systems, (3) progress toward college- and career-ready standards and rigorous assessments, and (4) improving achievement in low-performing schools through intensive support and effective interventions. (Investing in Innovation, 2009, p. 52215)

A year later, the United States Department of Education published a Federal Register notice inviting Race to the Top (RTTT) applications, with the “purpose of program” advertised as:

The purpose of the Race to the Top Fund, a competitive grant program authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), is to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and
implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas: (a) Adopting internationally-benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace; (b) Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals in how they can improve their practices; (c) Increasing teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution; and (d) Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19496)

As seen in their purpose statements, the ARRA (2009) legislative priorities and Race to the Top funding competition share a clear, consistent goal: the implementation of education reform in accordance with the federal government’s vision. Network goals begin to unfold during problematization as definitions emerge and groups of actors are categorized. Here, however, clear goals posed alongside prescribed interventions which are then echoed by a variety of actors is a hallmark of the moment of interference because this allows the network to take shape.

The federal grant invitation also included an explanation of the rubric used to determine how many of the 500 available points each state had earned once their RTTT plan had been evaluated by the federal government (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19511). If a state wanted Race to the Top funds, they would need to apply federally outlined policies and interventions across the state. And, states did want the funds. In fact, every state applied and competed for RTTT money – with the exception of four: Alaska, North Dakota, Texas, and Vermont (Education Next, 2017). All fifty states in the nation were eligible for the funds providing that their application was approved by the federal government and that they had no existing state obstacles to linking student and educator data:

At the time the State submits its application, there must not be any legal, statutory, or regulatory barriers at the State level to linking data on student achievement (as defined in this notice) or student growth (as defined in this notice) to teachers and principals for the purpose of teacher and principal evaluation. (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19497)
Consequently, states hindered by their own laws or by collective bargaining agreements from gathering student data or applying that data to educator evaluations were unable to seek RTTT funding until those barriers were removed.

The RTTT rubric is a very literal example of structure imposed during moments of interference and, moreover, enables the federal government to evaluate, accept, or reject state education plans. A review of the RTTT rubric reveals not only federal education priorities, but obligatory passage points set forth for each state applicant. Major rubric domains include the four key areas contextualized by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009: standards and assessments, data systems, great teachers and leaders, and turning around the lowest-achieving schools. Also included are the overarching domains of “state success factors” and “general”, which includes the categories of education funding, ensuring successful conditions for charter schools, and “other” reform conditions (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19511).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. State Success Factors</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A)(1) Articulating State’s education reform agenda and LEA’s participation in it</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Securing LEA commitment</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A)(2) Building strong state-wide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Ensuring capacity to implement</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Using broad stake-holder support</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Making progress in each reform area</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Improving student outcomes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Standards and Assessments</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Adopting standards</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Data Systems to Support Instruction</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C)(1) Fully implement a statewide longitudinal data system</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C)(2) Accessing and using state data</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Great Teachers and Leaders</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility Requirement (b)</td>
<td>Eligibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Measuring student growth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Developing evaluation systems</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Conducting annual evaluations</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. General</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility Requirement (a)</td>
<td>Eligibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F)(1) Making education funding a priority</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subtotal: Accomplishments 260 | 52%
Subtotal: Plans 240 | 48%

(Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19511)
Additional “invitational priorities”, not reflected in the rubric, were also outlined in the federal register invitation for applications. While applications were not awarded points for the inclusion of these invitational priorities, their inclusion would be one way for state applicants to align their plans with particular interests of the United States Education Secretary (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19496). “Expansion and Adaptation of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems” is an invitational priority which expressed the Secretary’s interest in applicant plans to develop/implement data systems with the capabilities to connect and coordinate data from numerous sources (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19496). Data related to a wide range of student and staff information is mentioned: “special education programs, English language learner programs, early childhood programs, at-risk and dropout prevention programs, and school climate and culture programs, as well as information on student mobility, human resources (i.e., information on teachers, principals, and other staff), school finance, student health, postsecondary education, and other relevant areas” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19496). The Secretary was particularly interested, according to the invitation, in data systems which could be used across states “rather than having each State build or continue building such systems independently” and in data systems which could “allow important questions related to policy, practice, or overall effectiveness to be asked, answered, and incorporated into effective continuous improvement practices” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19496). In relation to this priority is the inclusion of the “America COMPETES Act” or, more specifically, 6401(e)(2)(D) of the Act. Section 6401 is titled “Alignment of secondary school graduation requirements with the demands of 21st century postsecondary endeavors and support for P–16 education data systems” with 6401 (e)(2)(D) outlining the “required elements of a statewide P-12 education data system” (America Competes Act, 2007). While the Secretary’s interest in a data
system is framed as an invitational priority rather than one exemplified in the rubric, the implementation and use of a data system is included in the details of several scored categories. States were scored on their ability to outline a plan which incorporates the four goals described in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, one of which centers around the realization of standards-based reforms as well as the creation and utilization of education data systems (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19514). Applications would also garner points for “fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system”, more specifically one that “includes all of the America COMPETES Act elements” and for their planned utilization of the data collected in that system (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19517). Further points were awarded for ensuring that local school data was linked to the state-wide system and accessible state-wide to share instructional “approaches for educating different types of students” as well as for making the data accessible to “key stakeholders”, such as researchers (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p, 19518). This intensive focus upon creating pathways to collect data is indicative of not only building structures to monitor academic success according to the guidelines of the standardization network, but makes that information easily accessible across local, state, and national contexts. The data systems promoted by the federal government via Race to the Top prioritized the gathering, dissemination, and analysis of a wide range of standardized data deemed valuable within the network. This emphasis is noteworthy due to the use of standardized results throughout the history of standards-based reform movements, especially the manipulation of such results to bolster political agendas (Blakeslee, 2013; Hursh, 2008). In fact, the RTTT invitation cites utilizing this data to inform policy as an objective (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19496). It is also noteworthy due to the work of Callon (1986), which showed that generating
data within a network in alignment with the network’s own rules is an effective means of validating, strengthening, and extending its reach.

The Race to the Top application also required states to join a standards consortium (the larger the consortium, the more points were to be awarded), adopt a “common set of K-12 standards” by 2010, and use the adopted standards to inform state-wide assessments (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19516). Common K-12 standards are defined in the invitation as: “a set of content standards that define what students must know and be able to do and that are substantially identical across all States in a consortium.” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19498-19499). Further, the federal government mandated that the standards be adopted by the states word for word with the allowance that states could add, or “supplement”, those standards provided that “the additional standards do not exceed 15 percent of the State’s total standards for that content area” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19499). Standardization nation-wide meant little room for states to deviate from the standards created by the consortiums they joined. As is expected in the moment of interference, additional definitions set forth in this federal document define actors in the standardization network, including the definitions of an “effective principal”, “effective teacher”, “highly effective principal”, and “highly effective teacher”:

- **“Effective principal”** means a principal whose students, overall and for each subgroup, achieve acceptable rates (e.g., at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth (as defined in this notice). States, LEAs, or schools must include multiple measures, provided that principal effectiveness is evaluated, in significant part, by student growth (as defined in this notice). Supplemental measures may include, for example, high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates, as well as evidence of providing supportive teaching and learning conditions, strong instructional leadership, and positive family and community engagement.” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19499)

- **“Effective teacher”** means a teacher whose students achieve acceptable rates (e.g. at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth (as defined in this notice). States, LEAs,
or schools must include multiple measures, provided that teacher effectiveness is evaluated, in significant part, by student growth (as defined in this notice). Supplemental measures may include, for example, multiple observation-based assessments of teacher performance.”
(Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19499)

- **Highly effective principal** means a principal whose students, overall and for each subgroup, achieve high rates (e.g., one and one-half grade levels in an academic year) of student growth (as defined in this notice). States, LEAs, or schools must include multiple measures, provided that principal effectiveness is evaluated, in significant part, by student growth (as defined in this notice). Supplemental measures may include, for example, high school graduation rates; college enrollment rates; evidence of providing supportive teaching and learning conditions, strong instructional leadership, and positive family and community engagement; or evidence of attracting, developing, and retaining high numbers of effective teachers.” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19499)

- **Highly effective teacher** means a teacher whose students achieve high rates (e.g., one and one-half grade levels in an academic year) of student growth (as defined in this notice). States, LEAs, or schools must include multiple measures, provided that teacher effectiveness is evaluated, in significant part, by student growth (as defined in this notice). Supplemental measures may include, for example, multiple observation-based assessments of teacher performance or evidence of leadership roles (which may include mentoring or leading professional learning communities) that increase the effectiveness of other teachers in the school or LEA.” (Race to the Top Fund, p. 19499)

Each mention of “student growth” or “student achievement” is followed by “as defined in this notice”, signaling that the federal government would only accept one definition of the terms.

Applying for and receiving these funds necessitated states’ acceptance of the following operational definitions:

- **Student achievement** means— (a) For tested grades and subjects: (1) A student’s score on the State’s assessments under the ESEA; and, as appropriate, (2) other measures of student learning, such as those described in paragraph (b) of this definition, provided they are rigorous and comparable across classrooms. (b) For non-tested grades and subjects: Alternative measures of student learning and performance such as student scores on pre-tests
and end-of-course tests; student performance on English language proficiency assessments; and other measures of student achievement that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms.” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19500)

- “Student growth means the change in student achievement (as defined in this notice) for an individual student between two or more points in time. A State may also include other measures that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms.” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19500)

The Race to the Top notice also defined “high-needs students” and included students who attend “high-minority schools” in that definition. “Innovative, autonomous public schools” were defined in part as schools which “have the flexibility and authority” to “select and replace staff” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19499-19500). The document also provided a definition of persistently lowest achieving schools – one that echoes, word for word, all other published definitions of PLA schools: the lowest achieving 5% of schools in terms of state test performance and/or graduation rates (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19500). In regard to school failure, this definition remained consistent (Race to the Top Fund, 2010; USDOE, 2009). Not only are these definitions precise in order to outline what is possible and acceptable for actors in the network, they also subtly characterize actors, such as high-minority schools as places of high-need or innovative schools as those with an increased ability to dismiss teachers. The slight variations between the aforementioned definitions are important as well. Subgroup performance, or student results grouped by “race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, disability, and limited English proficiency” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19497), not only continued to define school accountability labels, but became a factor in determining the effectiveness of school principals (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19500). Student achievement was focused upon state test proficiency and continued to define the success or failure of entire schools (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19500). Teacher and principal effectiveness, however, was based upon
student improvement on state tests (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19499). While both rooted in standardized exams, the Race to the Top required two accountability systems: one for entire schools based upon student passing rates and one for the educators within them based upon student progress toward passing (Race to the Top Fund, 19499). These two systems are connected through a mandate that overall educator rankings be based “in significant part” upon student growth but also include measures, such as observations and portfolios, which are “reflective of student achievement” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19526). In other words, observation or portfolio scores should emphasize academic proficiency and, therefore, align with the pass rates of standardized exams. Just as the persistently lowest achieving label held consequences for schools, evaluation rankings held consequences for educators. The federal government demanded a process for the removal of “ineffective” teachers or principals and that educators labeled “ineffective” were denied tenure (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19504). Any state that won the Race to the Top competition pioneered this twofold accountability system by bringing it to every classroom throughout the state.

5.2 – Interference in New York State Schools

In the “Race to the Top”, New York State’s 2010 application was a “phase II” winner (NY, 2010a; Education Next, 2017). The state application, points awarded to New York State during the application process, and the comments of federal application reviewers provide documentation regarding the extent to which federal policies influenced state practices and goals (USDOE, 2010). The structure of the federal government’s RTTT application, rubric, and federal approval process demonstrate that the Race to the Top competition was not about crafting educational improvement plans that could address the undoubtedly differentiated needs of states
across the nation but, rather, a standardization competition. In its Race to the Top (RTTT) application, New York State details plans to fully conform to standards-based reforms and applauds newly adopted state legislation which promises to “usher in a new era of educational excellence in the State and will ensure that we are able to fully execute the innovative, coherent reform agenda outlined in our Race to the Top application” (NY, 2010a, p. 3). Additionally, all collective bargaining agreements had to comply with this new legislation by July 1, 2010 (NY, 2010a, p. 262). Therefore, as demanded by the federal RTTT invitation (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19497), New York state effectually removed barriers to fully implementing the federal government’s vision of education reform. Within New York’s application, specific components of the 2010 legislation are provided to demonstrate how legislative action would now benefit the educational goals outlined under RTTT, including new teacher and principal evaluation protocols, new disciplinary procedures for tenured educators, more than doubling the cap on State charter schools, and $20.4 million dollars now devoted to the implementation of a longitudinal data system across the State. The application rests upon four major areas of “reform” in order to “ensure that this new legislation is implemented in ways that reach all students” (NY, 2010a, p. 6): (1) “world-class curricula; formative, interim, and summative assessments aligned to internationally benchmarked standards; (2) a robust data system; (3) rigorous teacher and principal evaluation systems that include student achievement measures; redesigned teacher and principal preparation programs focused on clinical practice; and (4) coordinated and aligned interventions and supports for our lowest-achieving schools” (NY, 2010a, p. 6). As expected, the specific goals outlined in New York State’s Race to the Top application align with the four elements set forth in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 as well as the Race to the Top invitation (Race to the Top Fund, 2010). And,
understandably, the State’s goals and objectives are aligned with the Race to the Top application rubric, further demonstrating how efficiently this structured approach fostered the extension of the standardization network from federal to state contexts.

The 449 page application (NY, 2010a) documents anticipated continued legislative support, planned collaboration with charter management organizations (such as KIPP, Uncommon Schools, and Achievement First), and upcoming partnerships with agencies such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Their implementation timeline includes the adoption of the Common Core Standards in 2010, a statewide curriculum available to all school districts by 2012, an “early warning” data system by 2011 and an educational data portal by 2012, the adoption of a value-added growth model for evaluations by 2012, a teacher preparation program accountability system by 2012, and the identification of the first cohort of persistently lowest achieving schools by 2010. New York’s RTTT proposal, therefore, is fast-paced with all major components up and running within just two years of receiving RTTT funds but the state also justifies their ability to fully realize their plan in that timeframe (NY, 2010a).

A chart included in the application clearly outlines how the state plan aligns with federal goals and “describes the main components of the May 2010 legislation and the dramatic impact each element should have on the education of students statewide” (NY, 2010a, p. 3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>Major Points</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and Principal Evaluations (Chapter 103 of the Laws of 2010)</td>
<td>Establishes a new comprehensive annual evaluation system for teachers and principals based on multiple measures of effectiveness, including 40 percent student achievement, measures, which would result in a single composite effectiveness score for every teacher and principal. Differentiates teacher and principal effectiveness using the following four rating categories: Highly Effective, Effective, Developing, and Ineffective.</td>
<td>Only a portion of the State’s teachers teach in subjects in which students take a State assessment. However, the new legislation ensures that all teachers will be evaluated based on student data, which will include assessment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
uses such annual evaluations as a significant factor for employment decisions including promotion, retention, tenure determination, supplemental compensation, and professional development.

Provides that two consecutive annual ratings of “Ineffective” constitutes a “pattern of ineffective teaching or performance,” which constitutes very significant evidence of incompetence and which may form the basis for just cause removal of a teacher or principal.

Establishes an expedited tenured employee disciplinary process for teachers and principals where the charges are based solely on a “pattern of ineffective teaching or performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charter Schools (Chapter 101 of the Laws of 2010)</th>
<th>Raises New York’s cap on startup charter schools from 200 to 460.</th>
<th>This “high” cap, which exceeds 10 percent of all public schools in New York State, will provide more students with the opportunity to attend high-quality charter schools.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotes equal access to charter schools for students with disabilities, English language learners and low-income students.</td>
<td>The legislation expands access to and availability of a charter school education to high-need students Statewide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishes a new Request for Proposals process to allow the Board of Regents and State University of New York (SUNY) to target new startup charter schools in regions of the state and student populations with the greatest need for a charter school opportunity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Partnership Organizations (Chapter 103 of the Laws of 2010)</td>
<td>Provides authority for boards of education (or the Chancellor in New York City), with the approval of the Commissioner pursuant to Regents’ authority, to contract with an Educational Partnership Organization for a term of up to five years to manage a school designated by the Commissioner as a school under registration review or a persistently-lowest-achieving school.</td>
<td>This legislation will allow schools to partner with entities with proven track records of success in school improvement and turnaround</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation for State Longitudinal Data System</td>
<td>Appropriates $20.4M to the State Education Department to implement its longitudinal data system.</td>
<td>The appropriation provides NYSED with the necessary resources to continue its work on the implementation of the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
longitudinal data system. This will supplement a $19.7M federal grant recently awarded to the Department by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) (See Section C for more information).

