

ABSTRACT

BROOKS, ERINN LEIGH. *When Profit Meets Practice: Working at a Network Charter School.* (Under the direction of Dr. Martha Crowley and Dr. Sinikka Elliott).

A growing number of scholars, activists, and policymakers characterize the nation's public schools as failures. Market-centered policy has emerged as a popular solution. Through a variety of initiatives, market-centered policies encourage—or force—schools to compete for students, and teachers to compete for jobs and raises. Reform has been especially rapid in the charter school sector, which is populated by publicly-funded but privately-run schools. Charter “networks” are the headliners of market-centered reform. These for-profit or nonprofit organizations open a number of schools under similar missions and styles. Research analyzing academic outcomes at charters compared to those at traditional public schools finds mixed results. Fewer studies examine how charters' market-centered policies shape teaching. Charter networks fundamentally shift teachers' employment terms and work structures, arguing that these changes improve teacher performance and thereby student outcomes. Teacher turnover rates at charter schools greatly exceed those at traditional public schools, but few studies examine the qualitative mechanisms behind this trend.

Based on 1,000 hours of covert participant observation at one charter school belonging to a for-profit network, this dissertation explores how one network deploys market-centered work practices, as well as how teachers at a school I call “Eclipse Preparatory” interpret and navigate these practices. I begin by examining the structure and mission of the “Academic Achievement Group” (AAG), the for-profit charter network that manages Eclipse. I argue that AAG re-conceptualizes teaching by urging staff to envision careers in education, rather than careers in teaching. Using an elaborate internal labor market,

the network encourages staff to compete over promotions. I found a competitive workplace in Eclipse, where administrators quickly place staff on particular career tracks. Just as educational tracks shape students' success, these career tracks shape employees' ability to achieve success as teachers and—later—as administrators.

AAG's public face centers on staff accountability. By all appearances, teachers follow a detailed network "blueprint" in order to achieve measurable results and facilitate customer satisfaction. While AAG's detailed blueprint helps the network establish legitimacy, it does not connect neatly to teachers' everyday realities. On Eclipse's backstage, administrators emphasized controlling student behavior as a central measure of teaching effectiveness. The most successful employees found ways to comply creatively with AAG policy. I develop the concept of *creative compliance* to describe employees' tactics for adhering to formal policies in strategic ways, which allow them to bend the rules and cope with job-related challenges yet adhere to workplace policy. Behavior management practices have historically served as an important mechanism through which schools accomplish social reproduction. My analyses suggest that, as Eclipse teachers comply creatively with the directive to control students' behavior, they continue to discipline low-income students of color in ways that mirror common practices in traditional public schools.

The findings of this dissertation demonstrate that market-centered reforms facilitate a re-conceptualization of teaching. Policymakers and school leaders attempt to use competition to fundamentally alter the nature of teachers' work, including their career trajectories. My analyses suggest that this shift sparks negative unintended consequences on the ground. In particular, I suggest that market-centered reforms can be implemented in ways that reproduce—rather than challenge—race- and class-based inequalities in schooling.

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When Profit Meets Practice: Working at a Network Charter School

by
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DEDICATION

To Eclipse's staff, past and present.

And to Katy, who grew Eleanor from an idea into a beautiful, active ten-month-old over the course of this project.

BIOGRAPHY

Erinn Brooks grew up in Beloit, Wisconsin. She graduated from Beloit College in 2008, with bachelors of arts degrees in sociology, as well as education and youth studies. Erinn then received her teaching certificate in secondary mathematics from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, where she taught ninth grade as a Teach For America corps member. Beginning in 2010, Erinn pursued graduate work in sociology at North Carolina State University, earning concentrations in Inequality and Work and the Global Economy. In the fall of 2016, she will join the faculty at Manchester University as a tenure-track Assistant Professor of sociology.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the dominant narrative about America's public schools characterizes them as failing (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Johnston 2014; Kumashiro 2012; Ravitch 2010). A popular documentary film, *Waiting For Superman* (Guggenheim 2010), paints a particularly alarming picture of public schools as "dropout factories" that inflict harm on low-income children of color. The film uplifts charter schools as a visionary solution. A narrator tells the stories of a number of low-income students in urban neighborhoods, who hope to enroll in promising charter schools but must place their fate in the hands of lotteries to secure seats. Infused throughout these vignettes are interviews with key players in education, including district superintendents, school principals, venture philanthropists, prestigious researchers, and union leaders. Ultimately, this film characterizes the problem with America's schools as an economic one. *Waiting For Superman* embraces a market-centered logic that a growing number of policymakers, school leaders, and advocacy organizations support. According to this logic, education in the United States is inefficient because teachers receive jobs and raises regardless of their quality, and schools attract students and funding regardless of their track records. Public schools' insulation from competition gives them no incentive to improve (Archbald 2004; Fabricant and Fine 2015; Hoxby 2003; Kumashiro 2012; Renzulli and Roscigno 2007).

An increasingly popular solution to the nation's so-called crisis of school failure involves creating what I refer to as an "education marketplace." In this marketplace, schools compete for students, and teachers compete for jobs and raises (Fabricant and Fine 2015;

Hoxby 2003; Renzulli and Roscigno 2007). Over the last two decades, many state laws have loosened restrictions on charters—publicly funded but privately run schools. Charters infuse the public school landscape with competition, as they attract students (via open enrollment policies) who would otherwise attend traditional public schools (Archbald 2004). Over 6,000 charter schools now serve more than 2 million students; this represents an 80% increase in just 4 years (CREDO 2013). Charter “networks” have emerged as the headliners of market-centered reform. As the big-box stores of education, networks open a number of schools under the same organizational umbrella. Philanthropic foundations, advocacy organizations, and multinational corporations support their efforts, both politically and fiscally¹ (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Kretchmar, Sondell, and Ferrare 2014; Krop and Zimmer 2005; Scott 2009). While many in the public school sector fiercely resist market-centered reforms (Buras 2014; Hartney and Flavin 2011; Weiner and Compton 2008), journalistic evidence suggests that those at network charter schools embrace them (Mathews 2009; Moskowitz and Lavinia 2012; Tough 2008).

A burgeoning body of research analyzes academic outcomes at charters compared to those at traditional public schools (Almond 2012; Angrist et al., 2012; Bulkley and Fisler 2002; CREDO 2013; Dobbie and Fryer 2011; Gleason et al., 2010; Hoxby and Murarka 2009; Jeynes 2012; Silverman 2012; Weitzel and Lubienski 2010; Zimmer and Buddin 2006). Results are largely mixed; a recent meta-analysis of the literature suggests no differences in elementary and middle-school achievement, with small positive effects at urban charters and at one network charter (Betts and Tang 2011). Fewer studies examine the

¹ Although charter networks receive federal funding, many also seek out supplemental money from these sources.

extent to which their policies facilitate high-quality teaching (Bancroft 2008; Diamond 2007; Golan 2015). Charter school networks fundamentally shift teachers' employment terms and work structures, arguing that these changes improve teacher performance and thereby student outcomes. For instance, networks often hire and fire at will, eliminate collective grievance processes, and replace seniority protections with bonus pay and promotion structures (Malloy and Wohlstetter 2003). Scholars know that teacher turnover rates at charter schools greatly exceed those at traditional public schools (Renzulli, Parrott and Beattie 2011). Yet few studies examine the qualitative mechanisms behind this trend (Bancroft 2008; Golann 2015; Ingersoll 2001).

This dissertation explores one charter school belonging to a network that deploys market-centered work practices, as well as how network teachers interpret and navigate these practices. In this chapter, I describe the rise of an education marketplace, reviewing literature on education reform efforts as they relate to schools and teachers. Charter networks provide ideal, yet understudied, settings for examining how market-centered work practices unfold on the ground. This study adds to a growing literature on the unintended consequences of market-centered policies, which are utilized by many contemporary governments (Hays 2003; Hursh 2007; Ravitch 2010; Reich 2005; Spence 2012) and employers (Crowley and Hodson 2014; Kalleberg 2012). I demonstrate that the network's policies and practices inject competition into the work of teaching. For example, teachers compete for job security and promotions by adapting to an organizational backstage that rewards those who control students' behavior with absolute authority. In this environment, staff get ahead not by

implementing the network's detailed blueprint for effective teaching, but by learning to comply creatively with organizational policies.

MARKET-CENTERED POLICY

Contemporary education reform efforts follow a distinctly market-centered logic. According to this perspective, introducing competition and accountability into public education will improve school and teacher quality. Market-centered policy is rooted in a neo-classical economic understanding of free markets as the key tool for solving economic and social problems. Using the now well-known “invisible hand” metaphor, Adam Smith argued that actors' self-interested behavior produces social benefits on a large scale (Smith 1904). According to the neoclassical economic perspective, actors behave in self-interested ways, seeking out the best prices and jumping on opportunities for profit (Gilpin 2001), unaffected by emotions, relationships, or culture (Granovetter 1985). As a result, markets—the places where goods are bought and sold by rational actors—naturally produce the most accurate prices by providing information and facilitating competition (Fama 1970). Savvy individuals might find new, unique opportunities for profit in the short-run, but others quickly follow, and prices balance out in the long run. Because the same information is available to all, no single person or group can monopolize such opportunities. When markets do not produce efficient outcomes as predicted, neo-classical economists often blame artificial interference. In particular, they argue that government mismanagement and union bargaining restrict information and competition (Quiggin 2010).

Many sociologists critique the assumptions, theories, and evidence that underlie market-centered policy (cf., Convert and Heilbron 2007; Smelser and Swedberg 2005). First,

sociologists point out that actors do not always behave in independent, self-interested ways. Instead, the social ties and regulatory structures embedded in environments shape individuals' and firms' behaviors (Granovetter 1985; Zukin and DiMaggio 1990). For example, individuals glean instrumental benefits through informal social networks formed on the basis of race and gender. These benefits advantage some and disadvantage others in ways that appear economically irrational (McDonald and Day 2010; Royster 2003). Second, sociologists contend that even truly self-interested action on the individual level can lead to perverse outcomes on the macro level. Cassidy (2009) calls this "rational irrationality." For instance, sub-prime lending and securitizing became unsustainable on a large scale, sparking a nationwide mortgage crisis in 2008.

The Rise of an Education Marketplace

Historically, government-run public schools were relatively isolated from the free market. They did not compete with one another for students or public funds; the government did not, for instance, close underperforming schools. Similarly, teachers were not hired and paid according to the results they achieve, but hired on the basis of particular qualifications and paid according to salary schedules. Legislators, reformers, and school leaders who embrace the marketplace model argue that an absence of competition in the education sector drives down school quality and teacher quality. Opening an otherwise closed market to competition, in contrast, facilitates efficiency and quality by eliminating red tape and making schools and teachers accountable to their customers (Buckley and Schneider 2009; Fabricant and Fine 2015; Hoxby 2002, 2003).

Dominant political narratives paint traditional public schools as at fault for not only inefficient, low-quality education generally, but race- and class-based achievement gaps specifically (Johnston 2014). Scholars have long examined schooling as a key mechanism in the process of social reproduction (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Lareau 2003; MacLeod 2010), making clear that public schools indeed fail certain children. While many agree that educational inequity is a problem, debates continue regarding its sources and potential solutions (e.g., Fenstermacher 2002; Payne 2010; Ravitch 2010, 2013; Rothstein 2004). Importantly, advocates of market-centered reform characterize conventional public schools and teachers as culpable, suggesting that an education marketplace will solve educational inequity by holding them accountable (Dee and Wyckoff 2015; Hanushek 2007; Hoxby 2002).

Two federal policies drive contemporary education reform in the United States. First, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002. NCLB provided a national, test-based accountability system that was the first of its kind. Federally-funded schools across the nation began administering annual standardized tests in reading and math. The government held schools accountable for showing adequate yearly progress (i.e., test score growth), and those that did not faced a variety of sanctions, ranging from funding cuts to forced restructuring (Mehta 2013). Education scholar and former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch originally praised NCLB but has more recently criticized it in light of emerging evidence. She argues that the market-centered emphases on measurement and competition undermine collaboration that lies at the heart of effective schooling and teaching (Ravitch 2010).

More recently, President Barack Obama's Race to the Top initiative (RTT), signed in 2009, created a national grant competition between states. RTT encourages states to design innovative education reforms then submit their proposed policies into a competitive pool of states vying for funding. While RTT prizes innovation, it also channels schools' efforts in a market-centered direction. For instance, in order to be eligible to apply for RTT funding, states must lift caps on the number of charter schools allowed and eliminate barriers to tying teacher evaluations to test scores (Fabricant and Fine 2015). The vast majority of grant winners incorporate two staples of market-centered reforms in their proposals—performance-based teacher evaluations and charter school expansion (McGuinn 2011). Scholars note that RTT is distinct from NCLB because it distributes rewards rather than doling out sanctions. However, the policies share a market-centered orientation in that they both prize competition and accountability among public schools (McGuinn 2011; Ravitch 2013). While many scholars agree that public schools should be accountable to students and communities (cf. Sleeter 2007), the market-centered definition of accountability centers on performance as demonstrated through standardized test scores (Hursh and Martina 2003; Taubman 2010). Below, I discuss the ways proponents portray the merits of market-based education, focusing on two key arguments they make: that market reform facilitates competition 1) between schools and 2) among teachers. In this view, competition improves quality.

Facilitating Competition between Schools

Supporters of market-centered reform argue that injecting the education sector with competition improves the quality of all schools—even traditional public schools. The rationale for facilitating competition between schools centers on two key assumptions. First,

a marketplace forces all schools to compete in order to attract “customers,” or students. Akin to the idea that a competitive economy guarantees that only the best businesses survives, in this view, an education marketplace drives up school quality in a broad way (Archbald 2004; Crawford 2001; Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser and Henig 2002). Take the example of a poor-performing public school that has served a particular neighborhood for decades. In theory, this school has no incentive to improve the academic performance of its students because it faces no competitors. Year after year, it receives state monies to carry out its operations and pay its employees. The funding arrives whether students learn or not. Similarly, the school’s tenured teachers have little risk of losing their jobs and no incentive to improve their practice. If a charter school surfaces in the neighborhood, supporters argue, the old school will suddenly face a competitor. When parents see that the charter school offers a higher quality education, they will enroll their children. The old school can only survive by improving; therefore, the quality of both schools will rise. If the old school does not improve, it will be forced to close. In the end, multiple charter schools may emerge in the neighborhood, depending upon demand.

Second, market-centered logic suggests that deregulation sparks innovation (Crawford 2001). Similar to businesses, schools can innovate when they are not weighed down by external rules and beholden to interest groups. In an education marketplace, then, schools must show results (typically via standardized test scores), but they can achieve those results however they see fit. This might mean shortening or lengthening the school day, utilizing nontraditionally trained or uncertified teachers, or hiring and firing employees at will. Traditionally, elected school board members vote on and implement such decisions;

parents, as well as teachers' unions, typically participate in the debate (Finnigan 2007; Renzulli and Roscigno 2005). Those who support the marketplace model instead envision schools that are free to innovate because they are unencumbered by such regulations (Crawford 2001; Finnigan 2007).

The shift to an education marketplace among schools has changed what types of schools are available and how students come to attend them. Specifically, many cities and states have created school choice policies and authorized alternative public schools. School choice policies abandon school assignment and instead allow parents to choose which schools their children attend. Proponents argue that choice tackles socioeconomic inequality by providing low-income families with higher-quality schooling options that lie outside their immediate neighborhoods (Archbald 2004). Similarly, both state and federal governments expand the choices available to families by authorizing and funding alternative types of public schools, such as charters.

Facilitating Competition between Teachers

Supporters of market-centered reform also contend that competition improves the quality of teachers' work. Historically, teachers have operated—at least in part—as a collective interest group. Supporters of market-centered reform argue that unions promote mediocre or even bad teaching by stifling competition. Former Assistant Secretary of Education Chester Finn went so far as to call unions monopolistic cartels (Kumashiro 2012). According to market-centered logic, unions interfere with the market's invisible hand. First, they undermine quality teaching by erecting unnecessary barriers to entry for qualified but non-traditionally trained teachers (Lincove, Osborne, Mills, and Bellows 2015). Second,

unions compress pay, establishing salary schedules through collective bargaining that ensure teachers are paid at uniform rates and not according to performance-based measures (Hoxby 2002). Third and relatedly, unions protect bad teachers and deincentivize excellence by negotiating seniority-based promotions and tenure, which guarantee so-called “jobs for life” regardless of teachers’ performance (Kumashiro 2012).

Joel Klein, former Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education summed up the market-centered perspective, arguing, “The whole education system is built on three pillars of mediocrity: lockstop pay, life tenure, and seniority... Until we build it on a foundation of performance, accountability, and excellence, we won’t succeed” (Whitmire 2011:59). Indeed, market-centered education reforms have altered the teaching profession, via new employment terms and work structures designed to improve teacher quality and incentivize performance. In particular, an increasing number of districts are shifting toward employee atomization, or the isolation of workers as individuals. This includes limits or bans on collective bargaining, short-term employment contracts, and the elimination of tenure and seniority procedures. Atomization also means encouraging teachers to think about themselves in new ways—as competitors, or entrepreneurs, engaged in economic exchanges. From this perspective, teachers should be free to negotiate salaries and achieve promotions based on individual merit, rather than collective precedent. On the organizational side, schools need not guarantee employees jobs over the long term and should continuously evaluate performance.

A number of public schools are also demanding teacher accountability for student performance in new ways. Some of these measures appear to reward teachers for excellence,

for instance offering bonuses to teachers whose students demonstrate substantial academic growth on standardized tests (Podgursky and Springer 2007). Other measures are more punitive. For instance, Michelle Rhee, who briefly served as Chancellor of the Washington, D.C. Public School System, took a number of bold steps to institute newfound accountability in an underperforming district. During her three-year tenure, Rhee fired 241 teachers and 36 principals and closed 23 schools. She also renegotiated the terms of teachers' contracts, for instance reducing seniority protections and eliminating intra-district transfer guarantees (Whitmire 2011). Market-based reformers, including Rhee, offer solutions that are compelling in their simplicity and decisiveness. But do they work? Below I discuss theoretical and empirical evidence on market-based educational reform.

Assumptions and Evidence

Contemporary research suggests that the assumptions underlying market-centered education reform are flawed (Renzulli and Roscigno 2007). First, market-centered logic assumes that parents have perfect information about available schools, and that they act rationally based on that information. In reality, even experts face difficulties measuring school quality.² In addition, many parents do not make explicit choices about where their children attend school but instead send them to districted schools. When they do choose schools, parents often decide based on information gleaned through social networks (Holme 2002; Lareau 2014), or based on location and safety considerations (Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, and Matland 2000). Further, school choice policies disadvantage some families based on a host of other challenges, including unreliable transportation and limited internet access, as

² For example, consider the mixed reviews of charter school performance (Buddin and Zimmer 2005; Bodine et al. 2008; Fabricant and Fine 2015; Gleason et al. 2014; Silverman 2012; Zimmer et al. 2014).

well as limited access to information due to language, literacy, or institutional barriers (Ravitch 2010).