(NY, 2010a, p. 3-5)

This chart is one example of the meticulous connections New York made between their RTTT plan and federal reform expectations as well as the impact the plan would have upon every student in New York State. Of New York’s four legislative priorities, “Education Partnership Organizations” has specific ramifications for persistently lowest achieving schools, namely the ability for an outside organization to manage and direct those schools (NY, 2010a, p. 5). New York’s “Charter School” legislation specifically mentions affording more opportunities for charter school enrollment to “high need” students (NY, 2010a, p. 4). However, “Teacher and Principal Evaluations” as well as “Appropriation for State Longitudinal Data System” apply to every student and educator across the State, meaning the State planned to collect data about every student and link that data to every teacher and principal in New York (NY, 2010a, p. 3-5). The State’s data system would inform “district and school-level correlation reports between state test data and non-growth measures” (NY, 2010a, p. 179). This report, the State suggested, could answer questions like “Are the principal’s observations consistent with state test performance?” (NY, 2010a, p. 179).

Improvements in student achievement on both State and national standardized measures since the implementation of the 2005 Regents Reform Agenda are reiterated in the application. Additional claims are made asserting that New York’s standards have been recognized to be of
high quality on a national level and that “higher standards have galvanized schools and students to raise achievement levels statewide” (NY, 2010a, p. 77). With that being said, the application also documents the anticipation that achievement levels as measured by standardized assessments would be impacted by the implementation of “more rigorous standards and cut points for State assessments” as well as an expectation that the implementation of Race to the Top funds would produce “higher gains” within “priority subgroups” due to the focused intervention upon those groups of students (NY, 2010a, p. 32):

On Grade 4 Math, the statewide target is an eight percentage point gain over five years. This represents an incremental 3 percentage-point gain over baseline targets (should New York State not get the grant). Again, while in the last three years the State has experienced a 9 percent increase, less aggressive net gains are expected as the State moves to new assessments and changes cut points. Priority subgroups will experience higher gains, reflecting the targeted investments included for those groups through the Race to the Top funding. For example, we target a 12 percentage point gain for Hispanics (three percent above baseline), and a 12 percentage point gain for English Language Learners (5 percent above baseline), narrowing the achievement gap. (NY, 2010a, p. 33)

In alignment with federal guidelines, “priority subgroups” are identified in the application as students considered: Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners, and Economically Disadvantaged (NCLB, 2001, SEC. 1001; NY, 2010a, p. 33-35; Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19497).

The organizational structure of the New York State Department of Education was planned to comply with Race to the Top federal mandates. While a change in the structure of the department was already underway prior to the creation of the State’s application, Race to the Top funds, once secured, were intended to further that redesign and enable the State to create a “RTTT Performance Management Office” and an “External Technical Assistance Center for
Innovation and Turnaround” (ETACIT) within the department (NY, 2010a, p. 44). These offices, along with the state education department in general and 37 BOCES across New York State were, per the State’s RTTT application, tasked with intervening within local schools. For example, the plan identifies one task of the “RTTT Performance Management Office” as tracking the progress made by school districts in regards to implementation of Race to the Top initiatives and to then coordinate interventions for districts not progressing according to expectations (NY, 2010a, p. 46). The “External Technical Assistance Center for Innovation and Turnaround” was planned to specifically support persistently lowest achieving schools as those schools adopt one of the four turnaround models (NY, 2010a, p. 48).

(NY, 2010a, p. 265)
As outlined in the above graphic and explained in New York’s plan, ETACIT was positioned as an office which specializes in the “turnaround” of failing schools: “a statewide clearinghouse for best practices in turnaround and as the repository for Intervention Partners” (NY, 2010a, p. 261). As such, ETACIT would connect these “failing” schools with “Intervention Partners” who would guide the technical assistance, professional development, data systems, and community engagement of the school (NY, 2010a, p. 48). “Intervention Partners” would qualify for work with New York’s schools once ETACIT had determined these organizations had “proven track records of raising the achievement of high-need students” (NY, 2010a, p. 257). Failing schools would then work with an “Intervention Partner” to implement their intervention plans “with fidelity” (NY, 2010a, p. 262). Monitoring fidelity to initiatives and supervision assigned to certain actors in order to hold other actors accountable is mentioned in a wealth of data derived from the standardization network, such as Joint Intervention Team reports (NYSED/CSDA, 2011; NYSED/Buffalo CSD, 2011), the approval process imposed by the federal government upon States for RTTT funds (Race to the Top Funds, 2010), and is visually illustrated by New York State’s RTTT implementation flow chart (NY, 2010a, p. 265). In the moment of interference, structures are not only built to define the standardization network’s agenda and position actors accordingly, but to ensure those actors continually operationalize the network by sticking to the plan.

5.3 – Interference in William S. Hackett Middle School

In 2011, during an interview for the Albany Times Union news report about William S. Hackett Middle School’s persistently lowest achieving status, the Superintendent of the City School District of Albany said a school improvement plan was pending approval at the New
York State Education Department (Waldman, 2011a). As publicized in that same news article, Hackett’s Joint Intervention Team report was crafted to inform that improvement plan (Waldman, 2011a). However, the school improvement plan submitted by William S. Hackett Middle School was actually an “intervention plan” - a required element of the school’s application for a “School Improvement Grant” (SIG) and, as required, addressed JIT findings but was based upon a scripted chart aligned to a federally-defined intervention model for failing schools (CSDA, 2011). As a result of Hackett’s persistently lowest achieving designation, the school was eligible for improvement funds but were forced to select and conform to the mandates of a reform model to receive that grant (CSDA, 2011). School Improvement Grants, or SIGs, were designed strictly to support the implementation of a prescribed intervention model within failing schools (CSDA, 2011, p. 2). The City School District of Albany chose to implement the “transformation model” at Hackett, described in the application as “similar to the turnaround model” which calls for schools to “phase out”, redesign, and/or replace the school – “including replacing the principal and at least half the staff” (CSDA, 2011, p. 3). The “transformation model” adds the following requirements:

…evaluation of staff effectiveness developed by the LEA [Local Education Agency] in collaboration with teachers and principals that takes into account data on student growth, multiple observation-based assessments, and portfolios of professional activities. Evaluations would serve as the basis for rewarding effective teachers and removing ineffective teachers after ample professional development opportunities. A school that opts for a transformation model does not close but rather remains identified as persistently lowest-achieving until it demonstrates improved academic results. (CSDA, 2011, p. 2)

As explained in the “LEA Implementation Plan for the Transformation Model” for William S. Hackett Middle School, the intervention plan was based upon the previously completed Joint
Intervention Team analysis and structured to address the “major findings” of that report (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.1). The vague assertions of the JIT report are quoted again as major findings which will be addressed through the school’s intervention plan and supported with School Improvement Grant money, including previously mentioned statements regarding “generally low” expectations and a lack of “rigor” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.2). Applicants are asked to refer to a “Model Implementation Plan Rubric” to “ensure quality responses” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.1). The “Model Implementation Rubric” was created to ensure applicants completely describe and connect the JIT findings to the school’s plan, address all “required actions for the selected models”, identify when and why specific actions will take place throughout the grant cycle, indicate changes districts will make to implement interventions, outline costs and budget, explain how the work can be sustained, and consider any implementation obstacles the district or school will need to overcome (NYSED, 2010b).

In nearly twelve pages of narrative, the City School District of Albany outlines an intervention plan which provides solutions to the problems presented in the Joint Intervention Team report, thereby validating the existence of such problems and the need for both intervention and funds for intervention. The district alludes to previous efforts to bolster the school but states that the JIT report uncovered “missing pieces”: “The 1003(g) School Improvement Grant will ensure that all the missing pieces, as identified in the JIT, are thoughtfully and strategically aligned with existing, successful programs, thus allowing the district to bring drastic and sustainable change to Hackett Middle School beginning in July 2011” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.4). Similar to the RTTT approval process for states, which afforded federal application reviewers opportunities to request additional information regarding how state plans aligned to federal priorities, the SIG approval process for local school districts included
opportunities for New York State Department of Education reviewers to request additional information (CSDA, 2011; NY, 2010a). The original spring, 2011 application was reviewed by NYSED officials and returned to the City School District of Albany for revisions. Reviewers asked the district to:

- “Please clarify how teachers will be rewarded” for high performance (CSDA, 2011, p. 20-21).
- “Please provide information on the rubric” used to measure educator effectiveness (CSDA, 2011, p. 21).
- “Please provide information on the district’s plan to remove” teachers who fail to improve their practice (CSDA, 2011, p. 21).
- “Please provide information on how data will be used to revise the instructional program, especially related alignment of the curriculum with State standards” (CSDA, 2011, p. 27).
- “Please provide additional information on how teachers will be held accountable for using data” and, further, “How will this be monitored and by whom?” (CSDA, 2011, p. 27).

As evidenced by their requests for additional information, NYSED reviewers were particularly interested in how local intervention plans aligned with ARRA and Race to the Top priorities, namely the use of standardized exams, data, educator evaluations, and accountability. They also asked for additional details regarding when benchmarks assessments would be implemented, how many times these assessments would be given throughout the school year and which content areas would utilize them, when teachers would be trained to access and utilize data, and how teachers would implement data-based instruction (CSDA, 2011, p. 27). NYSED reviewers asked about the “School Implementation Manager”, or “SIM”, a new school-based administrative position required by the grant (CSDA, 2011, p. 10). They wanted to know how the SIM and
building principal would coordinate their efforts (CSDA, 2011, p. 17) as well as how the district would ensure the SIM could access the resources he or she needed to carry out the intervention plan (CSDA, 2011, p. 40).

An additional request from “NYSED” states: “Please provide additional information on how the district will address the attendance and truancy issues and the low expectations of staff and students” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.15). This is followed by an update from the City School District of Albany (“CSDA”) which details plans to further track student and teacher attendance, hold professional development workshops outside of the instructional day, and employ the efforts of a school “Attendance Committee” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.15). Data considered for the creation of this plan is listed on the first page of the document and does include “student attendance rates” but does not mention that data related to teacher or staff attendance was analyzed (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.1). The district further states that “low expectations for student achievement” will be addressed through a period a week of “advisory time” and a “School Climate and Culture Committee” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.16). Revising the school schedule to make time for academic advisement was mentioned by Albany’s Assistant Superintendent when she was interviewed for the Albany Times Union newspaper report about Hackett’s failure (Waldman, 2011a). However, the grant application and intervention plan make clear that this advisory period is not academically oriented (CSDA, 2011, p. 39). Instead, this initiative is a pre-determined “permissible activity” included within the grant application: “Extending or restructuring the school day so as to add time for such strategies as advisory periods that build relationships between students, faculty, and other school staff” (CSDA, 2011, p. 39). With no evidence disclosed that relationships were problematic at the school, students and staff were assigned to spend nearly an hour each Friday with their “advisory families” (CSDA, 2011, p. 39).
A school committee was tasked with creating advisory lessons, which centered around character education and proper school behavior (CSDA, 2011, p. 39; HMS, 2011). Despite the possible benefits of social-emotional education, devoting an hour of learning time per week to this at the suggestion of a government intervention program for failing schools is a powerful moment of interference. It demonstrates that students in schools deemed failing were not only susceptible to government intrusion into their academic experiences, but also into their relationships with peers and adults at school.

Assertions made in Hackett’s JIT report regarding “low expectations” were presumably derived from classroom observations during the team’s site visit. However, as previously noted, details regarding those observations were not documented, nor were the ways in which observers defined expectations as “low”. That said, the interventions, regardless of their ability to solve a particular problem, validate that a problem exists. This is true even when the problem, such as “low expectations”, has no supporting data to prove they are rooted in fact. The act of employing interventions creates realities and aligns the work of actors with those realities, whether they were previously objective fact or mere subjective perception. This is not only indicative of the significance of interference as a moment of translation, but of translation itself as a process which works to transform, define, and solidify truths within the network.

Additionally, the response from an individual representing the City School District of Albany (“CSDA”) to “NYSED’s” request for further information regarding how the district’s plan would address the problem of “low expectations” is an important moment (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.15). “CSDA’s” response provided additional information as directed and did not agree nor disagree with the notion that low expectations existed within Hackett Middle School. However, the response affirms that low expectations exist simply because, as required by the mandate that
schools address JIT findings in their plans, the district will address it. Once the accusation of “low expectations” was made in the JIT report, it became a problem the school must address. The JIT process combined with the SIG application process transformed the subjective opinion of “low expectations” into an objective fact and it was treated as such. The ability to transform opinions into facts and demand that schools act to rectify problems that are either baseless or based upon perception presents innumerable threats to the autonomy of schools. This moment also highlights how personal agency can be limited and manipulated within a network of power.

No individual grant authors are identified on the school district’s application and even the response itself, labeled “CSDA”, removes personal identity. There is no room for “CSDA’s” opinion even if she or he had one. Whomever wrote the “CSDA” response was a human actor tasked with securing grant funding and positioned in a moment of interference to speak on behalf of the school district in accordance with network expectations: NYSED asked for additional information and, as required by the grant application process, CSDA provided it.

Hackett’s intervention plan, as required by the School Improvement Grant application, takes the form of a structured chart which is explained in the following way: “The chart that follows identifies which action steps are needed to address the JIT findings and the components of the Transformation Model.” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.16). Subsequently, the chart begins with an outline of each “Action Required by the Transformation Model” as prescribed by the definition of the model as well as NYSED and USDOE mandates. School districts applying for SIG funds, including the City School District of Albany, filled the chart with details regarding “how the action will be accomplished”, “when the action will occur during the grant period and why”, and the “costs associated with the action” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.16-B2.43). This structure again creates obligatory passage points for any persistently lowest achieving school, like Hackett,
seeking a School Improvement Grant. Not only must the school’s work align with the findings of the Joint Intervention Team report, it must also align with the “requirements” of the chosen model. In the case of the transformation model, those actions include:

- Implementing a “rigorous” evaluation system for teachers and principals which accounts for “data on student growth” as defined in the grant application (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.18).
- Identifying and rewarding those educators who have raised student achievement as the result of implementing the model (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.20).
- Identifying and removing educators who have not improved despite opportunities to do so (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.21).
- Providing professional development for staff “to ensure they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.22).
- Implementing recruitment and retention policies for “skilled” staff, which can include financial incentives, flexibility in work conditions, and opportunities for career growth. (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.23)
- Eradicating teacher seniority in transfer eligibility by ensuring that all transfers are agreed upon by both the teacher and principal of the school (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.24).
- Implementing a research-based, vertically-aligned instructional program which is also aligned to state standards (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.25).
- Consistently analyzing data to inform and/or differentiate instruction (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.25).
• Ensuring that the chosen curriculum is implemented “with fidelity” and is raising student achievement (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.27).

• Identifying students at risk of “failing to achieve high standards or graduate” (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.33).


• Providing “operational flexibility” for the school – “such as staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting” (p. B2.40).

• Ensuring “ongoing, intensive technical assistance and related support” (p. B2.41).

Other “permissible activities”, such as the aforementioned social-emotional advisory time, are suggested but there is no space for the school to include a unique initiative not already categorized as “required” or “permissible” within the school intervention plan chart (CSDA, 2011). A review of these requirements demonstrates that the intervention plan itself is not designed as a plan to meet the specific needs of a school. Therefore, the quality of JIT reports are of little importance in terms of directing a school’s plan. The intervention plan does not necessitate a high-quality, in-depth needs assessment to inform it because it is built upon an “intervention model” which was defined at the federal level (USDOE, 2009) and scripted via the School Improvement Grant application. In the problematization stage, the Joint Intervention Team report played a powerful role in highlighting and publicizing the “problems” at William S. Hackett Middle School. In the moment of interference, however, it is both referred to and validated throughout the grant application but the interventions themselves are aligned to an intervention model rather than to the findings of the JIT report. Such mandated, pre-determined interventions serve to standardize the practices of schools and align them with both state and federal education policies but do not, as indicative of the standardization network, support a
differentiated plan tailored to the unique characteristics of a school. Instead, the interventions create a framework for transforming the school according to network expectations. The interventions available to failing schools are pre-determined and applicants are tasked with simply explaining how school and district work will align to meet requirements. For example, the grant requires the implementation of a teacher and principal evaluation system which considers standardized student proficiency and growth data. Accordingly, the Hackett plan states that the school will adopt the New York State United Teachers’ evaluation tool, “The Educator Evaluation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning” and explains how this tool will meet those requirements (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.18). The mandate to provide ongoing professional development is addressed in the Hackett plan with the hiring of an ELA coach, a Math coach, and a Behavioral Specialist as well as partnerships with professional development organizations (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.22). As previously seen in standardization network data, such as in New York State’s RTTT proposal (NY, 2010a), monitoring and supervision to ensure actor adherence to the network’s agenda is also included in Hackett’s intervention plan. For example, teachers would be expected to implement instructional initiatives “with fidelity” and both administrators and instructional coaches would be charged with holding teachers “accountable” for “follow-through with curriculum and instructional changes” as well as their utilization of data (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.27). Throughout the plan, the school’s governing body, the “Building Leadership Team” is mentioned as playing a vital role in fostering implementation efforts. A new school-based administrator, the School Implementation Manager (SIM), is tasked with leading and monitoring the intervention plan (CSDA, 2011, p. 10). At the district level, the plan includes an “Office of School Redesign” headed by a “transformation officer for PLA schools” to supervise
plan implementation and guide the principals of failing schools within the district (CSDA, 2011, Appendix E).