Second, market-centered logic assumes that traditional, public schools will improve in the presence of competitive pressure. However, competition fails to address a host of factors that influence school quality, including family socioeconomic status, neighborhood social capital, school resources, and teacher quality (Coleman 1988; Kozol 2005; Payne 2010; Ravitch 2010). Some evidence suggests that the education marketplace not only fails to address educational inequity but actually increases it (Fuller, Gawlik, Gonzales, and Park 2003; Renzulli and Evans 2005). For instance, some charters siphon advantaged students, for example admitting fewer low-income students (Ertas and Roch 2012) and counseling out students with perceived behavioral problems (Jennings 2010). This puts traditional public schools at a competitive disadvantage.

Third, market-centered logic assumes that schools will innovate when they face fewer regulations. Some evidence suggests that charters do not experience the freedom from regulation envisioned in school choice policies. For instance, a number of charter schools report limited autonomy in regards to budget, hiring, curricula, and instruction (Finnigan 2007). Further, even the most autonomous schools are judged on the basis of standardized test scores. Schools face difficulty innovating when standardized tests are the lone measure of success. For example, a burgeoning body of evidence suggests that schools “teach to the test” to navigate the climate of high-stakes testing (Booher-Jennings 2004; Diamond 2007; Lipman 2004; Neal and Schanzenback 2010). Some scholars assert that testing is particularly burdensome for schools with low-performing students (Au 2010; Heilig and Darling-

Hammond 2008; Hursh 2006). Not only must these schools put forth a great deal of concerted effort in order to improve student test scores, but they also face the harshest penalties (including school closure) for poor performance (Hursh 2006).

Finally, a rich body of scholarship critiques the logic of market-centered reform as it relates to teaching. Many education scholars note that the growing emphasis on competition between teachers undermines collaboration among teachers. This is concerning because education scholars and practitioners find that teacher collaboration is essential for effective teaching and quality schooling (Darling-Hammond 2013; Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran 2007; Jackson and Bruegmann 2009; Neal 2009; Ravitch 2010). The emphasis on short-term accountability, as measured by student test scores, undermines teachers' development over time, for instance reducing morale and sparking attrition at the highest need schools (Finnigan and Gross 2007). Accountability-based pressure can have unintended consequences such as teaching to the test (Menken 2006)—and, in extreme cases, systematic cheating (Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner, and Rideau 2010)—as a means of meeting performance targets.

Summary

A host of federal and state policies, as well as private ventures, have marketized education over the last three decades. Advocates of market-centered reform argue that deregulation will create the competitive environment necessary to improve educational quality. Some see schools as a new sphere for profit-making, but most claim to seek social justice. An education marketplace, they claim, will close long-standing achievement gaps once and for all. While many scholars support this position, others argue that market logic is

fatally flawed. Empirical evidence is only starting to mount on the question of whether market-centered reforms actually improve schooling and teaching. Many of the reviews are mixed. Does an education marketplace offer renewed hope that the nation's public schools can act as the great equalizer? In the next section, I examine an exemplar of market-centered reforms—network charter schools—in order to begin answering this question.

MARKETIZED SCHOOLING

Charter Schools

The charter school sector emerged as the central component of the education marketplace, as the majority of states and families participating in school choice now choose charters schools. Charters are publicly funded but privately run schools, which can employ a for-profit or nonprofit status. Classified as public schools, charters are free and open to all students. Although some seek out grant monies or private contributions, all charters receive government funding, which is issued on the basis of student enrollment numbers (Green, Baker, and Oluwole 2014; Vergari 2007). While charters are technically public schools, private groups run them with substantial autonomy. Any group of citizens can apply for a charter. These groups often include some combination of parents, teachers, business leaders, and activists. If local boards approve their plans, the groups receive state and federal funds, which they use to design and manage schools as they see fit (Kena et al. 2014).

Charters are commonly mistaken for private schools, even among parents whose children attend them (Berliner and Glass 2014). This occurs for a number of reasons—all related to the fact that private groups run charters with substantial autonomy. As a result, they emerge and operate in diverse ways. Some have extraordinarily specialized curriculum.

Others implement an exceptionally standardized curriculum, complete with routine mottos and school uniforms. Further, many charters lack the staples present in all traditional public schools, including hot lunch programs, as well as school-provided transportation.³

Charter schools take on diverse structures but generally operate in one of three ways. First, *conversion schools* emerge when traditional, public schools are “converted,” or transformed, into charter schools. This sometimes occurs because the government deems a traditional, public school “failed.” After a school is converted, the same students continue to populate the same facilities, but instructional techniques and organizational patterns change.⁴ In contrast, *start-up schools* launch independently. These charters are often inspired by specific approaches to instruction, curriculum, or governance (Buddin and Zimmer 2005). They tend to be small schools with close ties to local communities (Fabricant and Fine 2015). Third, *charter networks* are professional, franchise-like organizations that open a number of start-up schools under a single philosophy (Lacireno-Paquet et al. 2002; Miron 2007). I discuss these in the next section.

Following the emergence of the first charter school in 1991, charters appeared in 42 states. They now account for more than 5% of all public schools—up from only 2% in 2000 (CREDO 2013). As the charter sector has grown, charters’ missions have become more generalized (Renzulli, Barr and Paino 2015). The earliest charters were few and diverse, but contemporary charters most often serve low-income, nonwhite students in urban areas

³ Miron (2007) characterizes these structural changes as cost-cutting measures. Eliminating school-funded meals and transportation, however, disproportionately disadvantages low-income families, and it can steer them away from charters.

⁴ Until recently, the same faculty stayed on as schools were converted to charters (Buddin and Zimmer 2005). It is increasingly common for conversion schools to fire a significant proportion of—if not all—staff (e.g., Buras 2014).

(Almond 2012; Ertas and Roch 2012). In addition, many adopt a “no excuses” approach to schooling, meaning students, teachers, and schools should accept “no excuses” for long-standing achievement gaps and must work hard to close them. Schools (mostly charters) that subscribe to this approach often implement increased instructional time, frequent student testing, and militaristic discipline policies (Carter 2000; Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Lack 2009; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004).

Charter Networks

When charter school legislation first emerged, most charters were start-up schools with strong local roots. As the education marketplace took hold, non-local groups began petitioning for charters. These groups opened charter networks rather than individual schools. Coined Education Management Organizations (EMOs), or Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), these professional, franchise-like companies now open a number of charter schools under the same organizational umbrella. EMOs and CMOs, which I call “charter networks,” can assume for-profit or nonprofit structures. Both typically function as commercial enterprises and are led by individuals with business backgrounds. Instead of building single, local charter schools, networks take on mass education. They enroll large numbers of students and open new schools each year. Every school in a charter network is virtually identical in terms of infrastructure, policy, curriculum, and pedagogy (Lacireno-Paquet et al. 2002; Miron and Urschel 2010). As of 2012, EMOs operated 36% of charters in the U.S. (about 300). The largest EMOs have 50-100 schools in their networks, and they open multiple schools each year. Their density varies by state, but EMOs are most prevalent

in Michigan, where networks run 89% of charters (Miron and Gulosino 2013), which accounts for more than one-third of the state's public school sector (MSDS 2016).

Similar to other charter schools, network schools emerge because of policies designed to create an educational marketplace. But while some independent charters specialize as niche schools, networks standardize and distribute an educational service on a mass scale. These branded companies maintain formal contracts with each school in a national network. The contracts usually stipulate that the management organization will implement a school design model, plus control major decisions (DiMartino 2014). As a result, each network creates a model for schooling and implements this model at new charters in the network. Employees at a central office build the network through tasks such as marketing, recruiting, and fundraising. Meanwhile, regional and national managers oversee schools and principals, while a variety of specialists design and evaluate curriculum and instruction (Finnigan 2007; Miron and Gulosino 2013).

Networks claim to develop particular models of schooling that work. Depending on organizational goals, these models may resurrect failing schools, facilitate student achievement, or spark social mobility. Although networks' missions vary, their policies and practices stand out as uniquely market-centered. That networks implement market-based education reforms so uniformly and successfully is exceptional, given the resistance these reforms have garnered in many traditional public school districts (e.g., Hartney and Flavin 2011; Johnston 2014; Weiner and Compton 2008). In particular, networks transform employment terms and working arrangements with the goal of improving the quality of teaching. They emphasize competition and accountability, claiming to solve long-standing

achievement gaps by attracting and rewarding excellent teachers to schools targeting underserved groups. It is critical that scholars develop understandings of how networks deploy market-centered policies and with what consequences. Exemplified at network charters, these policies are taking hold throughout the education sector⁵ as the way to increase the quality of teaching and thereby the quality of schooling. How does this look on the ground? In the sections that follow, I explore the specific, market-centered employment practices that networks implement on their quest to tackle educational inequity.

MARKETIZED TEACHING

More so than any other public schools, charter networks implement market-centered policies and practices that reshape teachers' work. As previously discussed, the ideal type education marketplace infuses competition and accountability into the teaching profession. In particular, market-centered policies limit collective bargaining and the employment protections that often result from it. Schools closely regulate and measure teachers' performance, issuing rewards and sanctions on an individual basis.

Market-centered reforms level the playing field, treating schools as autonomous organizations and teachers as individual entrepreneurs. When teaching is marketized, schools no longer have to negotiate with unions, pay teachers according to salary schedules, and terminate staff through due process protocols. Instead, schools can reward the most valuable employees and sanction or eliminate those who do not meet their expectations. According to market-centered logic, this approach benefits teachers, as well. Rather than involuntarily

⁵ Market-centered policies are also applied in other workplaces, where more scholarship documents the processes and consequences surrounding this change (Crowley and Hodson 2014; Hays 2003; Kalleberg 2012; Reich 2005).

paying union dues just to earn the same salaries as poor-performing peers, excellent teachers can get rewarded for their performance.

Some sociologists refer to market-centered employment terms as “atomizing” because they isolate workers as individuals. A burgeoning literature in the sociology of work identifies these policies and interrogates their consequences in workplaces. Crowley and Hodson (2014) identify a host of atomizing policies that employers implement outside of the education center. Three of these policies are exemplified in network charter schools. As I discuss below, these policies include those that: 1) provide hiring and firing flexibility; 2) create bonus pay and promotion structures; and 3) limit employee grievance procedures.

Competition: Teaching as an Individual Pursuit

First, charter networks utilize hiring and firing flexibility. This means that they have an unusual amount of autonomy when hiring new employees and terminating existing staff. When it comes to hiring, all charters can hire teachers with non-traditional training and credentials (Hoxby 2002). This means that they can pull from a broad pool of potential employees, rather than being restricted to individuals who have completed university-based teacher preparation programs and obtained state-issued teaching licenses. Networks often supplement hiring flexibility with short-term contracts, which offer teachers one-year positions with conditional renewal. These contracts provide firing flexibility, acting as a built-in mechanism for networks to dismiss teachers at the conclusion of any given school year (Burian-Fitzgerald, Luekens, and Strizek 2003). According to market-centered logic, networks’ hiring and firing flexibility results in high-quality teaching because schools can

recruit and retain teachers committed to their visions and capable of implementing them. Schools are also free to weed out teachers who prove to be a bad fit.

Second, many charter networks implement bonus pay and promotion structures, which encourage employees to think of themselves as individuals engaged in a competitive endeavor. About half of charters offer merit pay, awarding performance-based bonuses rather than paying according to salary schedules (Podgursky and Ballou 2001). Advocates argue that merit pay attracts excellent teachers and rewards their work. It also eliminates the possibility that talented new teachers will be terminated during lay-offs, simply because they lack seniority at a school (Hoxby 2002).

Third, charter networks typically eliminate collective bargaining and limit unionization. Even where states allow collective bargaining, individual charter schools decide whether to institute collective bargaining rights (Bulkley and Fisler 2002). The vast majority of networks prohibit collective bargaining, and only one network is unionized⁶ (Malloy and Wohlstetter 2003).

Control: Compelling Teacher Compliance

Scholars have argued that autonomy is critical to effective teaching. Autonomous work gives individuals the freedom and control to determine their own actions on the job (Choi, Leiter, and Tomaskovic-Devey 2008:428). Autonomous workers engage in a variety of tasks, decide how to tackle daily challenges, and perform independent of constant supervision (Kohn and Schooler 1969). For teachers, autonomy means using one's expertise,

⁶ Green Dot Public Schools, a nonprofit network, is the standout exception. Importantly, Green Dot's union contract includes a "no tenure or seniority preference" clause (Green Dot 2015). This suggests that the union either takes a market-centered approach or—at the very least—has agreed to one under pressure.

which is gained through education, training, and experience, to decide what is best for students. In practice, this usually involves controlling a classroom's curriculum and environment (Gawlik 2007; Lee, Dedrick and Smith 1991). Autonomy is important because it contributes to increased self-efficacy (Gecas and Schwalbe 1983) and self-esteem (Gecas and Seff 1989) among workers, and it also leads to intellectual flexibility and creative problem-solving (Kohn and Schooler 1969). Particularly in an educational context, these characteristics contribute to teachers' ability to cultivate high student outcomes through effective instruction (Collinson 1999; Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy 2000; Kruger 1997). Teacher efficacy is not fixed, but something that teachers develop over time, as they interact with students, colleagues, and supervisors in particular work environments. When organizational policies incorporate teachers into decision-making processes, staff tend to develop higher efficacy (Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong 1992).

Traditional public school teachers have historically experienced relative autonomy in their classrooms, although this varies between schools, districts, and states. Administrators, as well as external governmental bodies, have always sought to compel teachers' cooperation in the labor process (Apple 1980; Apple and Teitelbaum 1986; Connell 1985; Grant and Sleeter 1985; Hargreaves 1994). Akin to workers in other organizations and sectors, teachers hold the skilled labor power needed to accomplish organizational goals. As a result, administrators have exerted two overarching control strategies to compel cooperation with organizational rules, as well as external demands. These strategies, which I discuss in detail below, include regulative control and normative control (Coburn 2004). I also discuss how surveillance intensifies both strategies for control.

Regulative Control

Schools are large bureaucracies, or rational environments that include a detailed division of labor and a hierarchy of authority (Edwards 1979). Like similar bureaucracies, traditional public schools have historically compelled teacher cooperation through regulative control, or the imposition of mandatory rules and sanctions (Coburn 2004). Bureaucratic rules and procedures spell out rewards and punishments, as well as a standardized career progression (Edwards 1979). Teachers' work is organized through a system of bureaucratic control, in which autonomy, security, and pay are distributed rationally and hierarchically (Edwards 2007).

Although charters were initially created to free schools from bureaucratic restrictions (Fabricant and Fine 2015), networks appear to use more—if different—regulative control than traditional public schools. For instance, Gawlik (2007) suggests that network staff are subject to increased layers of regulative control, since they are accountable to not only national, state, and district requirements, but also network demands. In addition, networks use performance metrics extensively. These classification systems allow administrators to measure teacher performance in concrete, quantifiable ways that can be attached to rewards and sanctions (Colyvas 2016).

Normative Control

In contrast to compelling employee compliance with formal rules and procedures, normative control strategies encourage voluntary—even enthusiastic—cooperation. Employers encourage workers to internalize organizational goals, using a variety of techniques. Managers then extend autonomy to employees, many of whom feel responsible

for not only their own performance, but also the company's performance. In many white-collar professions, managers increase employee productivity by cultivating individual obsessions with success and failure (Courpasson 2000). For instance, Kunda (2006) found that members of the "tech" industry participate in a culture laced with competition. While motivated, skilled employees received a great deal of self-determination, they also worked long hours and report substantial stress in the name of doing good work. Paralleling other studies of professions (e.g., Jackall 1988; Stone 2007), tech workers displayed an extraordinary amount of self-sacrifice and had trouble distinguishing work from home (Kunda 2006). In such environments, workers often blame themselves for perceived inadequacies because the firm's interests and actions become entangled with their own (Casey 1999).

Normative control emerges early in many teachers' work experiences, as they are socialized into particular organizational cultures through induction and mentoring programs (Ingersoll and Strong 2011). Perhaps even more easily than in other sectors, school administrators can cultivate employee investment by exploiting teachers' humanistic commitments to their profession and their students (Ballet and Kelchtermans 2009). For instance, elite college graduates who choose to teach in urban schools often cite personal investments in social justice and change (Tamir 2009). When teachers believe deeply in a school's philosophy, they often embrace organizational norms, even when those norms require more work than they are contractually obligated to perform (Leiter 1981). In the charter sector, for instance, Johnson and Landman (2000) found that teachers were often expected to work until they achieved organizational goals, instead of for a fixed amount of

time. When teachers agree to certain values and practices, they may implicitly agree to more work, as well. As I describe in the next section, administrators monitor teachers' investment, as well as their performance, through surveillance strategies.

Surveillance

Employers intensify control by surveilling the labor process. Surveillance involves monitoring worker behavior, as well as structuring work in ways that encourage employees to monitor themselves and each other (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992). Some organizations implement technological surveillance, using cameras, location trackers, or real-time electronic logs to regulate work (e.g., Leclercq-Vandelannoitte 2011). Others use employees themselves as surveillance tools by creating work teams that foster peer accountability (e.g., Leidner 1993). In service-based organizations, employers even enlist customers in monitoring employees (e.g., Williams 2006).

Historically, surveillance of teachers most often occurs on a broad scale. Bushnell (2003:256) describes, "Schooling can be mapped as a panopticon in which teachers are in their cells, observed and monitored. Their regulators are administrators, parents, politicians, and boards of education." Foucault's (1979) panopticon is an apt metaphor, since teachers face increasing forms of surveillance from each of the aforementioned audiences (Case, Case, and Catling 2000; Hassrick and Schneider 2009; Hazi and Rucinski 2009; Jones 2004; Zeichner 2010). Technological surveillance has emerged as especially invasive. NCLB, instituted in the early 2000s, attached consequences to student test scores, but sanctions were leveled at entire schools rather than individual teachers. RTT now requires states to include students' test scores in teachers' evaluations (Fabricant and Fine 2015; McGuinn 2011).

Teachers' performance on these measures is consequential for bonuses, as well as job security (Goldhaber and Hansen 2010; Podgursky and Springer 2007). In addition, these data are increasingly accessible to the public, as news outlets, such as *The Los Angeles Times*, publish databases that allow anyone to search for and analyze the test scores attached to individual teachers (Buddin 2016).

Gaps in the Literature

Market-centered reforms have overtaken the nation's educational landscape, moving to the forefront of policy work at the federal and state levels. As part of this shift, the charter school sector has exploded in recent years, but scholars are only beginning to document and analyze the consequences of this growth. Charter networks epitomize market-centered reform because they operate according to a business ethos (Goodman 2013; Miron 2007; Renzulli and Roscigno 2007). Networks claim to revolutionize schooling by closing longstanding race- and class-based achievement gaps. On the surface, their efforts appear progressive and even radical. However, some scholars in sociology and education problematize networks' financial connections to the private sector (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Kretchmar, Sondell, and Ferrare 2014; Krop and Zimmer 2005; Ravitch 2013; Scott 2009). For example, the Harlem Children's Zone, a small but widely-praised network, informs its practice with the latest social science research and purports to challenge inequality by offering wrap-around services in low-income neighborhoods; yet, members of Goldman-Sachs sit on its board (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Kumashiro 2012). There is money to be made as networks rent school buildings, contract out services, and invest in marketing campaigns. Organizational decisions made with the aim of maximizing profit may have negative unintended consequences.