In the School Improvement plan for William S. Hackett Middle School, the school district is required to explain “any obstacles to implementing this plan (ex: collective bargaining agreements, lack of professional staff, etc.)” as well as how the district plans to remove implementation barriers (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.44). This is reminiscent of the federal government’s demands that states eradicate legislative or union provisions which could impede full implementation of their Race to the Top plans (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19497). In Hackett’s School Improvement Grant application, the school district highlights collective bargaining agreements as an obstacle to their plan’s implementation, noting that this is especially true in regards to teacher/principal evaluations and financial rewards but adds that all union contracts will align with “APPR, Education Law §3012-c, and Commissioner’s Regulations” by 2012 (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.44). This speaks to the sweeping changes to collective bargaining contracts required not only by law, but also by the School Improvement Grant’s specific mandates. Further, these changes extend beyond evaluations, consequences, and rewards for educators. The SIG requirements impact a myriad of school functions and operations as well as teaching strategies and learning experiences, including the curriculum educators are allowed to teach, working conditions such as the length of the work day, participation in non-academic class “advisory” periods, the mandated use of specific technology, and changes to the structure of shared decision-making committees, supervision, leadership, and school/district administration. Via this application, however, the district asserted a willingness to reform union contracts, Board of Education policies, and school leadership procedures to fulfill the requirements of the grant and implement the mandated interventions at William S. Hackett Middle School:
The district is committed to the successful implementation of the Transformation Model activities described in this application and will modify practices and policies through the Board of Education approval process, bargaining unit negotiation process, and through building-level shared governance procedures in order to fully implement the intervention model. (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.44).

5.4 – Interference: Structuring the Standardization Network

During interference, a variety of actors assembled to solve the problem of school failure and provide a structure to successfully implement the standardization network’s interventions. Some actors represent the notion of structure quite literally, such as graphics, grant rubrics, and funding applications formatted as charts which require applicants to simply explain how their proposal aligns to government initiatives. These actors are found in both macro and micro data: in the federal government’s Race to the Top rubric (Race to the Top Fund, 2010), the Race to the Top application submitted to the federal government by New York State (NY, 2010a), and in the application submitted to the New York State Department of Education by the City School District of Albany on behalf of Hackett Middle School (CSDA, 2011).

As was the case in moments of problematization, definitions continue to lend power to actor grouping during interference. In particular, a focus upon the “achievement gap” problematized the performance of minority students and the network placed an emphasis upon categorizing students by subgroup as well as directing interventions toward remedying their failure (NCLB, 2001, SEC. 1001; NYSED, 2010a, p. 33; NYSED, 2012a; 2012b; Race to the Top Fund, 2010, 19496-19497; USDOE, 2013b). Attending a “high-minority” school also became a characteristic of “high-need” students:

“High-need students means students at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in
poverty, who attend high-minority schools (as defined in this notice), who are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, who are in foster care, who have been incarcerated, who have disabilities, or who are English language learners.” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19499)

The structuring that occurs in moments of interference literally and figuratively boxes actors in, restricts their movement, and limits their opportunities to misbehave. This allows the standardization network to package actors, decide which actors belong, and dictate their behavior (Sheehy, 2010). This prepares them for further collaboration to meet network goals. For example, as Sheehy (2013) points out, “standards do not create thick borders, practices do” (Sheehy, 2013, p. 406). In fact, the calls for higher or more rigorous standards to address school failure worked to problematize educational practice but the Common Core Standards themselves are rarely mentioned and not a single, specific academic standard entered the network during network tracing. The Race to the Top invitation (Race to the Top Fund, 2010) does not mention “Common Core” but does put structures into place that narrow options by mandating that states join consortiums and adopt “substantially identical” standards (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19498). Notably, mentions of standards are followed by mandates to implement standardized assessments (Race to the Top Fund, 2010). Standards and assessments are bound together throughout the competition invitation (Race to the Top Fund, 2010) in demands for “internationally benchmarked standards and assessments” (p. 19496), aligning high school graduation and college acceptance requirements “with the new standards and assessments” (p. 19496), and tailoring professional development to “support the transition to new standards and assessments” (p. 19504). States are given detailed instructions regarding standards adoption in a category labeled “Standards and Assessments” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19503-19504).
Hence, once actors are defined and categorized, their role, or how they will function within the network, can be defined as well.

In moments of problematization, undefined roles are pointed out and problematized. For example, New York’s Senior Deputy Education Commissioner, John King, summarized the negative findings of Joint Intervention Team investigations conducted across the State and cited undefined administrative roles as a commonly found condition within failing schools (King, 2010, p. 6). Hackett’s JIT suggested that the district should analyze administrative job descriptions to “realign roles and responsibilities in order to support student achievement and prioritize school improvement” (NYSED/CSDA, 2011, p. 5). Further, JIT recommendations called for systems at Hackett Middle School which: “...include roles and responsibilities for all members of the school staff and structures for providing discipline and consequences progressively and consistently” (NYSED/CSDA, 2011, p. 5). Whereas these examples define actors, problematize existing roles, and call for revisions to fit the network’s agenda, roles and responsibilities are increasingly defined and aligned in moments of interference. Monitoring and evaluation is a common thread that weaves through the roles formed via interference and, further, revolves around the standardization network’s data. The federal government recommended “comprehensive instructional reform” backed by ongoing data analysis and “periodic reviews” to ensure teachers were implementing those reforms “with fidelity” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19527). Through Race to the Top, state test data was translated into evaluation scores for every educator (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19499-19500). In New York, principals’ observations of classroom instruction were compared to state test data in an attempt to ensure consistency between students’ state exam passing rates and their teachers’ observation pass rates (NY, 2010a, p. 179). State-wide reform implementation was supervised
by a state “Race to the Top Performance Management Office” and new BOCES “Network Teams” (NY, 2010a, p. 44-46). Oversight was especially apparent at failing schools. An arm of the New York State Education Department, called the “External Technical Assistance Center for Innovation and Turnaround” was devoted entirely to implementing interventions at failing local schools (NY, 2010a, p. 46). Failing schools were paired with an outside “intervention partner” to oversee reform implementation (NY, 2010a, p. 116). Additionally, these intervention partners were tasked with aligning failing schools’ curricula, materials, and professional development to reform initiatives as well as to “the state’s new curriculum frameworks” (NY, 2010a, p. 262). At the City School District of Albany and William S. Hackett Middle School, new administrators were added and school-based committees were reorganized for the purpose of plan implementation and oversight (CSDA, 2011).

Interference commonly occurs by force, seduction, or solicitation (Callon, 1986, p. 209) and interference tactics effectively utilized by the network also reveal how power operates within it across contexts of practice. Legislation is one way interference is forced across local, state, and national education contexts. The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 made reform efforts a mandate of federal law and, along with the America Competes Act of 2007, served as the basis of the nation-wide Race to the Top competition (Investing in Innovation, 2009; Race to the Top Fund, 2010). RTTT solicited state participation in the competition through invitations to apply and seduced states to submit applications with funding (Race to the Top Fund, 2010). Interference by force is also reflected in RTTT eligibility requirements, which demand that state applicants remove any barriers, legislative or otherwise, to fully implement federal reform priorities (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19497). Systematically eliminating political and union resistance to standards-based interventions is an effective approach to
undermining these actors’ power to effectively protest the standardization network’s agenda. Provisions for eradicating conflict are commonplace in moments of interference, grants a network of power the ability to either bulldoze or ignore opposition, and allows the network to forge ahead uncontested (Callon, 1986, p. 214). In New York, this forced interference resulted in new state legislation (NY, 2010a, p. 3) and was echoed in demands that local school districts amend union contracts to ensure full implementation of School Improvement Grant intervention plans (CSDA, 2011, p. B2.44).

Approval is an effective interference tactic that is recycled across time and place within the standardization network as evidenced by the application process imposed upon states for educational funding. This tactic was successful in aligning state literacy plans with the Reading First initiatives of No Child Left Behind (Healy, 2007). State applications for Reading First grants were submitted to the federal government and were either approved or denied in accordance with their adherence to NCLB mandates (Healy, 2007). Similarly, state Race to the Top plans were submitted to the federal government and states were rewarded with money for demonstrating a commitment to standards-based reforms, particularly the use of standardized exams, managing standardized data, linking standardized results with educator evaluations, and holding schools accountable for failure to meet standardized expectations (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19496). Once a state submitted their RTTT application, federal reviewers not only had the authority to accept or reject applications, but to also question state plans, prompting states to further refine their proposals in alignment with reform initiatives (NY, 2010a). The same approval process was imposed upon school districts seeking School Improvement Grants for their persistently lowest achieving schools (CSDA, 2011). This approval process acted to streamline national, state, and local goals with a remarkable level of consistency and adherence.
to standards-based reforms, especially the implementation of standardized assessments to measure academic success or failure, data systems to readily access standardized results, connections between standardized student performance and educator evaluations, and accountability for failing schools. These four standards-based initiatives, originally prioritized nationally in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, are also emphasized state-wide in New York State’s Race to the Top plan (NY, 2010a) and locally within the school intervention plan for William S. Hackett Middle School (CSDA, 2011). It was not only the work of application reviewers that produced consistency across contexts of practice, however. Whether by force, seduction, or solicitation, a host of disparate actors, such as legislation, legislators, federal education officials, state education officials, money, scripted grant applications, definitions, charts, rubrics, organizational flow charts, signatures, district administrators, school administrators, parents, teachers, and union leaders collaborated to keep the standardization network’s goals at the forefront of education reform plans. New York state legislation aligned with federal legislation, New York State Education policies reflected this legislation and aligned with the United States Department of Education Race to the Top competition and, likewise, the City School District of Albany along with William S. Hackett Middle School conformed to state and federal reform interventions.

In the planning phase of interference, this trickle down from federal to state to local practice suggests that the federal government played a leading role in the standardization network. However, it is necessary to remember how the brainstorming phase of Problematization set the foundation on which the structures of interference could be built. Problematization, as explained, is fueled by public perceptions which were solidified over time and across place by the efforts of numerous actors. One actor, therefore, cannot be isolated as
the origin of the network or the lynchpin to network operations because it is the collaboration between actors that produces results. In addition, institutions are comprised of many distinct, human and nonhuman actors. Network tracing identifies individual actors who might otherwise remain hidden from view because they have been grouped together in moments of interference or because they are eclipsed by prominent actors within the standardization network, such as governing bodies and educational institutions (Law, 1992). As an example, Hackett’s School Improvement Grant application appears as one actor in moments of interference at William S. Hackett Middle School (CSDA, 2011). However, close inspection of the application reveals that what appears to be one actor is a myriad of separate actors brought together to work in concert under the “application” label. Additionally, while their collaborative work is indicative of interference as a moment of translation, their individual characteristics overlap to reinforce problematization, guarantee interference, and introduce enrollment within local schools applying for an improvement grant. The first actor to appear in the application is the “general information” for applicants, which details eligibility, expectations, requirements and the application format (CSDA, 2011, p. 2-6). This actor reinforces problematization by linking SIG eligibility with a school’s failure label (CSDA, 2011, p. 2). The application’s “assurances” section is an actor which builds interference scaffolding by dictating that SIG funds can be used only to “fully and effectively” implement an intervention model and details how successful implementation of that model should be measured and monitored (CSDA, 2011, p. 7). Another actor is titled “descriptive information” and this actor structures local enrollment into the SIG’s prescribed intervention plan. First, this actor demands proof that union leaders agree to amend contracts as necessary in order to carry out the intervention plan (CSDA, 2011, p. 9). Second, this actor mandates the addition of a “School Implementation Manager”, which is a school
administrator hired to work alongside the principal to execute plan implementation schoolwide (CSDA, 2011, p. 10). The application’s appendix includes another actor that structures local enrollment: A “Consultation/Collaboration Documentation Form” requires evidence that various school stakeholders were “consulted” during the School Improvement Grant application process in the form of stakeholder signatures. Name, title, and group affiliation are noted for each individual and signatures were secured. As explained in the document, “representatives of constituency groups” who sign the document are “affirming that appropriate consultation has occurred”, not that they agree with the planned interventions (CSDA, 2011, Appendix C). The consultation of individuals who do not sign can be supported with documentation that such collaboration did occur in a column titled “Signature Unobtainable/Summary of Documentation”. Evidence of consultation in lieu of a signature could include meeting notes, agendas, or attendance (CSDA, 2011, Appendix C). Forty-five signatures spanning nearly six pages identify additional actors within the network, including the teachers’ union president, administrators’ union president, PTA officers, parents, community members, administrators, faculty and staff (CSDA, 2011, Appendix C). While not a binding contract or “agreement” with the plan outlined in the School Improvement Grant, the signatures affirming “consultation” and “collaboration” around the document set the stage for successful enrollment, whereby actors are further organized to achieve particular goals. Although characterized as a theoretical or planning stage, interference directs the movement of actors drawn into the standardization network during the enrollment phase so they can work together in accordance with the network’s agenda. When effective, actors fall into place within the structure built through moments of interference and play their part.
CHAPTER 6

DATA ANALYSIS: STANDARDIZATION THROUGH ENROLLMENT

6.1 – Enrolling American Schools

When states across the nation vied for funds in the federal government’s Race to the Top competition, the single most important thing they could do was secure the endorsement of local school districts within their state. “Securing LEA commitment”, or Local Education Agency commitment, was the most heavily weighted RTTT rubric category (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19511). As the federal government invited state applications, they differentiated between levels of school district compliance to ensure that greater conformity would result in greater rewards at the local level. “Involved LEAs” were defined as local school districts involved in only the parts of the State’s plan which “necessitate full or nearly-full statewide implementation, such as transitioning to a common set of K–12 standards” (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19500). “Participating LEAs”, on the other hand, were defined as school districts which choose to work with the state to “implement all or significant portions of the State’s Race to the Top plan” (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19500). Unlike the school districts who were merely “involved”, those considered “participating” would receive a share of 50% of the State’s overall RTTT grant award. This share would be outlined in an agreement between the school district and the state to as evidence of state-local partnerships and would support the state’s Race to the Top application (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19500). In their applications, states were required to provide information about each participating school district, including information about their students and staff members (Race to the Top Funds, p. 19528). School district participation in state RTTT plans was literally the federal government’s first priority. In fact, it is labeled “Priority 1: Absolute Priority – Comprehensive Approach to
Education Reform”: “The State must demonstrate in its application sufficient LEA participation and commitment to successfully implement and achieve the goals in its plans” (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19496). As an absolute priority, if this priority was not met, the State’s application was “eliminated from the competition” (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19513). This resembles federal mandates that states remove barriers to fully implementing their RTTT plans in order to compete for funding (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19497). As mentioned, New York State passed legislation to clear the way for revised educator evaluations, more charter schools, the outside management of failing schools, and a longitudinal data system (NY, 2010a, p. 3-5). However, the “absolute priority” of securing school district participation was more than a theoretical interference structure that set the stage for enrollment. It ensured that states would enroll as many local school districts as possible into their plan and prove they had done so in their RTTT applications.