Additional research is needed to understand the inner workings of charter networks and the market-centered policies they deploy. A number of studies quantitatively analyze charter students' test scores (Almond 2012; Angrist et al. 2012; CREDO 2013; Dobbie and Fryer 2011; Gleason et al. 2010; Hoxby and Murarka 2009). Overall, results are mixed, with most studies finding no gains, or small gains, among charter school students (Fabricant and Fine 2015). Academic achievement (as measured through test scores) is a convenient, standardized measure through which to measure the success of students, teachers, and schools. However, many education scholars have argued that test scores only scratch the surface in revealing the quality of schooling (Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner, and Rideau 2010; Au 2010; Buras 2014; Heilig and Darling-Hammond 2008; Hursh 2005; Menken 2006; Neal and Schanzenback 2010; Ravitch 2010; 2013). Sociologists echo this claim, by interrogating the processes through which schools and teachers socialize students in ways that reproduce inequality (Carbonaro 2005; Diamond 2007; Golann 2015; Lareau 2003; McLeod 2010; Renzulli and Evans 2005). It is critical, then, that scholars move past debating students' test score gains and see how students, teachers, and administrators together construct the process of schooling on the ground. How does this materialize in schools structured around market-centered logic?

Charter networks intentionally reshape teachers' work, using market-centered approaches designed to increase the quality of teaching. While some empirical evidence speaks to the relationship between performance-based pay and student achievement (Dee and Wyckoff 2015; Goldhaber and Hansen 2010; Hanushek 2007; Neal 2009; Podgursky and Springer 2007), scholars know little about how charter networks harness teachers' labor

power on the ground. A rich literature in the sociology of work documents the processes through which employers attempt to compel worker cooperation (Burawoy 1979; Barley and Kunda 1992; Casey 1999; Edwards 1979; Hodson 1996, 2001; Smith 1996, 1997; Vidal 2007). A number of strategies to compel worker cooperation have been applied in traditional public schools. For instance, schools use bureaucratic rules and procedures to organize work (i.e., regulative control). Many also facilitate self-monitoring and peer-monitoring (i.e., normative control). However, market-centered reforms are fundamentally changing the organization of teachers' work, particularly in charter networks, which are often business-oriented. These reforms aim to improve teacher performance, but few studies attest to how these efforts play out beyond student test scores (Bancroft 2008; Buras 2014; Golann 2015). Scholars know that teacher turnover rates are exceptionally high among charter schools, with 30% of teachers leaving these workplaces each year (Malloy and Wohlstetter 2003). The mechanisms behind these rates deserve further attention.

THE STUDY

While scholars suggest that market-centered reform makes effective teaching more difficult (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Johnson and Landman 2000; Kumashiro 2012; Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, and Henig 2002; Ravitch 2010, 2013; Spence 2012), only a few qualitative studies speak to the processes and mechanisms that underlie these claims (Bancroft 2008; Buras 2014; Golann 2015). This dissertation adds to that literature. I explore how one charter network deploys market-centered work practices, as well as how network teachers interpret and navigate those practices. Understanding how charter practices shape teachers' experiences is critical because teacher outcomes are closely tied to school quality

and student well-being (Akiba, LeTendre, and Scribner 2007; Darling-Hammond 2000; Rice 2003). Although organizations implement market-centered work practices to increase efficiency and profit, a growing number of scholars and activists critique them as harmful to both organizations and employees. In other workplaces, similar policies correspond to more turnover, less coworker support, and worse job quality (Crowley and Hodson 2014).

Charter networks provide an ideal case for investigating market-centered workplace policy. In an era when market-centered policies are popular and gaining traction in a variety of sectors, this study sheds light on their consequences not only in the public schools, but also in other workplaces. Researchers have studied worker surveillance and resistance in routinized (e.g., assembly line) and professional (e.g., engineering) settings (Burawoy 1979; Graham 1995; Kunda 2006; Mehri 2005; Ogasawara; Pierce 1995), but examinations of these issues in “managed professions” (Codd 2005), such as teaching, are sparse (Ingersoll 2009; Williams 2005). Many routinized positions have been eliminated in recent decades, and an increasing number of workers are seeking and finding jobs in occupations that require moderate education and skill, yet carry less autonomy, prestige, and pay than the professions (Hodson 2001). It is increasingly important to study these jobs, since systems of workplace control affect the well-being of workers, as well as the efficiency and quality of the work being done.

Elementary and secondary teachers provide an especially important case study. In the era of accountability (Hursh 2005), teachers’ work is increasingly complex and demanding. This work involves teaching children. The way that teachers participate in, and defy, systems of workplace control will affect not only their own well-being, but also that of their students.

Further, teaching jobs are in the midst of significant changes, with local governments aiming to eliminate teacher tenure, to pay teachers based on performance, and to hire nontraditionally certified personnel (Ravitch 2010). Public charter schools face the fewest regulations when it comes to workplace policies (Finnigan 2007), and a growing number of students—now 1 in 20—attend them (Miron and Gulosino 2013).

Data and Organization of the Dissertation

In order to examine how schools deploy market-centered work practices and staff navigate them, I conducted a workplace ethnography of one network charter school. This research design was ideal because working as a member of the labor force provides insight into the nuances of how employers attempt to atomize and control workers, as well as how workers experience, support, and resist atomization and control. Ethnography in sociology involves conducting fieldwork through participant observation. It is an inductive enterprise, since researchers enter the field with broad interests but without specific research questions or hypotheses. As I describe in *Chapter 2*, one of an ethnographer's central aims is to construct grounded theoretical propositions that reflect the people and organizations under investigation (Charmaz 2006).

I collected data while volunteering and working at a network charter school (encompassing grades kindergarten through 8) in an urban area of the United States. My fieldwork spanned two academic years. I served in a volunteer capacity from October 2014 through December 2014. During this time, I visited classrooms, chaperoned field trips, and observed all-school events. I then worked full-time as a teacher's assistant (TA) from February 2015 through December 2015. With the exception of summer break, I was typically

in the field 35-40 hours per week. This included 6 professional development days on campus and 4 network-sponsored professional development off campus. My position as a TA afforded me substantial movement around the field site, as well as opportunities to interact with a number of teachers, TAs, and administrators. In particular, I became intimately familiar with the middle school hallway, where I assisted in more than half of the classrooms. I communicated with teachers daily and attended staff meetings weekly.

My data include written fieldnotes from 23 volunteer shifts, 154 work shifts, 3 hiring experiences, 4 off-site meetings, and 6 off-site social gatherings, totaling over 1,000 hours of fieldwork. Because I collected data covertly, I jotted notes while in the field whenever a private opportunity arose, then wrote detailed accounts following each work shift or off-site experience. As I describe in the next chapter, the majority of analyses stem from analytic coding of, as well as analytic memoing on, these fieldnotes. I also incorporate publically available documents and materials routinely available to teachers and TAs. To incorporate both individual- and structural-level explanations, I examined the personal histories and social locations of network employees, including their relationships with one another. I also considered the organizational history of the network, as well as the political and economic context that gave rise to its creation.

In *Chapter 2*, I provide a detailed look into the data and methods employed in my ethnography of a school I call Eclipse Preparatory School. I describe and contextualize the field site in *Chapter 3*, examining the structure and mission of the Academic Achievement Group (AAG), the for-profit charter network that manages Eclipse. I explore what it means to treat schooling as a business, describing how AAG brands and markets itself to “customers,”

that is, students and their parents. I also examine how AAG staffs its schools and manages its employees.

In *Chapter 4*, I argue that AAG re-conceptualizes teaching by urging staff to envision careers in education, rather than careers in teaching. Using an elaborate internal labor market, the network encourages staff to compete over promotions. I found a competitive workplace in Eclipse, where administrators quickly place staff on particular career tracks. Just as educational tracks shape students' success (Carbonaro 2005; Friedkin and Thomas 1997; Gamoran and Mare 1989), these career tracks shape employees' ability to achieve success as teachers and—later—as administrators.

Chapter 5 contrasts AAG's frontstage rhetoric with Eclipse's backstage definitions of success. AAG's public face centers on staff accountability. By all appearances, teachers follow a detailed network "blueprint" in order to achieve measurable results and facilitate customer satisfaction. While AAG's detailed blueprint helps the network establish legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan 1977), it does not connect neatly to teachers' everyday realities. On Eclipse's backstage, administrators emphasized controlling student behavior as a central measure of teaching effectiveness.

In *Chapter 6*, I examine how teachers navigate one AAG policy, which requires that staff keep students inside the classroom (i.e., avoid sending students out). AAG presented this policy as something that set it apart from conventional public schools, but implementation was precarious. Staff navigated the policy in diverse ways, following, resisting, and bending it to varying degrees. The most successful employees found ways to comply creatively. I develop the concept of *creative compliance* to describe employees'

tactics for adhering to formal policies in strategic ways, which allow them to bend the rules and cope with job-related challenges yet adhere to workplace policy.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss the implications of market-centered education reform, and I propose avenues for future research. I argue that market-centered reforms facilitate a re-conceptualization of teaching. Policymakers and school leaders attempt to use competition to fundamentally alter the nature of teachers' work, including their career trajectories. My analyses suggest that this shift sparks negative unintended consequences on the ground. In particular, I suggest that market-centered reforms can be implemented in ways that reproduce—rather than challenge—race- and class-based inequalities.

CHAPTER 2 DATA AND METHODS

A bipartisan community of legislators, reformers, and scholars present the education marketplace as a solution for long-standing inequality in the educational sphere (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Johnston 2014; Kumashiro 2012; Ravitch 2010). As part of the effort to marketize education, a growing number of charter school networks “scale up” exemplary models of schooling. Yet, scholars are only beginning to understand how networks’ bold promises unfold. An emerging literature in the sociology of work suggests negative consequences result from the very workplace policies that network charters implement (Crowley and Hodson 2014; Hays 2003; Kalleberg 2012; Reich 2005). Specifically, sociologists warn that, in other workplaces, market-centered policies degrade job quality, undermine collegiality, and catalyze organizational instability (Crowley and Hodson 2014). These outcomes would be particularly concerning in an educational context; however, scholars have yet to study these processes in network charter schools.

I set out to examine how market-centered policies and practices unfolded at one network charter school. Informed by participant observation, I asked the following research questions:

1. How does AAG deploy market-centered work practices?
2. What meanings do staff give to market-centered work practices?
3. What does high-quality teaching entail at Eclipse?
4. How do Eclipse staff navigate network policy on the ground?

A network charter school provides an ideal context for examining these questions, since networks are hubs of market-centered reform. These organizations promise to offer a superior educational “product.” State and federal governments grant them unprecedented autonomy to structure schools, under the condition that they demonstrate results every few years. While legislators and researchers know a great deal about students’ standardized test scores within charter networks and outside of them (Almond 2012; Angrist et al., 2012; Bulkley and Fisler 2002; CREDO 2013; Dobbie and Fryer 2011; Gleason et al., 2010; Hoxby and Murarka 2009; Jeynes 2012; Silverman 2012; Weitzel and Lubienski 2010; Zimmer and Buddin 2006), less is known about how market-centered reforms unfold on the ground. To sociologists, charter networks also provide an ideal context for understanding how market-centered policies and practices shape contemporary workplaces.

RESEARCH SITE

The site for this study is Eclipse Preparatory School.⁷ The school employs about 50 people and enrolls approximately 600 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Eclipse opened its doors approximately 15 years ago, under the management of a long-standing EMO called the Academic Achievement Group (AAG). AAG has been in operation for about two decades, and it manages approximately one hundred charter schools nationally. Like many management organizations, AAG is very involved in all operations at Eclipse (Miron 2007). The network manages hiring and workplace policy, as well as a number of aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

⁷ As described later in the chapter, information that could be used to identify this study’s setting or participants, including names, descriptors, and internally or externally published material, has been disguised to protect anonymity.

Throughout my time at Eclipse, I learned a great deal about AAG. This is not simply because I was paying attention to the network as a researcher, but also because AAG was heavily involved at Eclipse. In-state AAG representatives visited Eclipse a few times per month, and out-of-state AAG representatives visited a few times per semester. In addition, the Eclipse staff spent time at two other AAG schools for professional development seminars.

Student Characteristics

Eclipse's students reflect broader demographic trends among charter schools (CREDO 2013; Ertas and Roch 2012). Eclipse enrolls more nonwhite and low-income students than nearby traditional public schools.⁸ Parents enroll their children at Eclipse via public lottery. Eclipse administrators assign potential students numbers, and students are selected by lottery until all open spaces are filled. While some charters have more applicants than spaces available (Ravitch 2013), Eclipse typically enrolls all who apply. Once a student matriculates at Eclipse, he or she automatically has the opportunity to continue in subsequent grades without re-applying. While a majority of student movement occurs at the beginning of the year, students continue to enroll and unenroll as the school year progresses.

I chatted informally with a number of students and staff during my fieldwork as to why families choose Eclipse. Students rarely had much to say in response to my questions about how they ended up at Eclipse. Some attended the school since kindergarten. Others started later but followed a sibling or a cousin. For these students, attending Eclipse seemed natural—as if it was not a choice at all. A smaller portion of students enrolled for the first

⁸ As a whole, however, AAG's students have slightly higher SES than the average public school student.

time as middle schoolers. Some of these students told me bluntly, “My parents told me I had to come here.” Others described learning of the school through cousins or neighbors, or seeking it out after being “kicked out” of another school. These explanations mirror prior research. Families often learn of charter schools through their networks (Holme 2002; Lareau 2014), and some seek them out purposefully after their children have been suspended or expelled from conventional schools (Kim, Kim, and Karimi 2012).

I rarely asked staff members about how students come to attend Eclipse, but many brought it up without prompting. One TA expressed a sentiment that I heard from many staff members. She said, “Eclipse is truly an alternative school. We will take *anybody*. You’ve been kicked out of five schools? We’ll take you. Because we need kids!” While charters have been criticized for screening out so-called difficult students (Jennings 2010; Lacireno-Paquet, et al. 2002), Eclipse teachers and administrators identified a contrasting tendency. As I discuss in the *Chapter 3*, AAG pressured Eclipse administrators to maximize enrollment numbers. Many teachers perceived that Eclipse accepted and retained students that other schools refused to, as a result.

Staff Characteristics

Eclipse employs more nonwhite teachers and administrators than the average charter school, as well as the average traditional public school. Approximately 40% are nonwhite, and African American is the largest group represented. As is typical among teachers (Simpson 2004), the vast majority are women. School administrators, including the principal and vice principals, are roughly split between men and women. This pattern diverges somewhat from traditional public schools, where men are promoted into high-status

administrative positions⁹ most often (Pounder 1988; Simpson 2004). However, demographic patterns at Eclipse mirror typical norms when it comes to positions lower—and higher—in the organizational hierarchy. For instance, all of Eclipse’s TAs are African American,¹⁰ and the vast majority are women. In contrast, almost all of the higher-level AAG administrators¹¹ are white, and a majority are men.

Eclipse teachers have more education and more experience than charter school teachers on average. For instance, each of the permanent teachers who worked in Eclipse’s middle school during my fieldwork graduated from accredited teacher preparation programs. Approximately one-third held master’s degrees in education-related areas. While many were new to Eclipse, only one middle school teacher was new to the teaching profession. In fact, most had five or more years of teaching experience, often in the traditional public school sector. I cannot speak to whether these levels of education and experience are representative of the AAG network more broadly (because the data are not available to me). However, a vice principal at another AAG school shared with me her plans to hire mostly first-year teachers at a new network school. This approach would save money, since AAG starts teachers with no experience at a lower rate. I anticipate, then, that Eclipse teachers are more educated than other AAG teachers, particularly compared to the newest schools in the network.

⁹ The education sector is characterized by “positional” occupational segregation, with women overrepresented among elementary principals and central office staff (Pounder 1988).

¹⁰ I was the only white TA.

¹¹ This calculation includes the AAG administrators who visited Eclipse, led regional professional development meetings, or sent network-wide communications during my fieldwork.

Staff come to work at Eclipse in diverse ways. More than half originate from the state where Eclipse is located, but a number move to the local area near the school within a few years of becoming employed at Eclipse.¹² As seems to be the case with many staff at schools serving low-income students of color, the vast majority do not live in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the school (McWilliams 2016).¹³ Many teachers cited disenchantment or burnout with their previous jobs in traditional public schools. Particularly during their first days at Eclipse, these teachers expressed excitement about AAG's mission and approach. Others found their jobs more by happenstance. For instance, the lone first-year teacher in the middle school began browsing for jobs online after finishing a Peace Corps term abroad. She used a mobile device to apply to Eclipse while lifeguarding, and she received a phone call from an AAG recruiter the next day.

DATA COLLECTION

Gaining Access

I gained entry to the field site by volunteering at a variety of grade levels. I applied online through a standardized process that involved filling out paperwork and passing a background check. I called and came in to follow up on my application. I introduced myself to two front office workers as a graduate student and former high school teacher. Drawing on the organizational knowledge and pull common among secretaries (cf. Kanter 1977), these staff members proved instrumental in connecting me to Eclipse's teachers and vouching for me as someone who could be trusted. I became a familiar face at Eclipse, not only because of

¹² To my knowledge, only one teacher and one TA moved from another state specifically to start a job at Eclipse.

¹³ Although any student may enroll in Eclipse, the vast majority of students I spoke to reported that they live within a ten-minute drive.

the school's relatively small size, but also because I was hyper-visible as a floating volunteer (and later as the sole white TA). I visited a number of classrooms, which were located in different areas of the school. I also worked with students in the hallway, where other students and staff regularly passed. I felt that I developed rapport quickly with the teachers whom I assisted, in part because they invited me back often. They also entrusted me with tasks that required some skill, such as grading tests and teaching new material. Aware of my teaching background, many staff members encouraged me to apply for a job as a substitute or permanent teacher. As I discuss in *Chapter 4*, this encouragement was not unique but a staple of the Eclipse workplace; those deemed qualified experienced encouragement and pressure to move up in the AAG organization. A few months after I began volunteering, a Teaching Assistant (TA) quit, and the principal offered me the newly open position in a voicemail. I came in for an interview the following morning, received a formal job offer that afternoon, and accepted the same day.¹⁴

The TA job is posted as a position that requires some college and involves assisting teachers to aid in the network's mission of providing quality education to all students. Everyday work as a TA involved a variety of tasks and was characterized by a great deal of inconsistency. I came to understand my job as not only assisting teachers, but also helping deal with whatever crisis arose on a particular day. For example, I often acted as a substitute teacher when classrooms were unexpectedly without an adult in charge. Some eccentric tasks included driving to get a student who missed the bus, taking care of a student who fainted during class, lesson planning for classes whose teachers quit, checking students' answer

¹⁴ One month prior to this job offer, the principal offered me a teaching position. I declined this offer and asked her to keep me in mind for a TA position.

bubbles on standardized tests, and monitoring hallway behavior during important visits. On a typical day, though, I visited a variety of middle school classrooms (as assigned), and I assisted teachers as directed. My primary duties included assisting students one-on-one and teaching students in small groups. I also taught in a lead teacher capacity for two periods of the day.