Further, the Race to the Top partnerships between participating school districts and their state education department were more than informal collaboration agreements. As mandated by the Race to the Top competition, they were formal, binding contracts sealed with a “Memoranda of Understanding”, or MOU (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19528). This memoranda was intended to be guided by attorneys for the Department of Education in each state and provided states with recourse should participating school districts stop complying with their agreements or otherwise fail to perform as agreed (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19527). Hence, once a school district entered a binding partnership with the state, they faced consequences for changing course. Race to the Top points awarded to state applications were aligned with the strength of these MOUs, such as the terms and conditions outlined in the agreements, the implementation expectations for participating school districts, and the variety of stakeholders within the district
that would agree to sign and comply with the state’s plan (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19514). The MOUs outlined a scope of work that aligned with the federal Race to the Top rubric rather than a unique, collaborative plan created between the state and individual districts. The federal government recommended:

...signatures from as many as possible of the LEA superintendent (or equivalent), the president of the local school board (or equivalent, if applicable), and the local teachers’ union leader (if applicable) (one signature of which must be from an authorized LEA representative) demonstrating the extent of leadership support within participating LEAs. (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19514).

A sample Memoranda of Understanding created by the federal government ensured not only local participation in state ventures, but also in federal ventures (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19528-19531). School districts who signed this MOU (or one similar to the sample provided) were not only entering into a binding relationship with the state government. Four of six responsibilities for participating school districts tied them directly to both the “State or U.S. Education Department (ED)”, including: attending events hosted or sponsored by either the “State or ED”, uploading grant-funded products or materials to “any website” dictated by “State or ED”, participating in evaluations of the grant conducted by the “State or ED”, and being “responsive to State or ED requests for information” (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19529).

This focus upon local school districts recognizes that the standardization network’s agenda cannot be fully realized, or mobilized, without infiltrating the most localized contexts of practice. During the process of translation, binding agreements between local school districts and departments of education at the state and federal levels move policy compliance beyond the hypothetical context of the interference stage and into the operational context of the enrollment stage. The problems and solutions were solidified via problematization, actors, roles, and
interventions were structured via interference, and here, via enrollment, actors are organized and held to playing their part.

6.2 – Enrolling New York State Schools

In their Race to the Top application, New York State boasts that 85.9% of New York’s school districts agreed to participate in their plan and represent 98.2% “of our students in poverty” (NY, 2010a, p. 8). Further, although the 37 Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) across the state cannot be considered participating school districts, all 37 submitted a Memoranda of Understanding “in an overwhelming show of support and partnership” (NY, 2010a, p. 8). LEA (or, local education agency/school district) commitment, and the importance of it, is further explained in the application:

To ensure the highest level of commitment and support from LEAs that elect to participate in our plan, New York’s MOU clarifies that participating LEAs must commit to implement all of the elements of the State’s reform plan. NYSED instructed LEAs that MOU submissions that include any language insertions, addenda (including any conditions on participation and/or implementation), comments, strikeouts or deletions would not be approved. As a result, by signing New York State’s MOU, participating LEAs are demonstrating strong commitment to our reform agenda and a binding agreement to implement our RTTT plan. (NY, 2010a, p. 26)

In clarifying the impact the Race to the Top grant and initiatives would have for school districts across the State, the New York application specifically indicates the involvement of schools in the City School District of Albany:

While New York’s RTTT reforms will impact all our LEAs, schools, and students, in order to reach the greatest number of high-needs students as quickly as possible our implementation plan prioritizes our five largest city school districts, as well as those LEAs supporting persistently lowest-achieving schools. These districts are Albany,
Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Roosevelt, Syracuse, and Yonkers, which together represent 40.0 percent of the State’s total student population and 65.1 percent of the State’s high-needs students. All seven of these districts are fully participating. (NY, 2010a, p. 26)

According to the application, 70.8% of local public school teacher unions also signed to support the plan. While the signatures of union leaders and school board presidents were encouraged in New York’s Memoranda of Understanding, only the signature of the school superintendent (or authorized school leader) was required to enter a school district into this binding contract with the state and federal departments of education (NY, 2010b, p. A45). New York’s MOU, including the responsibilities expected of participating school districts, replicated the sample MOU provided by the federal government in the Race to the Top application (NY, 2010b, p. A46). For the City School District of Albany, both the superintendent and president of the school board signed the MOU. The president of Albany’s Teacher’s Union did not (NY, 2010b, p. A52).

Over 100 letters of support for New York’s Race to the Top plan from leaders in the field of education, legislature and government, business, and community and cultural organizations were included in the State’s application appendix (NY, 2010b). As examples:

- Richard Iannuzzi, President of the New York State United Teachers Union, stated in his letter of support that “NYSUT’s leadership secured strong support” from local unions across New York State for New York’s Race to the Top application and urged the federal department of education to “fully fund” New York’s plan (NY, 2010b, p. A92-A93).

- Oliver Robinson, President of the New York State Council of School Superintendents, asserted that his organization of superintendents had “long advocated for initiatives consistent with those encompassed in the state’s Race to the Top (RTTT) application and
supporting documents” and specifically outlined hopes for updated learning standards, improved state assessments, an expanded data system, initiatives to enrich teaching and leadership, and “muscular interventions in chronically dysfunctional schools and districts” (NY, 2010b, p. A94).

- Timothy Kremer, Executive Director of the New York State School Boards Association, spoke “on behalf of the nearly 700 member school boards and 5000 local school officials” to express support for New York’s RTTT application and stated that the New York State School Boards Association had “been a leader in promoting the use of value added student assessment to inform teaching and learning” (NY, 2010b, p. A96). In addition, he states that “despite longstanding efforts, the issues of low performance in some schools have been intractable” and expressed support for addressing “ingrained failure” as well as “drastic action” taken to improve these “struggling settings” (NY, 2010b, p. A97).

- Gladys Cruz, Chair of the Staff/Curriculum Development Network, pledged commitment to “work closely with NYSED to bring educators in the field any changes that may be warranted by the implementation of the Race to the Top grant project and four priority areas” (NY, 2010b, p. A102).

- Speaker Sheldon Silver wrote “on behalf of the New York State Assembly” to support New York’s Race to the Top application, stating: “we have recently approved sweeping education reforms, which we also believe will enhance our state’s application for RTTT funding” (NY, 2010b, p. A120).

- Senators Dean Skelos and John Flanagan wrote that in hopes of maximizing “every effort for additional federal support”, “the Senate recently passed important reforms that will strengthen our education system” and specifically cite the raised cap on charter schools and
teacher evaluation system as examples of legislative action which would benefit education in the State (NY, 2010b, p. A124).

- Nancy Zimpher, Chancellor, The State University of New York (SUNY), expressed SUNY’s commitment to “strengthening the education pipeline” through reforms to teacher preparation programs and “the development of data systems to measure student growth and inform instruction” (NY, 2010b, p. A188).

It was not only the individuals who signed these letters that became enrolled in the standardization network by doing so. Their organizations and the letters themselves became network actors which added credence to the State’s application for this federal funding and the policies necessitated across education in New York State to meet the federal requirements of that funding.

The role of New York’s Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in the state’s Race to the Top application not only acts to enroll BOCES, but to further enroll local school districts. As explained in the application:

Each of New York’s 37 BOCES is lead by a District Superintendent who is both the Chief Executive Officer of the local BOCES, and the Commissioner’s representative in the field. This structure is unique within the United States and allows NYSED to have unparalleled statewide reach. The BOCES are linked together through a formal network that includes the Assistant Superintendents of Instruction from each BOCES, instructional administrators from each of our Big 5 city school districts, and NYSED senior staff. These representatives convene and communicate regularly, serving as “connective tissue” across the State. (NY, 2010a, p. 50)

BOCES across New York employed “network teams” to directly support schools with professional development and guidance. Even beyond the grant, those schools were encouraged to use a portion of their funding (more specifically, “Title II” funds) to continue the work of
these network teams in schools and to ensure ongoing implementation of Race to the Top initiatives (NY, 2010a, p. 51). These network teams were intended to become involved in a myriad of work within individual schools:

- “Assist schools in implementing the Common Core standards and aligning instruction to the new standards and curricula.
- Support schools in implementing the State’s comprehensive assessment program and adapting to more rigorous performance-based assessments.
- Support school-based inquiry teams (described in Section C) to analyze student performance data (both quantitative and qualitative) and make adjustments to instructional practices. The inquiry team approach has been well documented as a successful and sustainable development method in New York City, Southern California, and several other places.
- Assist schools in interpreting and using/designing formative assessments closely tied to the curricula.
- Work closely with principals and key faculty leaders to provide school-based and network-level intensive, on-going, real-time coaching and professional development according to the needs of each school.
- Help principals find outside service providers based on the needs of each school’s faculty and students.
- Support Joint Intervention Teams in the evaluation of persistently lowest-achieving schools, as described in Section (E)(2); facilitate professional development to support the implementation of the turnaround plan.”

(NY, 2010a, p. 51-52)
The preceding graphic serves as an enrollment flow chart: the New York State Department of Education, BOCES, school districts, and schools are connected through professional development derived from network data. Outside partners are responsible for developing content, including statewide curricula, instructional practice models, protocols to observe instruction, and professional development to relay initiatives. BOCES and school districts, on the other hand, are tasked with relaying the message – either through providing professional development or monitoring reform implementation, especially in failing schools. Schools implement reforms (NY, 2010a, p. 56). In the RTTT application, New York also suggests introducing “complex data initiatives” in “phases” in order to ensure “decreased frustration and increased stakeholder buy-in” (NY, 2010a, p. 101). Enrollment centered around New York
State’s education “data portal”: regional network teams would focus upon parent participation because, as stated in the application, “parent participation will place natural pressure on teachers and principals to become active and proficient users” (NY, 2010a, p. 126). Therefore, in terms of data initiatives, the New York State Education Department anticipated that such initiatives could cause “frustration”, so they targeted parents first, believing that parent enrollment in this new technology would enroll educators state-wide through “natural pressure” (NY, 2010a, p. 126).

6.3 – Enrolling William S. Hackett Middle School

In the School Improvement Grant application for persistently lowest achieving schools (CSDA, 2011), the following paragraph appears under the bolded title “expectations” to frame the contract each school enters with the state (SEAs) and federal (USED) government upon applying for funds:

Through the SIG program, the USED requires State educational agencies (SEAs) to prioritize funding to local educational agencies (LEAs) with the lowest-achieving schools that have the greatest need and demonstrate the strongest commitment to use the funds to significantly raise the achievement of their students. It is USDE’s expectation that SIG funds are used for the implementation of one of four rigorous school intervention models—turnaround, restart, school closure, and transformation—in each persistently lowest-achieving school. (CSDA, 2011, p. 2)

The School Improvement Grants were, therefore, a set of guidelines set within the context of money which created obligatory passage points for network actors within a persistently lowest achieving school’s community. A contract supported by money for the school is not the only enrollment tool highlighted in the grant application itself, however. Another clear enrollment
tool is professional development. As indicated within the application, “job-imbedded professional development” should align to the interventions found within the grant, occur regularly, require “active engagement” rather than “passive learning” (CSDA, 2011, p. 4). Thus, required professional development would center around plan implementation to standardize practices across the school and ensure that actors played their assigned roles. Additionally, the school’s governing body, the “Building Leadership Team” and related sub-committees, were positioned to implement and monitor interventions. The ELA coach, Math coach, Transformation Officer, and School Improvement Manager, all hired under the grant, are mandated members of the school’s Building Leadership Team, thereby altering the makeup of the team as it were before the acceptance of SIG funds. In fact, all school committees were enrolled under the umbrella of the Building Leadership Team and all committee work was consequently focused upon the implementation of the School Improvement Grant’s interventions. Therefore, engagement in any school committee also acted as network enrollment (CSDA, 2011).

Committee work at William S. Hackett Middle School began in the 2011 school year with a “Subcommittee Presentation” created by outside representatives of the “Capital Area School Development Association”, or CASDA (CASDA, 2011a, p. 1). The first presentation slide (CASDA, 2011a, p. 2) of the “Subcommittee Presentation” is titled “Shared Decision Making” and aligns the purpose of the committee with NYSED Commissioner’s Regulation 100.11 by quoting the purpose of school-based planning as outlined in those regulations: “The purpose of school-based planning and shared decision making shall be to improve the educational performance of all students in the school, regardless of such factors as socioeconomic status, race, sex, language background, or disability” (CASDA, 2011a, p. 2).
A graphic is included to explain the organizational structure of the school’s Building Leadership Team as well as which subcommittees serve in an “advisory capacity” and which serve in a “recommendation capacity”. Subcommittees categorized under “recommendation capacity” are tasked with some decision-making capabilities and the ability to make recommendations to the school’s principal while those with an “advisory capacity” review information and offer their “expert advisement” (CASDA, 2011a p. 3):

As noted, all subcommittees fall under the umbrella of the Building Leadership Team and the orientation further establishes the purpose of this overarching committee as oversight of: “the School Improvement Plan for implementing the JIT recommendations” (CASDA, 2011a, p. 4).
This will be accomplished by “integrating the work of the subcommittees, considering feedback from faculty and staff regarding school community at large, monitoring building progress” and “adjusting the School Improvement Plan to meet student needs” (CASDA, 2011a, p. 4). The orientation presentation also outlines the “composition” of the Building Leadership Team, noting that, as “required by CR 200.11”, one union representative must be on the team along with at least 1-2 parents or community members, 1 administrator, and 2 “pupil services” staff members(CASDA, 2011a, p. 4). The presentation sets a goal for securing representation from every grade level team and every academic content area throughout the school (CASDA, 2011a, p. 4). The purpose of each Hackett subcommittee was presented during this staff orientation:

- Professional Development Subcommittee: “Establish a calendar of all professional development for Hackett MS” (CASDA, 2011a, p. 9)

- Attendance Subcommittee: “To analyze student absence and tardy data for the purpose of establishing school protocols for improving student attendance” (CASDA, 2011a, p. 10)

- School Culture/Climate Subcommittee: “Identify behavior problems and collect data related to behavior”, “Analyze and implement policies driven to reduce student referrals and harmful or dangerous behaviors”, “Manage PBIS events/celebrations” (CASDA, 2011a, p. 11)

- Student Advisory Subcommittee: “Create Agenda for monthly discussion topics and review effectiveness of Student Advisory period” (CASDA, 2011a, p. 12)

- Extended Day Subcommittee: “Coordinate and reorganize the expansion of the Extended day program” (CASDA, 2011a, p. 13)

- Response to Intervention Subcommittee: “Research and review resources and best practices for the development of a secondary RTI plan” (CASDA, 2011a, p. 14)
A meeting note-taking template outlines the roles played by subcommittee members during each meeting, the meeting agenda, and reiterates the subcommittee’s purpose (CASDA, 2011a, p. 5).

Building Leadership Committee and Subcommittee work was maintained through a public “wikispace” (HMS, 2011). The “home” page includes the September 2, 2011 orientation, Hackett’s Joint Intervention Team report, the School Improvement Grant applications, the subcommittee note-taking template, and a “Subcommittee Booster Presentation” dated January 18, 2012. This “booster presentation”, again created by representatives of CASDA, uses the same PowerPoint slides from the original orientation to reiterate the Building Leadership Team committee structure, Building Leadership Team purpose and composition, and again present the note-taking template (CASDA, 2012, p. 1-4). The remainder of the presentation begins with “taking our temperature”, a slide devoted to “monitoring the progress of the school improvement plan” (CASDA, 2012, p. 5). Another template is presented during this “booster meeting” which is intended to align the School Improvement Grant “required actions” with the work of the Building Leadership Team and Subcommittees (CASDA, 2012, p. 6-7). A slide also defines “evidence” and requires “artifacts of the work” to “prove it” (CASDA, 2012, p. 8). A series of deadlines and “next steps” dictate when evidence should be submitted, when the overarching Building Leadership Team members will review that evidence, and when they will provide feedback and scores of subcommittee work using a “Progress Monitoring Tool” (CASDA, 2012, p. 8).

The Building Leadership Team was employed as an enrollment tool which effectively streamlined the work of all school committees and enrolled staff to align with Hackett’s school intervention plan. This was done through organizational structure, the assignment and limitations of power afforded to each committee, and the alignment of purpose with both
Commissioner’s Regulations and the SIG’s “required action” steps. This was also done through structured notes which dictated the discussion possible at subcommittee meetings and required specifically defined evidence to support the progress of each subcommittee and, thus, the progress of the school in implementing prescribed interventions. Additionally, enrollment was accomplished through peer supervision. Members of the overarching Building Leadership Team were tasked with evaluating, even scoring, the work of their peers who had enrolled in subcommittees.