Data

Data collection occurred over the course of two academic years. I volunteered at Eclipse from October 2014 through December 2014. During this time, I visited classrooms, chaperoned field trips, and observed all-school events (encompassing grades kindergarten through 8). I then worked full-time as a teacher's assistant (TA) from February 2015 through December 2015. With the exception of summer break, I was typically in the field 35-40 hours per week. This included 6 professional development days on campus and 4 network-sponsored professional development off campus. My position as a TA afforded me substantial movement around the field site, as well as opportunities to interact with a number of teachers, TAs, and administrators. In particular, I became intimately familiar with the middle school, where I assisted in more than half of the classrooms. I communicated with teachers daily and attended staff meetings weekly. I also attended informal social gathering outside of work.

I chose to conduct a covert study in an effort to analyze one AAG workplace without putting participants' livelihoods at risk. Covert workplace ethnographies are more common in sociology than in other fields because sociologists often set out to observe what they characterize as a "contested" labor process (Edwards 1979). Sociologists recognize that

employers and employees often maintain divergent interests. While employers want to harness workers' labor power in ways that maximize profit, employees seek to achieve dignity through their work in ways that often stray from organizational mandates (Hodson 2001). As researchers call attention to these divergent interests, it can put workers—especially the most vulnerable workers—at risk (Smith 2001). I decided that remaining covert was the best way to mitigate the risk that my focus on Eclipse as a workplace might put participants' jobs in jeopardy. For instance, Eclipse administrators evaluated teachers on a regular basis, and their formal evaluations were consequential for the renewal or non-renewal of staff members' employment contracts. I observed teachers engage in subversive acts during and after their evaluations, for instance hurling insults and offensive gestures at their supervisor when his back was turned. Remaining covert provided the strongest protection against administrative discovery and retaliation related to such acts.

My data include written fieldnotes from 23 volunteer shifts, 154 work shifts, 3 hiring experiences, 4 off-site meetings, and 6 off-site social gatherings, totaling over 1,000 hours of fieldwork. In the broadest sense, ethnographic fieldnotes are written accounts of a researcher's participation in a particular social world. Fieldnotes are descriptive, but they are also interpretive. Ethnographers select and frame observations as they commit them to paper, and no two ethnographers inscribe interactions and conversations in exactly the same way (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I understand this as a key strength of qualitative research, since it encourages qualitative scholars to practice reflexivity during and after fieldwork, as they grapple with their participation in meaning-making processes. Because the “instrument,” or the ethnographer, is so obviously a part of data collection, readers are inclined to notice

and interrogate how she shapes goings-on in the field. Of course, this is something that occurs in other types of research, as well, since scholars participate in the construction of reality as they ask certain questions, and collect and analyze data in particular ways in order to answer their questions.

During data collection, I wrote extensive fieldnotes at the end of each work day. I often recorded jottings on my password-protected cell phone during the day, to help jog my memory when writing fieldnotes in the evening. My fieldnotes include thick description of the setting and participants, as well as interactions and conversations that unfolded throughout my time at Eclipse. I paid particular attention to “the indigenous meanings and concerns” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995:11) of participants. Although I began with a broad interest in workplace dynamics, I did not enter the field with a specific set of hypotheses. My fieldnotes reflect this orientation, and they grew more focused on particular workplace processes as I spent more time in the field.

Data also include AAG’s publically available documents, as well as materials routinely available to the network’s teachers and TAs. In order to protect the anonymity of the network, its employees, and its students, I have disguised identifying information with multiple layers. At the organizational level, I use pseudonyms for not only schools, but also positions, programs, resources, and techniques that could be identifying. I also obscure information gleaned from publically available documents and internal emails. Similarly, I use pseudonyms for all staff, parents, and students, and I take care to conceal other identifying information. This includes, for example, the grades and subjects in which teachers work, as well as the extra-curricular activities and hobbies in which students participate.

I conducted preliminary analyses, including initial coding and analytic memoing (discussed below), during data collection. Although data collection and analysis often occur simultaneously in ethnographic research, I made the decision to prioritize writing detailed fieldnotes. I made this decision because of time constraints, since I was in the field 35-40 hours during a typical week. Still, selective coding and regular memo-writing provided a way for me to hone emerging themes and thereby focus data collection. I utilized weekends and school vacation days for these tasks. Although I was unable to definitively identify a point of saturation (given that my analyses were preliminary), I decided to end data collection when I gained a solid grasp of emerging themes. I then sought distance from the field site in order to become more fully immersed in the analytic process.

I exited the field on extremely positive terms with my coworkers and supervisors, covert status intact. I submitted a letter of resignation three weeks prior to my end date. In the letter, as well as in subsequent conversations with coworkers, I cited increasing responsibilities as a graduate student and research assistant as my reason for leaving. Although unexpected, my resignation did not come as a major surprise to my supervisors and colleagues. In fact, when I walked into the principal's office with a letter in my hand, she predicted my intent, saying, "No! Ms. Brooks, don't tell me!" As I explain in *Chapter 4*, Eclipse has an exceptionally high employee turnover rate, with many staff leaving or changing positions *during* the school year. Because my end date coincided with winter break, I had the opportunity to train the individual who replaced me.

DATA ANALYSIS

Theoretical Orientation

My analyses are grounded in the symbolic interactionist perspective. It is through meaning and action that people in the everyday world create, maintain, and reproduce, as well as resist and transform social structure. People act based on the meanings that they give to things, and those meanings are constructed through social interaction (Blumer 1969; Schwalbe 2008). From this perspective, understanding how market-centered education reform unfolds requires becoming immersed in a school's environment. Feminist theory is important in this regard because it provides tools for understanding how power operates at the micro level. In keeping with Kleinman (2007), I examine how language reproduces and challenges inequality. As I listened to conversations, interacted with participants, wrote fieldnotes, and conducted analyses, I tuned into legitimating discourse, false parallels, boundary work, neoliberal rhetoric, and patterned absences (Kleinman 2007; Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Methodologically, my research is informed by a grounded theory approach (Blumer 1969; Charmaz 2006), which means that I used ethnographic data to formulate theoretical claims. I developed strategies for data analysis based on two key principles. First, I understand research as an interpretive process. Any theory is an interpretation of the social world, rather than an objective picture of it (Charmaz 2006; Kleinman 2007; Miller 2000). According to Becker (2001:319), a central aim of qualitative research,

is not to prove, beyond doubt, the existence of particular relationships so much as to describe a system of relationships, to show how things hang together in a web of mutual influence or support or interdependence or what have you, to describe the connections between the specifics the ethnographer knows by virtue of having been there.

In short, this dissertation is not an attempt to capture an objective snapshot of a social setting.

I do not, for instance, aim to contribute to the debate about whether charter schools outperform public schools (cf. Buckley and Schneider 2009; Fabricant and Fine 2015). Instead, as Becker (2001) explains, I aim to show how things work and connect at one network charter school in hopes of contributing something meaningful to how scholars understand these workplaces and others similar to them.

Following Charmaz (2006), the proposed study constructs an interpretation of AAG's market-centered work practices, as well as the meanings that Eclipse employees give to those practices and the processes through which they navigate them. I look for how and why participants build particular versions of reality. To address my research questions, I pay special attention to market-centered work practices. These include policies concerning hiring, firing, pay, and promotion, but they also include processes of atomization, control, and surveillance. I describe these systems and interrogate them, examining how employees uphold, resist, or modify them each day. I also note how workers engage in identity work and boundary maintenance (Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Second, working in a grounded theoretical tradition involves assuming that the research process is a social production. Participants construct identity and meaning through their interactions, and researchers not only interpret, but also participate in, this performance (Charmaz 2006; Holstein and Gubrium 2002). This is an especially important point because I

was a central—if covert—participant in everyday life at Eclipse. My goal during data collection was to observe and experience workplace control at Eclipse, rather than to guide what went on at the school site. As such, I collected data before surveying the literature. This approach encouraged me to seek out emerging themes, rather than to test hypotheses deduced from previous literature. I also grappled with my participation in the meaning-making process. Workplace interactions would have unfolded differently if I had not been there. I “wrote myself into” fieldnotes by practicing reflexivity (Burawoy 1998). Practically speaking, this meant I wrote fieldnotes that acknowledged my feelings and my participation in constructing reality. I also wrote analytic memos that grappled with the consequences and meaning of that participation (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). For example, as I discuss in *Chapter 4*, supervisors and coworkers sometimes asked me to provide information about teachers’ performance, based on my experiences as a floating TA. In my fieldnotes, I regularly considered why people sought out this information, as well as how my responses shaped others’ reputations.