The effectiveness of these enrollment tactics in aligning the work of Hackett middle school committees (which were comprised of faculty and staff from all grade levels and content areas along with the school’s administration and union) with prescribed interventions can be seen in the notes and documents uploaded to the “wikispace” by Hackett subcommittee members. As examples, work notes include “review SIG’s highlights”, “reviewed the data requested by the JIT”, “language of school improvement grant reviewed”, “check…on what is needed…in regards to the Memorandum of Understanding”, and “work on action plan from SIG”:

- School Climate and Culture Subcommittee notes from 9/13/11 state: “Review SIG’s highlights and what the committee’s purpose is. Much of the meeting was spend looking at the above and discussing purpose.” (HMS School Climate & Culture Subcommittee, 2011)
- Extended Day Subcommittee notes from 10/14/11 state: “Committee reviewed the data requested by the JIT and Chris will complete the form with information shared and discussed at meeting.” (HMS Extended Day Subcommittee, 2011a)
- Extended Day Subcommittee notes from 12/2/11 state: “Language of school improvement grant reviewed; requires lengthening school day, providing activities for students, a
partnership with an outside agency was required” (HMS Extended Day Subcommittee, 2011b)

- Extended Day Subcommittee notes from 5/1/12 state: “Check with Mr. Paolino on what is needed from Extended Day in regards to the Memorandum of Understanding” (HMS Extended Day Subcommittee, 2012)

- Professional Development Subcommittee notes from 10/24/11 state a discussion topic as: “Work on action plan from SIG” (HMS Professional Development Subcommittee, 2011)

According to their September 12, 2011 notes, The Building Leadership Team engaged in a “SIG Scavenger Hunt” facilitated by a representative from CASDA (HMS BLT, 2011). This “scavenger hunt” document began with the following statement: “1. It is USDE’s expectation that SIG funds are used for the implementation of one of four rigorous school intervention models—turnaround, restart, school closure, and transformation—in each persistently lowest-achieving school” (CASDA, 2011b). The scavenger hunt required Building Leadership Team members to answer a number of questions after reading specific pages of the School Improvement Grant application. These questions were specifically related to the school’s intervention model, including goals raising standardized test passing rates, improving teacher attendance, and addressing low expectations. The activity also asked participants to describe “the most valuable activity” listed in the grant application (CASDA, 2011b).
Evidence of the time and effort spent by committee members on reviewing documents such as the Joint Intervention Team report, School Improvement Grant application, and Commissioner’s Regulations, demonstrating understanding of those documents, and proving that committee work supported the tenants of those documents is indicative of enrollment in the process of translation. Enrollment, as seen through the work of Hackett’s committees, acts to solidify purpose, organize actors into specific roles, focus actors and activities upon network goals, and hold actors accountable for meeting the network’s agenda.

Even without joining a school committee, actors at Hackett Middle School were enrolled through school-wide changes required by the grant and marshaled by those committees as well as
by changes to collective bargaining agreements which specifically enabled intervention within Albany’s persistently lowest achieving schools. While representatives of the Albany Teachers’ Union had not signed New York’s Race to the Top Memoranda of Understanding (NY, 2010b, p. A52), a letter signed by the union president and district superintendent is included in the School Improvement Grant application for the district’s failing schools (CSDA, 2011, Appendix D1). As stated in the letter, “as a condition for approval” of the School Improvement Grant, bargaining contracts for educators assigned to schools receiving those funds would be revised (CSDA, 2011, Appendix D1). In 2012, the President of the Albany Teachers’ Union and City School District of Albany Superintendent signed an agreement which amended the teacher evaluation process for educators within the district’s persistently lowest achieving schools, with the caveat that “this memorandum shall not be construed as to modify any agreements or contract language in sites other than those designated as PLA schools” (APSTA & CSDA, 2012). Such an agreement allowed differential treatment of teachers in Albany’s failing schools and removed their collective bargaining contracts as an obstacle to both government intervention and actor enrollment. The revision of collective bargaining agreements is a striking moment of enrollment within persistently lowest achieving schools. With the union’s permission and without union protections, teachers at Hackett Middle School would either enroll or risk losing their jobs; that is, they would either function as the network dictated or they would be dismissed from it.

6.4 – Enrollment: Organizing Standardization Network Actors

There are numerous similarities between the planning phase of interference and the action phase of enrollment because interference builds the structure actors must conform with once they
are enrolled into the standardization network. In moments of interference, for example, the federal government demanded that states clear the way, legislatively or otherwise, for reform initiatives (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19497) and New York State legislation put structures into place to undermine union contracts (NY, 2010a, p. 262). In a moment of enrollment, the Albany Teachers’ Union collective bargaining agreement was amended (APSTA & CSDA, 2012). As is the case during interference, boxes, grids, charts, and templates guide and restrict actor behavior. Previously, a “collaboration and consultation” document served to collect actor signatures or evidence of their participation in network activities but did not serve as evidence of their agreement with those activities (CSDA, 2011, Appendix C). Here, in enrollment, a Memoranda of Understanding forges a legal, binding agreement between federal, state, and local education agencies (NY, 2010b, p. 46; Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19514). During interference, the City School District of Albany School Improvement Grant proposal aligned Hackett’s school-based committees with a school intervention plan (CSDA, 2011). During enrollment, actors were linked up via those committees for a specified network purposes (CSDA, 2011a, p. 9-14). A progression of increasingly restrictive practices bridge moments of interference and enrollment. Once interference plans are operationalized, they produce results.

Theoretically, the standardization network intends to improve student performance. In 2001, the purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) included equal opportunities for all students to “obtain a high quality education” based upon “challenging State academic standards”, and pass state assessments aligned with those standards (NCLB, 2001, SEC. 1001). In 2009, the goal of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was to “improve student achievement through school improvement and reform” (Investing in Innovation, 2009, p. 52215). In 2010, the Race to the Top competition was built upon the ARRA to “reward states
that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform” for the purpose of “improvement in student outcomes”, “gains in student achievement” and “closing the achievement gap” (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, p. 19496). Repeatedly, the goal of improving student performance is followed with the objective to implement education reforms. Upon close inspection, standardization itself is the goal of the standardization network. Improved student performance is a hypothetical byproduct.

The ARRA distilled the objectives of NCLB into four “priorities”: educator evaluations, data systems, standards and assessments, and intervening in low performing schools (Investing in Innovation, 2009, p. 52215). Exact ways to implement these four priorities were detailed in both the ARRA and in the Race to the Top competition (ARRA, 2009; Race to the Top Fund, 2010). And, these four priorities structured state RTTT applications as well as the School Improvement Grant intervention plans for failing schools (CSDA, 2011; NY, 2010a; Race to the Top Fund, 2010). In practice, implementing these four priorities – new educator evaluations, standards and assessments, data systems, and interventions for failing schools – was the standardization network’s priority. Standardization (or, as defined in this study, aligning practice to conform to standards) is the result. However, aligning practice to conform to standards does not mean aligning practice to conform to the Common Core Standards or any other set of academic standards. The four priorities of the network set the standards for practice alignment and across contexts, practice aligned to conform to them. This is evidenced by New York State’s efforts to carefully align all elements of both state legislation and their state education practices with the standardization network’s four priorities (NY, 2010a). This is clear in the City School District of Albany’s efforts to align their plan for William S. Hackett Middle School with these priorities (CSDA, 2011). This is also clear at a localized level of practice as actors at Hackett Middle
School spent their time reading, repeating, and ensuring compliance with their School Improvement Grant intervention plan (CASDA, 2011b; HMS BLT, 2011; HMS Extended Day Subcommittee, 2011b; HMS Professional Development Subcommittee, 2011b; HMS School Climate & Culture Subcommittee, 2011), providing evidence of their work’s alignment to the plan (CASDA, 2012, p. 8), and monitoring the work of other actors to ensure alignment with the plan (CASDA, 2012, p. 8). In moments of enrollment, it becomes clear that standardization itself is the standardization network’s goal and only guaranteed result. This is similarly echoed in the major findings of previous Actor Network Theory research which demonstrate that policy networks focus practice upon compliance rather than the individuals those policies were supposed to benefit (Hamilton, 2009; Koyama, 2010).

As more actors are drawn into a network through enrollment, the truths solidified in moments of problematization and structures built during moments of interference ensure actors will fall in line and work toward furthering the network’s agenda (Callon, 1986). Some of the actors drawn into the network are new while others existed within the network previously but are reorganized into roles that better serve, extend, and strengthen the network (Callon, 1986). The letters written by a variety of leaders in support of New York’s RTTT plan, for example, represent actors new to the network and those with reimagined purposes within the network (NY, 2010b, p. A92-A188). All schools existed in the network. The lowest performing 5% of schools, for example, existed as persistently lowest achieving and the schools that had no failure label existed as institutions that were, at the very least, meeting expectations (NYSED, 2010a; USDOE, 2009). Traditionally, failure labels were given to schools in impoverished communities, which made them the focus of government intervention and placed them under the most accountability pressure (NYSED, 2010a; NYSED, 2012c; USDOE, 2013a). Through the
Race to the Top competition, new standards, assessments, data systems, and educator evaluations became a reality for all schools and meant that all educators would receive a label indicating their effectiveness ranking for the first time (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, 19500-19504). That said, intervening in schools that failed to meet expectations remained a network priority and the formal consequences of accountability were reserved for schools deemed failing as well as educators deemed ineffective (Race to the Top Fund, 2010, 19500-19504). However, in New York, plans to make tests “more rigorous” meant that more schools could land in the crosshairs of failure. Through enrollment, therefore, it was possible for previously a successful school to be reassigned to the role of a failing school. In fact, New York State predicted that passing rates on state assessments would drop due to “more rigorous standards and cut points for State assessments” (NY, 2010a, p. 32). Consequently, the state focused upon student growth rather than student achievement in their application to explain how Race to the Top funds would foster improvement by way of student “gains” (NY, 2010a, p. 32). Standards-based reform efforts were targeted toward “priority subgroups” or minority, economically disadvantaged, English language learner, and special education students and, therefore, the state predicted students in those subgroups would show more improvement on state tests than their white, Asian, general education, non-economically disadvantaged peers (NY, 2010a, p. 29-39). According to New York’s plan, students in “priority subgroups will rise on a faster trajectory” to “close the achievement gap” (NY, 2010a, p. 31-33). Amplifying standards-based interventions ignores research which asserts that such reforms have not resulted in academic success, even as based upon standardized exams, in the past (Dragoset et al., 2016). However, New York’s approach was in alignment with the standardization network and they justify their predictions as data-informed targets “we thought were reasonable” and “could be attributed to our RTTT strategy”
Again, as seen across the network, standardization was the goal; student “gains” were a hypothetical byproduct (NY, 2010a, p. 29-33). Regardless, New York’s plan simultaneously continued to define school failure by state test proficiency and predicted higher rates of failure on state exams overall (NY, 2010a, p. 32). Further, New York believed the “achievement gap” would close because the results of some subgroups would essentially remain stagnant while others showed gains (NY, 2010a, p. 29-39). Hence, New York’s plan simultaneously linked student growth to every educator’s evaluation but did not envision similar growth for every student.
CHAPTER 7

DATA ANALYSIS: STANDARDIZATION THROUGH MOBILIZATION

7.1 – Mobilizing American Schools

“It’s fascinating to me that some of the pushback is coming from, sort of, white suburban moms who — all of a sudden — their child isn’t as brilliant as they thought they were and their school isn’t quite as good as they thought they were, and that’s pretty scary. You’ve bet your house and where you live and everything on, ‘My child’s going to be prepared.’ That can be a punch in the gut.”

– US Education Secretary Arne Duncan (Richmond, VA – November 15, 2013)

During a meeting of the Council of Chief State Schools Officers Organization, US Education Secretary Arne Duncan addressed what had by then, in November of 2013, become a growing protest against “Common Core” across the nation by stating that “white suburban moms” were upset because “all of a sudden” new test results revealed that their children were not “as brilliant” and schools not “as good” as they had previously believed (Strauss, 2013).

Two days later, Duncan expressed his “regret” for “clumsy phrasing” and attempted to further explain his stance in a post to the U.S. Department of Education’s official blog (Duncan, 2013).

In his post, titled “High Standards for All Schools and Students, Everywhere”, Duncan wrote:

“I want to encourage a difficult conversation and challenge the underlying assumption that when we talk about the need to improve our nation’s schools, we are talking only about poor minority students in inner cities. This is simply not true.” (Duncan, 2013)

He further claimed that research supports the need for improvement in “every demographic group” and stated “scores have dropped as a result of a more realistic assessment of students’ knowledge and skills” (Duncan, 2013). Duncan asserted that “we’ve been hiding the educational reality”:
“I know no one enjoys hearing tough news from school, but we need the truth – and we need to act on it. The truth is we should be frustrated that as students, parents, and citizens, we’ve been hiding the educational reality, particularly as other countries are rapidly passing us by in preparing their students for today and tomorrow’s economy.” (Duncan, 2013)

Duncan’s post was a response to the failed mobilization of the standardization network at the national level as demonstrated by protests against “Common Core” which began after the release of dismal student performance results on “Common Core” assessments (Strauss, 2013). The post is more than a response to those protests, however. When viewed through the Actor Network lens, Duncan refers to the “truth” of our “educational reality” as a way to reinforce the problematization of a lackluster education system beyond our American “inner-cities”. In doing so, both his original comments about “white suburban moms” and his subsequent apology attempt reveal one reason the standardization network was not mobilized across all of America: education had not been problematized across all of America. As Duncan points out, outside of “inner cities”, the notion of schools as failures was likely “sudden” and “news” in some communities. If standardization via government intervention had been deemed acceptable for some school communities, there were warnings even prior to 2013 that it would not be welcome in all school communities across the United States.

For example, during a 2012 education forum with New York State Education Commissioner John King, Dr. Al Harper, Superintendent of Schools in Elmont, Long Island promoted differential treatment among schools and compared the results of his district to a neighboring one:

We're graduating 97% of our children. Ninety percent of our children are reaching their goals. Very closely here - less than 2, 3 miles to the Queens boarder - about 47%. So, we're doing the job well. We should be recognized
for it. We should have a pass for some of the things that are going on and that's why we're here. (NY Senate Republicans, 2012)

Yet, according to the New York State assessment data released on August 7, 2013, over 60% of students in Suffolk and Nassau counties (where the Elmont district is located) did not pass the exams; while the year before, that number was approximately 30% (Gralla, 2013). Over the course of just one year, such an increase in failing students within any geographic location should be a sobering occurrence for all educators and one which prompts a reflection upon the practices across the field of education as applied to all schools.

If anyone thought their neighborhood school was safe from government intervention because their school was “doing the job well” and would never experience sufficient student failures to qualify for a failure designation, they were mistaken. The dramatic, unprecedented decreases in student proficiency within one school year ignited outrage in 2013 and calls to investigate assessment practices (MertMelfa, 2013a, 2013b; Gralla, 2013). However, as previous research demonstrates, assessment manipulation was not a new concept (Blakeslee, 2013; Hursh, 2013). Under manipulative, politically driven conditions, it is plausible that successful schools had been just as mislead as those on the other end of the accountability spectrum. Regardless, the same assessments used to define a school’s failure also defined a history of success for many schools. In all cases, “truths” about the quality of education within a school, for better or worse, were supported by little more than standardized results. It is when significant increases in the number of failing students impacted schools without a previous history of failure that the validity of standardized measures were called into question. The problematization for previously successful schools was not only sudden, but in direct contrast to the standardization network’s previous assertions and certainly did not reflect the “truths” of those communities. Without successful problematization, interventions had no foundation. As a result, actors within school
communities previously deemed successful on the very same measures contested the new failure roles they were assigned during mobilization and could not be mobilized.

By 2014, starting with Indiana, states began withdrawing from their Common Core consortiums and rebranding their own set of standards in response to Common Core backlash (Common Core Task Force, 2015, p. 14). Another indicator of failed mobilization at the national level is the 2015 passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act and the language within that act (ESSA, 2015). Section 8526A, “Prohibition Against Federal Mandates, Direction, or Control” states:

(a) IN GENERAL.—No officer or employee of the Federal Government shall, through grants, contracts, or other cooperative agreements, mandate, direct, or control a State, local educational agency, or school’s specific instructional content, academic standards and assessments, curricula, or program of instruction developed and implemented to meet the requirements of this Act (including any requirement, direction, or mandate to adopt the Common Core State Standards developed under the Common Core State Standards Initiative, any other academic standards common to a significant number of States, or any assessment, instructional content, or curriculum aligned to such standards), nor shall anything in this Act be construed to authorize such officer or employee to do so. (ESSA, 2015, SEC. 8526A)

Such stated limitations of federal influence upon state education operations stand in stark contrast to the federal guidelines which continue to lawfully apply to “local education agencies” in need of improvement, however. Section 1003, “School Improvement”, removes federal “School Improvement Grants” but provides detailed directives to states regarding how to allocate school improvement funds to local school districts. The federal law details that local school
districts must continue to apply for funds for failing schools from each state, dictates the acceptable contents of such applications, and continues to dictate the parameters of improvement plans and the monitoring of those plans. In turn, the state education departments were mandated to continue reporting information about the schools receiving improvement funds and the interventions implemented with those funds to the federal education department. Further, section 1005, “State Plans”, demonstrates that the federal government would continue to review and grant approval of state education plans in the name of Title 1 funding. The federal Education Secretary is given considerable power in ensuring the state’s alignment with federal law and in approving the state’s plan before providing Title 1 money:

(I) the Secretary—

‘‘(aa) determines how the State plan fails to meet the requirements of this section;
‘‘(bb) immediately provides to the State, in writing, notice of such determination, and the supporting information and rationale to substantiate such determination;
‘‘(cc) offers the State an opportunity to revise and resubmit its State plan, and provides the State—

‘‘(AA) technical assistance to assist the State in meeting the requirements of this section;

‘‘(BB) in writing, all peer-review comments, suggestions, recommendations, or concerns relating to its State plan; and

‘‘(CC) a hearing, unless the State declines the opportunity for such hearing

(ESSA, 2015, SEC. 1005)

Hence, through the Every Student Succeeds Act, the federal government retained the ability to withhold education funding until each state proved their alignment with federal initiatives (ESSA, 2015, SEC. 1005). Once approved, changes to the original state plan, such as the adoption of different standards, assessments, or professional evaluation systems necessitated a plan amendment, which was also subject to approval (ESSA, 2015, SEC. 1005).
In March of 2017, United States Education Secretary Betsy DeVos revealed an “updated template for consolidated state plans” and stated:

My philosophy is simple: I trust parents, I trust teachers, and I trust local school leaders to do what’s right for the children they serve. ESSA was passed with broad bipartisan support to move power away from Washington, D.C., and into the hands of those who are closest to serving our nation's students. (USDOE, 2017a)

This consolidated template requires states to describe how their plans meet the requirements of federal education law as they relate to “challenging standards”, assessments, accountability, school improvement, goals and indicators of success, identification of and intervention in failing schools, instructional practices, teacher preparation, data collection and use, and the education of students identified within specific subgroups (USDOE, 2017b).

While ESSA (2015) prohibits the federal government from making specific demands of the states, such as the demand that all states adopt the Common Core Standards, the law itself requires that states adopt “challenging standards” and provides guidelines to define them (ESSA, 2015, SEC. 8526A). This is no different from mandates relayed through the Race to the Top competition, which did not contain the words “Common Core” but did require states to adopt standards and outlined how states should meet that expectation (Race to the Top Funds, 2010, p. 19498). Political responses to Common Core protests acted to dismiss the words “Common Core” from the standardization network but the network remained intact. Professors Mary Battenfeld and Felicity Crawford of Wheelock College asserted in a U.S. News commentary that "the new law flies against history’s lesson that federal oversight is a good thing for vulnerable children":

The provisions of this 1,061-page bill (about 400 more than NCLB) do not vary radically from the “accountability through testing” mandates that have marked federal education policy for the last 14 years. The main difference is that the ESSA
hands the educational accountability ball from the federal government to the states. (Battenfeld & Crawford, 2015)

Further, they predicted that “ESSA will likely do little to disrupt the NCLB pattern of ‘punishing’ vulnerable children and the ‘low performance’ of the schools they attend” and will continue “disproportionally penalizing vulnerable students and their schools” (Battenfeld & Crawford, 2015).

7.2 – Mobilizing New York State Schools

New York State exam results were released on August 7, 2013 and, as predicted, scores dropped by an average of 25% state-wide. In ELA, 31.1% of students were deemed proficient, a drop from the 55.1% deemed proficient the year before (Riede, 2013). These steep decreases hit schools across the state while various officials tried to calm public frustration over the number of failing students. Timothy Kremer, the executive director of the New York State School Boards Association who had previously penned a letter in support of New York’s Race to the Top plan (NY, 2010b, p. A96-A97) was quoted in a news report as saying: "It is important to recognize that student achievement did not go down. Instead, standards went up" (Riede, 2013).

On October 10, 2013, New York State Education Commissioner John King held the first of five scheduled public education forums in conjunction with the statewide Parent and Teacher Association (PTA). There, Regent Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr. stated that the intended purpose of the forum was "to hear from people on the ground" regarding the execution of state reforms. He stated that he was "acutely aware that good ideas live and die based on execution" (MertMelfa, 2013a). However, after a presentation lasting beyond an hour and a half, the audience was given approximately 20 minutes to speak and each speaker was granted a timed two minutes. John King attempted to respond to the initial speakers, but individuals from the audience yelled, "It's
our turn to be heard!” and "You had your turn!". When he could not foster audience cooperation, King said, "We're not going to go on until I speak" (MertMelfa, 2013a). In the wake of this event, King announced that he was suspending all further PTA-sponsored forums, claiming "special interests" had monopolized the conversation and "dialogue has been denied" (Gralla, 2013). Carl Korn, spokesman for the New York State United Teachers, responded by noting that "parents and teachers are not special interests", and further:

The fact that thousands of parents have shown up about testing in different corners of the state suggests a great deal of frustration that testing has come in front of instruction and the focus, the parents and teachers agree, should be on teaching and learning, not testing. (Gralla, 2013)

These forums were reformatted as "town hall" meetings, the first of which was held within the City School District of Albany, the home to William S. Hackett Middle School, on October 24, 2013 (MertMelfa, 2013b). One Albany teacher stated that he thought of himself as not only a "public school employee", but as a "public school advocate" and told Commissioner John King that his "policies and practices have created conditions that have made the best decision for my children the decision to pull them from public education before it has an adverse effect on them, too" (MertMelfa, 2013b). Another Albany teacher had the following to share:

I can tell you this obsession with testing is unhealthy and it's hurting our children. In my classroom, tests always start out the same way: excited students, eager to show me how much they've learned, that they were paying attention to me, that they want to please me. But, as the test progresses and some of them begin to struggle, the energy fades, excitement turns to disappointment, heartache, and finally anger. What I am saying to you today is that teachers and students are not failing. It's the policy of the one size fits all and the nonstop testing that should be labeled ineffective. (MertMelfa, 2013b)
Under pressure from their constituents, New York politicians ultimately distanced themselves from Common Core. Speaker Sheldon Silver, who had provided a letter of support for New York’s Race to the Top application in 2010 (NY, 2010b, p. A120), called for a halt to the implementation of Common Core by 2014 and Senator Dean Skelos, who had also penned a letter in support of the State’s application (NY, 2010b, p. A124), added that the Senate would take action if the Regents declined to do so: “They should do a moratorium or we will then do what we have to do legislatively” (Dewitt, 2014). In his 2016 Senate campaign, Skelos also accused his opponent of “cozying up” to an organization which supported Common Core (Brodsky, 2016). By 2013, Senator John Flanagan, another supporter of the State’s RTTT application, was holding hearings to field complaints about Common Core as the Chair of the New York State Senate Education Committee (Dewitt, 2013; SenatorFlanagan, 2013). After these hearings, he created suggestions for revising the implementation of Common Core across the state, many of which were later echoed by the recommendations of Governor Cuomo’s “Common Core Task Force” in December of 2015 (Common Core Task Force, 2015; Dewitt, 2013). Of those task force recommendations, Flanagan said, “These reforms will build on what we have already done to ease the anxiety that exists in many classrooms across the state while reinforcing the importance of high standards” (NY, 2015). In 2015, Flanagan spoke to the role of legislative action in directing State education, and stated that such work should be left to the State Education Department and Board of Regents. Legislative interventions were “unnecessary”, he said, and should happen rarely, only as needed (Reisman, 2015). This, after his joint 2010 letter with Dean Skelos (NY, 2010b, A124) not only supported the State’s RTTT application and impending policies, but also credited legislative action with making such reforms possible (NY, 2010b, p. A124). Flanagan drew fire from constituents again in 2017 for writing a
letter in support of Betsy DeVos, a charter school advocate and President Donald Trump’s pick for Education Secretary with one teacher portraying the Senator as an opportunist: “John Flanagan has shown time and again that he will put his own needs and wants before the families and children of New York State” (Franchi, 2017).

Richard Iannuzzi penned a letter of support for the state’s RTTT application as President of the New York State United Teachers Union (NY, 2010b, p. A92-A93) and, in 2013, he penned another letter – one that ran as an ad relaying teachers’ concerns over standardized tests and encouraged parents to sign a petition asking the New York State Department of Education to “get testing right” (Iannuzzi, 2013). By February of 2014, however, Iannuzzi was voted out of the union’s top spot after criticism that he was not doing enough to protest the State’s education policies. On the same Saturday that the New York State United Teacher’s Union voted for Iannuzzi’s ouster in voting for Karen Magee to be their first female leader, they also leveraged a “no confidence” vote against State Education Commissioner John King (Stanforth, 2014).

Others who wrote letters in support of New York’s Race to the Top plan, such as Tim Kremer, Executive Director of the New York State School Boards Association (NY, 2010b, A92-A93) and Nancy Zimpher, Chancellor of the State University of New York (NY, 2010b, A188), became members of Governor Cuomo’s “Common Core Task Force” (Common Core Task Force, 2015).

In a report of their findings and recommendations to Governor Cuomo, New York’s Common Core Task Force details an “exhaustive” review of the Common Core Standards, curriculum, and aligned assessments as well as collaboration with stakeholders across the field of education and consideration of public feedback (Common Core Task Force, 2015, p. 7). What they discovered, according to their report, was a problem with “roll-out” and implementation:
After careful review, the Task Force affirms that New York must have rigorous, high quality education standards to improve the education of all of our students and hold our schools and districts accountable for students’ success. However, it is well-established that there were significant issues with the roll-out and implementation of the Common Core Standards causing parents, educators, and other stakeholders to lose trust in the system. (Common Core Task Force, 2015, p. 7)

Therefore, the 21 recommendations of the Common Core Task Force focus on revising, amending, or enriching current practices but do not eradicate any existing practices. The recommendations revolve around three major themes: establishing new high quality standards, developing better curriculum guidance and resources, and significantly reducing testing time and preparation (Common Core Task Force, 2015, p. 9-10). In other words, New York’s Common Core Task Force suggested refining what had already been done. They reinforced the need for standardized assessments and the role of accountability as tied to those assessments but recommended a temporary halt on “consequences”:

Given the amount of work needed to get the new system right, the Task Force recommends that until the transition to a new system is complete, i.e. New York State-specific standards are fully developed along with corresponding curriculum and tests, State-administered standardized ELA and Mathematics assessments for grades three through eight aligned to the Common Core or updated standards shall not have consequences for individual students or teachers. Further, any growth model based on these Common Core tests or other state assessments shall not have consequences and shall only be used on an advisory basis for teachers. The transition phase shall last until the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

(Common Core Task Force, 2015, p. 36)

Noticeably, the task force’s moratorium applied to measures of student growth which were tied directly to educator evaluations. This recommendation did not apply to whole schools and, therefore, did not delay the consequences of failure labeling for entire school communities based
upon revised assessments, did not provide a caveat for failing schools to allow for a transition to new standards, or insist that assessments were used only on an advisory basis within those schools. In fact, in a December of 2017 press release, New York State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia provided an update on the status of “priority” (previously known as the “persistently lowest achieving” designation) schools (NYSED, 2017). That press release explains the continued role of assessments in failure labeling and the continued high-stakes nature of the state’s assessments for failing schools:

To be eligible for removal from Priority School status, a school must make the required progress on 2015-16 and 2016-17 school year results, meet participation rate requirements for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics for all subgroups for which the school was accountable in both of these school years, and be above the threshold for Priority School identification. (NYSED, 2017)

Therefore, while the New York Common Core Task Force stopped student growth from impacting educator evaluations, it continued to factor into failure designations. State test participation rate requirements ensured that opting out of the exams could not be a protest strategy taken up by the communities of failing schools because doing so would simply hold their spot on a failure list.

In his 2015 “Opportunity Agenda”, Governor Andrew Cuomo addresses Common Core implementation at the state level saying that it is “not easy, it has meant big change for our schools” but asserts his commitment to “protecting students during the transition” (Cuomo, 2015, p. 222). Toward that end, he proposed limiting the time spent on standardized tests, test preparation, and new legislation to ensure that “for the next five years, results from new tests will not appear on students’ official transcripts or permanent records” (Cuomo, 2015, p. 222). At the
same time, he gave validity to standardized testing as a measure of student, teacher, and school success as he reinforced his belief in state-wide educator evaluation:

Last year, less than one percent of teachers in New York State were rated ineffective; but state test results show that statewide only 35.8 percent of our students in grades 3rd through 8th grades were proficient in math and 31.4 percent were proficient in English Language Arts. We must ask ourselves: how can so many of our students be failing if our teachers are succeeding? It is time to put a real, accurate, and fair teacher evaluation system in place that allows us to differentiate among teachers. (Cuomo, 2015, p. 228)

Further, the Governor asserts that local measures used in teacher evaluation, such as classroom observations, “inflates scores and leads to unnecessary testing” and calls for “the teacher evaluation system to be simple and standardized” (Cuomo, 2015, p. 229).

Cuomo’s 2015 Opportunity Agenda takes particular aim at New York’s 178 priority schools, claiming “seventy-seven of these schools have been failing for nearly a decade and 27 have been in the lowest level of accountability status for nearly a decade” (Cuomo, 2015, p. 242-243). He suggested harsher consequences for failing schools, including the appointment of a receiver to such schools to “overhaul curriculum, improve professional development and replace unqualified teachers and administrators…” (Cuomo, 2015, p. 245).

While some early supporters of New York State’s education reform plans distanced themselves from those policies by joining a growing chorus against Common Core or supporting evaluation moratoriums, there was no moratorium for failing schools (Common Core Task Force, 2015; Cuomo, 2015; NYSED, 2017). There, the standardization network raged on. The 2015 Opportunity Agenda, which included harsher consequences for failing schools, was tied to the New York State budget and ultimately passed (STCaucus Members, 2015). Some Assemblymen and Assemblywomen voted in the affirmative, effectually placing failing schools
within their districts under increased government pressure, but did so “reluctantly” or with “a heavy heart” (STCaucus Members, 2015). Others, such as Assemblyman Kieran Lalor of Dutchess County voted against the legislation. His comments explaining his vote reveal the acceptance of standardization within “struggling” schools while questioning the “punishment” of “good” schools: “We’re using a one size fits all approach. I represent some very good schools. Our teachers are good. Our schools are good. And, they’re being punished for some schools that are struggling around the state” (STCaucus Members, 2015). School communities across both America and New York State were not mobilized to accept the standardization of their schools as outlined by government policies. However, this does not demonstrate the complete failure of the standardization network to mobilize. In fact, it was mobilized within “struggling”, “failing” schools, such as Hackett Middle School.

7.3 – Mobilizing William S. Hackett Middle School

A 2015 report released by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo’s office titled “The State of New York’s Failing Schools” asserts that “the statistics and facts contained in this report and its Appendix expose a public education system badly in need of change” (NYS, 2015, p. 9). The report highlights 178 New York Schools deemed failing, 77 of which, including William S. Hackett Middle School, were considered failures for more than a decade (NYS, 2015, p. 17). That same year, the New York State Education Department identified twenty schools as “persistently struggling” and Hackett was designated as one of those “persistently struggling” schools (NYSED, 2015). This went beyond the State’s “priority” label, which was formerly known as the “persistently lowest achieving” label. This was a new accountability designation which called for further state intervention and the implementation of school receivership
The “persistently struggling” label was reserved for schools who, like Hackett, had existed in the state’s most severe accountability status (first called a “persistently lowest achieving” school and then a “priority” school) since 2006 (NYSED, 2015). With the identification of “persistently struggling” schools, New York State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia announced, “in these schools, whole generations of students have been left behind” and called on school superintendents to “act on conditions that have persisted for too long in these schools” (NYSED, 2015). Elia also explained that newly identified “persistently struggling schools”, including Hackett, would receive additional funds for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years to support school reform and were subject to April, 2015 State legislation regarding school receivership. Under that legislation, the district superintendent acts as the school’s receiver for one year and, in that year, must demonstrate “demonstrable improvement on annual goals established by the Commissioner, including student performance”. If the Commissioner’s expectations were not met in that time, the school board would need to appoint an independent receiver for the school (NYSED, 2015).

As reminiscent of the public release of Hackett’s “Joint Intervention Team” report four years before, the state also required public notice and public hearings to follow Hackett’s new designation as “persistently struggling” (CSDA, 2015, p. 10-11). Notice of those hearings was posted on the school website, advertised through local newspapers, and a letter from the Superintendent to the community was communicated in multiple languages (CSDA, 2015). In that letter, the Superintendent explained: “Hackett was identified because its overall student performance on state tests that measure English and math skills significantly lagged behind other schools in the state for more than 10 years” (CSDA, 2015, p. 11). She stated her intention to work with the school’s principal to “meet and exceed expectations and best practices outlined in
the new law” and outlines “opportunities” the law affords, including: “becoming a community school providing additional student and family services, extending the school day or year, changes to curriculum” and “re-staffing” (CSDA, 2015, p. 11). “If the school does not show sufficient improvement in one year,” the Superintendent warned, “the state will require our Board of Education to appoint a state-approved outside receiver, removing our ability to control future decisions about Hackett.” (CSDA, 2015, p. 11)

However, in February of 2016, a NYSED press release claimed that nine of the original twenty “persistently struggling” schools had been removed from the “persistently struggling” list while also stating that those nine schools would continue to receive the grant funding offered to them under their “persistently struggling status” (NYSED, 2016a). According to the State Education Department, Hackett Middle School, which had started the 2015-2016 school year as a “persistently struggling” school, had been upgraded to the less severe “focus schools” list in the middle of that same school year (NYSED, 2016b). In a possibly unprecedented demonstration of the subjective nature of school failure labeling, the New York State Education Department explained that the methodology behind identifying school failures had changed (Schwartz, 2015). The State Education Department preliminarily identified schools for the 2015-2016 school year and then modified this identification process as well as the methodology used to determine failure labels via a federal government waiver (Schwartz, 2015). Despite Hackett’s removal from the failure lists due to this reassessment, the State Education Department, via spokeswoman Emily DeSantis, stated that Hackett would continue to receive improvement funds as well as “oversight and support” (Masters & Seiler, 2016). However, the New York State Budget Division, via spokesman Morris Peters, argued: “...when the State Education Department unilaterally removed these schools from the program during the very first year, they became
ineligible for continued funding under the law. We've consistently said we prefer that schools stay in the program so that the funding continues and the necessary reforms may be enacted” (Masters & Seiler, 2016). Consequently, funds once promised to “persistently struggling” schools were frozen by the Budget Division and, at Hackett, certain initiatives halted, such as their extended day and professional development programs for teachers (Cortes, 2016).

Whereas just a year prior, Commissioner MaryEllen Elia had categorized Hackett as one of twenty “persistently struggling” schools which had fostered generations of educational injustice (NYSED, 2015), she visited Hackett in September of 2016 on the first day of school to congratulate the school’s leaders on “an exemplary job done at Hackett to move things in the right direction” (Masters & Seiler, 2016). She added that the work was incomplete, however, and that there was certainly “enough work to do” to improve the school. Just hours after her visit, a parent-driven lawsuit against NYSED and the Budget Division on behalf of William S. Hackett Middle School’s students and those of other “persistently struggling” schools was announced in the *Albany Times Union* (Masters & Seiler, 2016).

Parents of students in three persistently lowest achieving schools sought to “prevent the subversion” of policies which stripped their schools of both a failure label and the funds aligned with that label (Cortes, 2016). The parents of the Cortes v. Mujica case (2016) sought to prove that their children’s persistently failing schools needed and remained entitled to receive improvement funds. Curtis Witter, the parent of a child at William S. Hackett Middle School, is one petitioner on the case against Robert Mujica, Director of the New York State Division of Budget, and Maryellen Elia, New York State Commissioner of Education (Cortes, 2016). The parent petitioners argued that “irreparable harm” could be done to Hackett students if the grant funds continued to be withheld and that the money supported both a basic, sound education and
initiatives that met student needs. According to the petitioners, the reforms made with school improvement money worked to benefit students because more students made the honor roll, fewer failed classes, and fewer discipline issues were experienced at the school. Professional development workshops for teachers “played a critical role in improving overall classroom instruction”, according to the litigation. These statements signify that the original problems promoted in Hackett’s JIT report and the standardized interventions of the school’s School Improvement Grant as dictated by the “transformation model” had been viable remedies to Hackett’s ills. In fact, the funds used to integrate these policies and initiatives were portrayed through this case as so important that “irreparable harm” to the education of students may be done without them (Cortes, 2016). As a result of the lawsuit, The Division of Budget’s actions and decision to withhold funds was deemed illegal and the Budget Division was ordered to make the “transformation funds” available to the New York State Education Department and, thereby, available to all “persistently struggling” schools slated to receive them, including Hackett Middle School (Cortes, 2016).

According to Hamilton (2011), “in the final moment of mobilization, the few come to speak as the many” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 14). A parent-driven lawsuit asserted that Hackett, as a failing school, needed and has benefitted from the policies and grants of the standardization network. Although Hackett had been designated as a “persistently struggling” school in 2015, one which had languished without improvement at the highest levels of State accountability for over 10 years and which had been maligned as causing generations of educational injustice, within one year and under vague pretenses, Hackett was heralded as improving (Masters & Seilers, 2016; NYS, 2015; NYSED, 2015; Schwartz, 2015). That improvement was portrayed as a result of the standardization network’s interventions not only by government officials, but by
members of the school community through a lawsuit which sought to keep government funding, and consequently standards-based reforms, in place (Cortes, 2016; Masters & Seiler, 2016). This acknowledged the power of the network while also necessitating the need for continued intervention and standardization at the school. At Hackett Middle School, a “truth” emerged in the moment of mobilization which both accepted and validated the school’s failure as well as the effectiveness of the standardization network’s interventions.

7.4 – Mobilization: The Successes and Failures of the Standardization Network

The lawsuit levied on behalf of William S. Hackett Middle School students (Cortes, 2016) represents successful mobilization of the standardization network within that school community in 2016. However, this success was foreshadowed in the Albany Times Union newspaper article, blog story, and blog comments posted about the school in 2011 (Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). According to standardized test results, Hackett was failing and had been for quite some time (NYSED/ACSD, 2011; Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). The Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, members of the public purportedly from a variety of sectors, the New York State Education Department, and a Joint Intervention Team agreed – Hackett was failing (NYSED/ACSD, 2011; Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). The only voice to dissent from this truth was Hackett Student (2012). Through a pseudonym, Hackett Student (2012) lumped the students of Hackett Middle School together and spoke as their representative regardless of whether the other students at Hackett agreed with his or her assertions. Hackett Student (2012) remained anonymous and supported claims with ambiguous observations and experiences. Likewise, under anonymity, Hackett’s Joint Intervention Team lumped students, parents, administrators, and teachers together and spoke on their behalf regardless of whether those individuals agreed
with the findings or suggestions of the JIT report (NYSED/ACSD, 2011). They too offered vague accounts of their observations and experiences at the school (NYSED/ACSD, 2011). However, when Hackett Student (2012) contested Hackett’s failure, another blog comment (Diogenes II, 2012) reinforced the Joint Intervention Team as “objective experts” and their report as “true”. Hackett Student (2012) received little attention in the form of a dismissive response. However, when the Joint Intervention Team behaved similarly to assert Hackett’s failure, they succeed with fanfare. It might be a proverbial “he said, she said” if one account were not given more attention and held up as true. This hints at network mobilization, which is marked by representatives who speak the “truth” and, further, by a solidified acceptance of those truths as well as resistance to dissenting perspectives (Callon, 1986, p. 208; Hamilton, 2011, p. 14).

The story of William S. Hackett Middle School reflects the unique circumstances that were only possible in failing schools. In 2010, as required by law, Hackett’s persistently lowest achieving designation was publicly released along with a Joint Intervention Team report about the school (King, 2010; NCLB, 2001; NYSED, 2010a, NYSED/ACSD, 2011; Waldman, 2011a; 2011b). Due to their persistently lowest achieving designation, Hackett had to choose one of four intervention models and the school was eligible to apply for a School Improvement Grant in order to implement their chosen model (King, 2010; NYSED, 2010a; USDOE, 2009). The grant application process ensured that their intervention plan aligned with government mandates and monitoring requirements ensured the school was implementing reforms as agreed (CSDA, 2011). By 2015, Hackett continued to fall short of expectations and received a “persistently struggling” label to signify more than a decade of failure (NYSED, 2015). Ironically, for almost half that time, Hackett had implemented standards-based reforms as directed and had been held accountable for doing so (CSDA, 2011). Regardless, later in 2015, changes in the way New
York State calculated the requirements for failure labels removed Hackett from the persistently struggling list (NYSED, 2015a; 2015b; Schwartz, 2015). Hackett was applauded for the improvements they made at the school (Masters & Seiler, 2016). The New York State Budget Division withheld the school’s grant money, however, claiming the school had to fail to qualify for the award (Masters & Seiler, 2016). As a result of a lawsuit filed by Hackett parents, a judge disagreed and Hackett’s intervention grant, along with the interventions and monitoring it required, was restored (Cortes, 2016). These moments in Hackett’s story illuminates a repeated pattern of problematizing the school, interference that structured the school’s practices in accordance with standards-based reforms, enrollment that dictated and monitored the work of actors, and mobilization that held the network in place. The standardization network has been able to cycle through the process of translation within failing schools as claims of failure were met with demands for standards-based reforms and claims of continued failure were met with demands for more of the same.

The standardization network was not mobilized broadly across state and national contexts of practice because the process of translation failed. In one or more moments of translation, a breakdown occurred. During enrollment, the standardization network reorganized previously successful actors by claiming they had failed to meet network expectations. Students failed state exams at higher rates and, as such, more students were labeled failures when their test scores were released (Gralla, 2013). Enrollment, then, was successful in reorganizing network actors and placing them into the structures built during interference, namely a box labeled “failure”. However, the standardization network problematized academic failure as defined by standardized measures (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001; NYSED, 2010a; USDOE, 2009). Therefore, actors new to the failure category had previously passed the network’s tests and were not
members of the “failing” group during moments of problematization. They had not been problematized as the actors they joined in the failure category had been, such as the actors found within persistently lowest achieving schools. Each moment of translation that follows problematization depends upon the foundation of truth it solidifies (Callon, 1986, p. 217; Hamilton, 2011, p. 11). Mobilization succeeded at William S. Hackett Middle School for the same reason it failed elsewhere: where claims of problems were universally accepted as true, mobilization was possible.

The standardization network cycled through moments of translation and as it was processed across time and place to create a networked reality, failure was inscribed and re-inscribed as existing within failing schools. Although protests and controversy often signal dissent, the wide-spread protests of 2013 were not dissent from the standardization network’s truths. Instead, they are evidence of mobilization – an acceptance of solidified truths and resistance to dissenting perspectives – and merely held the network accountable for aligning with the truths it created: failure was a problem that needed to be addressed in some schools, not all schools. According to Actor Network theorists Callon & Law (2003), otherness is the hallmark of an actor disentanglement strategy called “NIMBY”, or “not in my backyard” (Callon & Law, 2003, p. 13). Using NIMBY, actors contest their roles and resist any negative impact a network may have upon them by claiming consequences should not apply to them, but should be directed toward others instead (Callon & Law, 2003). Acting out of self-preservation, actors validate the network in their attempts to disentangle themselves from it rather than work to dismantle the network as a whole (Callon & Law, 2003). An example of this is the amended Albany Teacher’s Union contract which treated teachers within Albany’s failing schools as the “other”. The amendment is carefully worded to apply only to teachers working in the district’s failing
schools, thereby disentangling the other, non-labeled schools from the impact of failure (APSTA & CSDA, 2012). NIMBY also appears in the argument of the Long Island Superintendent who asserted that his schools were doing well by the standardization network’s standards and, therefore, should be exempt from the negative consequences of the network experienced by other schools (NY Senate Republicans, 2012). NIMBY again appeared on the Assembly floor when an Assemblyman criticized a “one size fits all approach” and claimed “some very good schools” he represented were “being punished for some schools that are struggling around the state” (STCaucus Members, 2015). As seen in these examples, actors using NIMBY as a response to the standardization network were simply asking for a return to status quo: successful schools should not be subjected to the punishments of failing schools. Such arguments re-inscribe the standardization network’s definitions of success and failure. The ability to be seen as a “good” school, for example, requires the existence of “bad” schools. This, in and of itself, demands the continued existence of the standardization network, fuels the network’s power to define educational success or failure as well as who will fall into those categories, and holds all actors within the network regardless of their presently assigned label.

In another attempt to disentangle themselves from the network, actors also used “rarefaction”, a strategy of withholding essential information from the network (Callon & Law, 2003, p. 13). In particular, actors opted out of standardized assessments as a way to deny the network of the information it had used to label them (Dewitt, 2013; MertMelfa, 2013a, 2013b). By 2017, this form of protest became problematic for schools already identified as failures because, in addition to traditional achievement requirements, those schools had to meet required test participation rates to be removed from a failure list (NYSED, 2017).
Common Core backlash also benefitted the standardization network. In New York, when high numbers of students failed the state’s Common Core tests, protestors claimed Common Core was distorting education within their school communities: the joy had been drained out of learning, students were anxious, teacher autonomy was undermined, instruction focused upon test prep, curricula narrowed, student individuality was ignored, students were seen as the numbers that correlated to their state test proficiency levels, and tested subjects began to trump both social time and other content areas (Gralla, 2013; MertMela, 2013a; 2013b). Prior to the advent of Common Core, however, these same conditions were well documented in educational research about “failing” school communities grappling with the standardization network’s consequences (Delpit, 2003; Diamond, 2007; Johnston et al., 1998; Johnston & Costello, 2005; Kozol, 2005; McDermott & Varenne, 1995; McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2009; Stillman, 2009; Wissman, 2009). Despite this, Common Core was blamed and consequently masked the standardization network and the many disparate actors at work within it. Law (1992) explains that the "appearance of unity, and the disappearance of a network, has to do with simplification" (Law, 1992, p. 5): "...if a network acts as a single block, then it disappears, to be replaced by the action itself and the seemingly simple author of that action [...] something much simpler [...] comes, for a time, to mask the networks that produce it" (Law, 1992, p. 5).

As changes were enacted to address public outrage, the words “Common Core” were rejected from the network but the network survived. Today, success and failure continue to be defined by standardized measures and the punishments for failure have only worsened (Cuomo, 2015; ESSA, 2015; NYSED, 2017). As was the case in 2013, success can quickly turn to failure. Schools currently meeting expectations continue to exist within the standardization network’s
confines and so they are vulnerable to future reassignment whereby they will play the role of failure and face the network’s consequences.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

8.1 – Reflection: The Foreshadowing of an Expanding Network

In this study, Actor Network Theory was particularly useful in identifying the actors of the standardization network. Network tracing not only uncovered individual actors, but how their collaborative efforts during moments of problematization, interference, enrollment, and mobilization has enabled this network of power to exist and extend. As such, this study contributes an understanding of how the standardization network functions and while I once personally experienced it as a mysterious phenomenon, I can now see that many of the network’s operations are repetitive and simple. In this study, the use of Actor Network Theory revealed connections across time and contexts of practice which demonstrate that much of what transpired within “failing” school communities foreshadowed what was to come for traditionally “successful” communities as the network expanded.

Over time, standardization network actors and their collaborative efforts evolved to extend the network and the most glaring example of this is the evolution of legislation. Whereas the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was designed to mitigate the educational impact of concentrated poverty, once rebranded as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, poverty was not a good enough reason to receive additional funding. Schools had to fail as well and, according to the standardized definitions of success and failure outlined by NCLB, many schools serving impoverished, minority communities were failing and, therefore, were entitled to additional funds along with additional intervention. This made clear where the problem was, who the students left behind were, and supported standards-based efforts to save those needy students, disaggregate test results by student demographics, and close a nation-wide
achievement gap. Many of these ideas were retained as a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 but with an increased preoccupation upon utilizing data to monitor the achievement gap, analyze the test performance and growth of all student subgroups, and label every educator as highly effective, effective, developing, or ineffective as well as ramping up the “rigor” of the standards and standardized assessments founded by NCLB.

As legislation morphed over time from a focus upon some students – namely those “left behind” – to all students, so too did the approach to processing schools within the network. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 outlines the earliest examples of an application and approval process for funding that was encountered by network tracing within this study. Under NCLB, States applied to fund literacy programs through a federal “Reading First” initiative. According to Healy (2007), the federal government approved or denied State plans seemingly at will and, therefore, many States learned from previously accepted or rejected plans and did their best to align with what they surmised as acceptable to the federal government in order to secure funding. School Improvement Grants, also an invention of NCLB, were slightly different in that they were only available to failing schools and the federal government dictated expectations for local plans through clearly defined intervention models. The Race to the Top, an advent of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, is a hybrid of NCLB’s Reading First and School Improvement Grants in that the Race to the Top was open to all States and the application process was highly structured to ensure effective intervention implementation state-wide and limit deviation from the network’s reform agenda nation-wide.

Forced compliance with the standardization network first emerged at the schools facing the most severe consequences for failure. There, evidence that numerous stakeholders were “consulted” or that “collaboration” took place around school improvement plans was all that was
needed to undermine collective bargaining contracts and secure actor enrollment. Ramifications for non-compliance meant not only that School Improvement Grants would be rescinded, but that staff could lose their jobs, students could be sent to other schools, and schools could close. Without such steep consequences, compliance with Race to the Top was solidified through binding agreements between federal, state, and local education agencies and federal demands to remove any barriers that might impede state-wide reform implementation at all schools were met with legislative changes.

The standardization network’s operations are built upon public perception and this became particularly obvious when public perception did not evolve in alignment with the network. As changes were enacted in accordance with State Race to the Top agreements, previously successful students and educators faced failure by way of failed exams or lack of student growth. This didn’t align with universal beliefs about where failure existed or who the failures of the education system were as traditionally defined within the network. Amidst the “Common Core” backlash that ensued, some actors attempted to redefine the problem of school failure as existing everywhere by questioning discrepancies between student proficiency on State exams and teacher effectiveness rankings or by supporting claims of American failure with international standardized test results. These attempts were futile. However, mutation within the standardization network did occur and managed to restore network stability. The words “Common Core” were absent from much of the legislation that existed in the network prior to the education protests of 2013. They are mentioned in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, however, as ESSA makes clear that the federal government is prohibited from forcing States to adopt Common Core. Actor Network Theory teaches us that it was never that simple to begin with. A host of separate actors assembled to standardize failing schools in some
communities and many of those same actors evolved in order to expand the network to all schools and communities.

To some, it may have appeared that a separate network was operating at failing schools but this illusion became evident when traditionally successful schools began to report suffering the same conditions previously documented within those deemed failures. The lesson for human actors is to care about and pay close attention to what is happening in other communities because the notion that they are separate from our own is an illusion as well. Unfortunately, this study finds no evidence that this is a lesson learned by all human actors within the standardization network. Today, failure labeling continues, School Improvement Grants along with scripted school improvement plans continue to shape the realities of failing schools, and a federal process for approving or denying all State education plans in the name of funding continues as well.

8.2 – Discussion: Public Perception and Human Actors

Through the lens of Actor Network Theory, otherness is at the heart of several disentanglement tactics used by actors in their attempts to escape a network. Racial and socioeconomic otherness was an underlying theme of Common Core protests. United States Education Secretary Arne Duncan portrayed protestors as “white suburban moms” who were unable to accept the failures of their children and community schools. Education leaders and politicians claimed that the consequences of the standardization network should not apply to their good schools or scapegoated failing schools for necessitating the consequences that began to impact their communities. New initiatives and legislation supposedly aimed at righting the wrongs of Common Core offered no systemic change and served as little more than a pressure relief valve for the protests originating from traditionally successful communities yet held
increasingly serve penalties for those traditionally deemed failures. By the time “Stop Common Core” signs faded, the words “Common Core” were removed from the educational lexicon and the standardization network not only survived, but became an even more ominous threat to failing schools overwhelmingly located in minority and impoverished communities. The very same tools used by Common Core protestors were systematically denied to those failing school communities. New York’s addition of test participation rates as a requirement of removal from failure lists eliminated opting out of state exams as an effective protest tactic for schools on those lists. When protestors dispersed, media attention left with them and failing schools were left to suffer in silence the exact conditions that had sparked wide-spread outrage. This was not a new experience for “failing” school communities, however, as years of research has documented the injustices they faced prior to the public outcry of 2013. In the wake of those protests, the fact that the very practices they blasted as adverse to education continue to persist in some communities for some children absent of equal public outrage is glaring proof of the inequality that persists in American education.

In a country long marred by racial and socioeconomic inequality, differential treatment is not limited to the American education system. One modern example is the experiences of communities grappling with a drug epidemic. Whereas this type of epidemic was met with criminalization and a “War on Drugs” when it hit impoverished minority communities, it was presented as a disease crisis and was met with treatment, understanding, and life-saving interventions when it hit wealthier white neighborhoods. As actors in vast power networks, often unwittingly, the otherness that frames our “truths” makes us capable of ignoring, excusing, accepting, or even advocating for treatment of others that we would not wish upon ourselves. Previous research has noted that students and educators internalize the failure labels placed upon
them, which hints at a network so powerful that it has the potential to inform even what we believe to be true about ourselves and, therefore, the treatment we might endure as we are processed within it. Many actors who participated in education protests in 2013 did not believe themselves to be failures, however, they did believe others were failures and this otherness was by design.

“Failing” schools were primarily located in minority or impoverished communities and were problematized primarily for low performance on standardized measures. This was the impetus for efforts to close the “achievement gap” as well as policies to categorize student scores into subgroups defined by race and socioeconomic status. By and large, the crisis of education failure was essentially the crisis of too many poor, minority students failing standardized exams and standards-based reforms were presented as a rescue effort to ensure those children were not left behind. Several ideas exist about why poor or minority students might be more likely to fail a standardized exam and whether such testing can or should be used to determine their academic proficiency. Research, too, has called test manipulation and the fairness of utilizing standardized methods to define success or failure for any student of any demographic into question. Regardless, as long as standards-based education reforms were applied to poor, minority students and communities, relative calm existed. When the Race to the Top extended those reforms to every classroom and when students previously deemed successful by the standardization network also failed State exams at high rates, the tests were portrayed as so unreliable that many parents refused to allow their children to take them. Therefore, if they are not valid educational yardsticks in some communities, they certainly cannot be in others.

The problematization of school failure is not only based upon questionable test results, however, but upon public perception and widely held beliefs that some schools, specifically
poor, minority schools, are failing. In New York, the negative findings of Joint Intervention Team investigations at failing schools across the State were so common that they were summarized and presented to the Board of Regents. It is possible that these schools were alike in many ways, but just as possible that they are not unlike any school in the State and similar negative findings might exist anywhere given the same context. Although persistently lowest achieving schools were first identified in 2010, this designation was the most severe failure status available under New York’s accountability system and, therefore, reserved for schools that had failed to meet expectations despite years of State attention. As such, Joint Intervention Team investigations were conducted on schools that had the closest involvement with the standardization network without an understanding of how the network itself may have distorted practices. In fact, once the standardization network crept into traditionally successful schools, protestors decried the same negative conditions commonly cited in Joint Intervention Team Reports as also emerging at their schools, including test-driven instruction and a lack of differentiation. The greatest difference between a “failing” and “successful” school is the universal belief that failure exists at one and not the other which allows the standardization network to take hold in one place rather than the other. Strengths as well as weaknesses exist in every school community but in moments of problematization, real or imagined problems take center stage and become publicized repeatedly, eclipsing positives. When schools are problematized, so too are their communities as students, parents, and educators are maligned as part of the problem. To solve the problem of failure, a school is continually processed by the standardization network until it is no longer considered “failing” or closes altogether. Throughout the process, the network reforms the work of actors within the school or introduces new actors to reform practice, such as restrictive school improvement plans, government
reviewers, outside education experts, intervention partners, school improvement managers, and external receivers. As a result, even the schools that do survive are deformed by practices more invested in network compliance than enriching students and are left unrecognizable as community schools. After years of enduring this process, William S. Hackett Middle School was suddenly removed from New York State’s most severe failure list simply because accountability calculations had changed. This is not unlike the remarkable uptick in test failure rates experienced by traditionally “successful” communities when New York’s tests and subgroup projections changed. The standardization network’s definition of failure is arbitrary and, therefore, any school community accepted as a failure within the social milieu is at risk of being processed by the standardization network. Public perception is the network’s lifeblood and otherness has contributed to the network’s survival not only in poor, minority communities, but everywhere. Since the standardization network continues to arbitrarily define educational success and failure, all communities remain at risk of being assigned to the failure category where they will face the network’s consequences. Arguments that a rhetoric of failure was not only intended for impoverished or minority schools, but for all schools, cropped up in response to Common Core protests. Claims that even the most accomplished American students lag behind students across the globe threaten to become “the truth” that might again propel the standardization network into “successful” learning communities.

Common Core protests offer many lessons about network intervention by human actors. Through protest, network actors used the truths and connections created by the network to assemble against it. Communities and subgroups of actors traditionally categorized as successful by the standardization network represented a passive majority of network actors. Once they were reassigned to the unfamiliar category of failure, they found themselves in the company of
unfamiliar actors long separated from them by the network’s subgroups and categories. Instead of creating new network connections by collaborating with and learning from actors who had experienced the failure category, however, traditionally successful actors opted for self-preservation, adopted otherness tactics to escape failure, and shifted the burden of consequences back onto those who usually carried it rather than attempting to lift the burden from everyone. Had they focused upon unity instead of otherness, these actors may have learned that their new experiences in the network were not new at all but were an extension and almost an exact replica of what their counterparts in failing schools had endured for years. With that, the spreading network may have come into view: accountability calculations which once arbitrarily designated entire schools as failures had morphed into a system for determining the effectiveness of every educator; the School Improvement Grant application process which was available only to failing schools closely resembled the nation-wide Race to the Top application process for all state applicants; accountability mandates had once undermined the unions of failing schools but became legislative requirements to remove any barriers to state-wide education reform efforts; and, overall, the conditions found in failing schools served as foreshadowing of what was possible anywhere rather than evidence of a particular community’s innate shortcomings. Instead, protests targeted Common Core and because the standardization network had little to do with Common Core, it was of no consequence to the network when Common Core became an educational pariah. The standardization network existed long before Common Core and, consequently, outlived Common Core. Protests were successful in temporarily scaling the network back to the “failing” communities where it traditionally operated, but it cannot be confined there indefinitely. Protests also successfully demonstrated just how vulnerable the network is to public perception. Seemingly powerful network actors such as the New York State
Education Department Commissioner, the United States Secretary of Education, the New York State Governor, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and even the President of the United States turned out to be no match for the actors who assembled in protest. Within the network, there is no federal to state to local government hierarchy or trickle down. Educational realities are constructed by public beliefs and once the tide turned against Common Core, political actors at all levels of government scrambled to shore if they couldn’t ride the wave. Imagine what might have happened if those protests were not based upon the faulty premise that Common Core was to blame for the realities of American education. Imagine how powerful those protests might have been if they had been defined by unity rather than otherness. They might have shaken the very foundation of truths on which the entire system rests and dismantled the standardization network to make way for a new educational reality for all American students.

Despite historic traditions of separation and categorization in the American education system, we are inextricably bound within that system and unity is the greatest threat to the adverse consequences of the standardization network. The most important step human actors can take to intervene in this network is to interrogate their own beliefs about “others” as well as what they hold true about academic success and failure. With an understanding that network connections and collaboration can be used by human actors to both engage in protest and foster change, making connections between school communities traditionally deemed successful and those traditionally deemed failures is important. In doing so, perspective is paramount, however. Such connections must be crafted as mutually beneficial – as learning communities benefitting from one another’s strengths rather than one “helping” or “rescuing” the other. As seen in this study, notions of “the other” along with systemic separation continue to perpetuate unnecessary suffering in the American education system. The standardization network yields to public
perception, however, and that means the network’s power is in the hands of human actors. If we are unable to accept the suffering of others because we understand their suffering as our own, it will be impossible for the network to function as it presently does. Then, when a school like William S. Hackett Middle School becomes the topic of public discussion and a blog commenter identified as “Hackett Student” provides an account that claims “Hackett is a strong beautiful place, and it has a lot of good qualities” (Hackett Student, 2012), that dissenting perspective won’t be so easily discounted or ignored. Then, when we say that certain educational conditions are unacceptable, we will recognize the acceptance of those conditions anywhere for the injustice it is. Then, when a State Governor calls for a death penalty for any school, we will collectively feel the weight of that death sentence.

8.3 – Future Research: Limitations and Opportunities

Hackett faculty and staff members made a skit parodying “Carpool Karoke” for their graduating 8th graders and posted the video to the school’s YouTube channel in June of 2017 (HMS, 2017). In the video, staff members sing songs with farewell themes, smile, laugh, and wave goodbye. Some wear Hackett Middle School t-shirts. Others hold signs with messages to their students: “You’re the one, class of 2017!” The skit ends with a conversation between the school’s principal and a teacher retiring after 14 years of service to the school. “I did it my way,” the teacher claims. “Let’s go out our way”, the principal responds and the two sing along as Frank Sinatra’s “My Way” plays in the background (HMS, 2017).

If actors within Hackett did things their way – or, at least out of alignment with the intervention mandates placed upon them – it is understandable that evidence of their dissent would not appear in public record. My decision to consider only publicly available documentary
data to inform this study is a limitation in that accounts from Hackett’s actors, including my own, go unheard here. Conversations, lessons, materials, resources, and the actual instruction that took place within classrooms at Hackett Middle School were excluded from this study. Therefore, the standardization network may have been mobilized to a greater extent at the school than I was able to uncover, just as it may have been resisted by actors I could not access. As a teacher at the school, I do remember my own efforts to counteract standardization by, for example, crafting lessons that attended to my students’ individual needs despite the network pressure I felt. I have no doubt that my colleagues similarly served as a last line of defense in protecting students from the consequences of the school’s failure status. Finding ways to keep a punitive system out of the classroom is not written in a teacher’s job description but for the teachers of failing schools, I am aware that it is among their most important duties.

Future ANT research that weaves contexts of practice together and considers more than public information about failing schools could garner many important lessons from localized actors operating under the closest network scrutiny. I anticipate that they have a great deal to teach the field and research capable of further connecting their micro realities to macro practice would provide a worthy perspective upon how standardization has transformed teaching and learning. That said, my decision to consider only publicly available documentary data acknowledges the important role public perception plays in processing networks of power and allowed me to focus upon actors the public could see. As a result, this study aligns with the previous findings of both micro and macro policy research yet provides unique contributions to the field.

Though this study, as well as a wealth of educational research, reveals the distorted practices which result from a mobilized standardization network, that should not be translated to
mean there is no place for academic standards or consistency in the quality of instruction in America’s education system. In fact, this study offers no comment upon the quality of the Common Core Standards but, instead, points out that the standardization network was much bigger than “Common Core”. The network prioritized compliance to prescribed reforms rather than alignment with any set of academic standards, “Common Core” or otherwise. Likewise, despite the power of high-stakes accountability to distort practice as seen in this study and others, this study should not be interpreted as advocating for a complete lack of educational accountability. Researchers such as Thomas and Brady (2005) argue that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, intended to supplement education funding in impoverished communities, lacked accountability for how those funds were spent or whether they were used to actually benefit children. The researchers note that demands for increased educational accountability occurred as early as 1988 due to claims that funds were misappropriated and that the abuse of Title I funds included inappropriately bolstering educators’ salaries and even office décor purchases (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Other studies show that changes in the appropriation of school funding post-NCLB may have resulted in beneficial state-wide investments in educational resources and increased teacher salaries which attracted educators with more advanced degrees (Dee, Jacob, & Schwartz, 2013; Lee & Reeves, 2012). Throughout my career as an educator, I have heard colleagues discuss a pendulum that exists in the field of education – one that often swings wildly from one extreme to another, for example: from no accountability to high-stakes accountability or from no instructional guidelines to standardized, scripted curricula. This study investigates the standardization network as it operated across micro and macro contexts of the American education system and from at least 2010 to 2018, as demonstrated in this study, the network operated in a highly structured, rigid state. Further research that
investigates education’s pendulum swings might enable our field to find balance, avoid “throwing the baby out with the bathwater”, and learn from our collective mistakes while retaining any advantageous results of education policy over time.
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