While I took an inductive, reflexive approach to fieldwork, I did not arrive at Eclipse as a blank canvas. I was drawn to this organization because I had a particular set of curiosities based on my previous teaching experiences. I joined Teach For America¹⁵ after graduating from college, hopeful that I could contribute to the mission to ensure that, “one day, all children in our nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education” (Kopp 2003:174). I was placed in an urban charter school, managed by a nonprofit charter

¹⁵ Teach For America is a nonprofit organization that recruits “corps members” who agree to teach for two years in schools that serve low-income students. Please see Brooks and Greene (2013) for a more extensive review of this program, as well as critical reflections on my participation in it.

network, and I taught there for two years. I began my work extraordinarily hopeful that, with the school's unique structure and my steadfast dedication, we would shrink race- and class-based achievement gaps in one urban community. I worked alongside caring administrators and teachers, and I interacted with extraordinary students and parents. However, I developed a nagging feeling that I was selling these families short. I participated in what many scholars call a "no excuses" approach to schooling (Carter 2000; Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Lack 2009; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004), but I feared that my "college-ready" students would be ill-equipped to think independently when forced to navigate actual college-level courses. Further, I worked painfully long hours and reached a level of "burnout" (Farber 1991) by the end of my second year. I was not the only one—teachers came and went at a much higher rate than I ever noticed during my own public schooling. As I left teaching and entered graduate school, I remained deeply committed to understanding and challenging inequality, and I also had a newfound curiosity about the work that goes on at network charter schools.

Analysis

Analyses stem primarily from analytic coding of, as well as analytic memoing on, ethnographic fieldnotes. Through a careful coding process, qualitative researchers begin to develop emergent theories that explain their data in meaningful ways. The overarching goals of coding include: 1) analyzing actions and events while paying close attention to the context in which they occur; and 2) generating theoretical abstractions and propositions that transcend one particular setting (Charmaz 2006:46). I coded by hand, as well as with the help of NVivo software. First, I conducted initial coding, describing compiled data line-by-line, as

well as incident-by-incident. Since the immediate goal was description, I used action words to ensure that initial codes were grounded in the data. I then generated codes from the resulting descriptions.

I utilized a variety of in vivo codes, or special terms that participants use. In general, researchers use in vivo codes as a tool that help them remain grounded in data, since these codes invoke participants' meanings (Charmaz 2006). For me, in vivo codes were especially helpful for scrutinizing taken-for-granted meanings. Given my previous teaching experience, I was familiar with some insider terms common among AAG staff. This helped me develop rapport with participants, many of whom invited me to participate in conversations and goings-on that were typically off-limits to outsiders. However, my level of familiarity also meant that I might take for granted aspects of the social setting ripe for analysis. To address this, I regularly wrote memos that explored the meanings of in vivo codes, the connections between them, and their broader implications.

During initial coding, some codes appeared frequently, and some stood out as especially significant. For example, "moving" and "leaving" highlighted the degree to which employees changed positions within, and left, the network. I began memoing about these codes, using memos to both describe the codes and to explore the conditions under which they emerged. Analytic memos, which are written at every step of data analysis, are an essential component of building grounded theory. Charmaz (2006:73) describes that analytic memos, "catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue." Memo-writing helped me hone emergent themes and move into focused coding. I defined a set of focused codes that were

more abstract and conceptual in nature. For instance, I created “mobility” and “turnover” codes to capture the meanings that administrators and employees assigned to moving and leaving, respectively. I then recoded the data, and my memos moved to an even greater level of abstraction. I examined links between focused codes, in order to organize them, contextualize them, and examine their consequences. For instance, examining “admin control” and “peer control,” in conjunction with “mobility” and “turnover,” helped me generate the concept of *career tracking*. As discussed in *Chapter 4*, career tracking describes the processes through which staff are channeled into—and participate in the construction of—particular career pathways.

My analyses suggest that AAG’s market-centered policies and practices shape the Eclipse workplace in important ways, which center on competition. Given widespread job insecurity and low entry-level wages, Eclipse teachers compete for membership on informal career tracks. Many staff become heavily invested in tracks because membership shapes access to information and autonomy critical to achieving success—and dignity—in the workplace. My analyses also demonstrate that controlling student behavior is a central measure of teacher quality on Eclipse’s backstage. Teachers manage behavior effectively in part by complying creatively with AAG directives, rather than implementing policies as written. Creative compliance hinges on access to behind-the-scenes information, as well as the ability to mobilize support.

CHAPTER 3

SETTING: THE BUSINESS OF SCHOOLING AT AAG

The Academic Achievement Group's (AAG's) national director, Rory, flew in to visit Eclipse on the first day back for professional development, before school had officially started.¹⁶ While teachers, vice principals (VPs), and principals almost exclusively call one another by their last names, Rory always introduced himself by his first name. Today, he waltzed into the middle-school science lab—the school's largest classroom, which serves as the setting for large meetings—for a 2:30 all-staff meeting. Rory (white man, late 40s) wore dark grey slacks with a matching plaid shirt and purple tie. As usual, his sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, and there was no evidence of a blazer. He commanded attention when he entered the room because he towered at least four inches above most staff, looked slightly more dressed up than everyone else, and wore a huge smile. He immediately shook hands and patted backs, greeting some people he appeared to know and others who were new faces.

AAG's regional director, Pat, walked in tow. She was a familiar face at Eclipse because she visited monthly to tour the school and to meet with the principal and VPs. Today Pat (white woman, early 50s) wore navy blue slacks, matching heels, and a lacy white shirt with a yellow blazer. Like Rory, she stood out as more dressed up and outgoing than others in the room. As the last few staff members slipped in, Principal Ryan (black woman, early 50s) asked for everyone's attention. We had all resumed our positions on plastic chairs, sitting behind long tables. The tables were arranged in a U-shape, opening to a large whiteboard on

¹⁶ As described in *Chapter 2*, information that could be used to identify this study's setting or participants, including names, descriptors, and internally or externally published material, has been disguised to protect anonymity.

the classroom's front wall. Ryan introduced Rory and Pat, who were now standing off to the side.

Clearly well-practiced, Rory and Pat assumed positions on either side of an AAG PowerPoint presentation that was projected on the whiteboard. Rory clasped his hands together and said how excited he was to be at Eclipse. He gave a slight nod to a teacher handling the projector remote and transitioned seamlessly into the first slide of the presentation. Rory narrated while a video showed cartoon students entering a school. Adults followed them, and dialogue balloons identifying their positions—teachers, VPs, principals, regional directors, and national headquarters—appeared then dissipated. Rory said, “Research shows that teachers are the most important thing in determining student achievement, followed by administrators—not skin color, not free and reduced lunch, not parents.” He spoke in exact time with the video, as the scene changed to the cartoon students proudly waving test results to their teacher's celebration. Pat added the take-home point: “Hope is not a strategy.”

If there is one maxim that communicates the AAG approach to schooling, it is that *hope is not a strategy*. As the subject of popular books (e.g., Gee 2008; Page 2003) and widely distributed TED talks (e.g., Talbot 2014), this motto communicates a fundamental business principle. Organizations and their employees cannot sit contentedly nor wander aimlessly and simply hope to achieve success; instead, they must act strategically, purposefully, and consistently. At AAG schools, this means subscribing to the network's carefully crafted blueprint for schooling. Advertisements that detail the organization's history characterize AAG as a network committed to providing quality schooling by implementing

business principles. Founders argue that a business orientation is critical for creating schools that produce results. In particular, they contend that AAG schools close longstanding academic achievement gaps by remaining accountable to customers and communities.

The market-based approach to public education has garnered increasing support from national media, as well as state and federal legislators (Goldstein 2011; Johnston 2014; Ravitch 2010, 2013; Swalwell and Apple 2011). Market-centered policies facilitate competition among both schools and teachers. In a deregulated education sphere, supporters argue, the market's invisible hand rewards the best teachers and schools, forcing all to improve in order to survive. Charter networks have emerged as a fast growing and highly praised exemplar of market-centered reform (Archbald 2004; Renzulli and Roscigno 2007). While journalistic accounts paint charters as the solution to the nation's educational woes (Mathews 2009; Moskowitz and Lavinia 2012; Tough 2008), scholars know less about how their market-based approach looks on the ground and how it affects the day-to-day organization of work. What does it mean to treat schooling as a business?

In this chapter, I describe and contextualize the setting for my fieldwork, exploring how AAG applies a business ethos in its policies and practices. I first outline AAG's organizational layout, sketching the network's office structures and staff hierarchies. Second, I describe AAG marketing practices by showing how the network uses its vision statement to create brand recognition, recruit new families, and cultivate customer satisfaction. Next, I delve into network hiring practices and employment terms, noting how AAG policies differ from those of traditional public schools. I conclude by analyzing how network norms for

employee evaluation create an organizational culture focused on separating “good” teachers from “bad” teachers.

STRUCTURING THE BUSINESS

AAG is a long-standing for-profit network¹⁷ that has been in operation for about two decades. The organization runs approximately one hundred charter schools nationally, and the number of schools under its management grows each year. AAG is based out of a national headquarters, where the organization employs hundreds of individuals in a wide variety of administrative positions. Mirroring large corporations in other industries, AAG appoints people to divisions in accounting and finance, board relations, business intelligence, facilities, grants and fundraising, human resources, information technology, measurement and accountability, marketing, and talent acquisition. The organization also contains education-specific departments, such as admissions, curriculum and assessment, coaching and learning, and school quality.

Outside of national headquarters, AAG opens and manages schools in a variety of states. AAG’s business plan involves creating a prototype of schooling then “scaling up,” or opening new, identical network schools each year. The network argues that, by scaling up, it rises to meet parents’ demand for high-quality education. This is particularly important in historically underserved communities, where low-income students of color have long attended underperforming public schools. As a result, clusters of AAG schools emerge in urban areas. Multiple network schools surface in each state to which the network expands.

¹⁷ As discussed in *Chapter 1*, I use the term “network” to describe professional, franchise-like companies, which open a number of charter schools under the same organizational umbrella. Scholars also refer to these organizations as Education Management Organizations (EMOs) or Charter Management Organizations (CMOs).

Because charter school laws are state-specific, management organizations such as AAG open many schools in states with laws and conditions favorable to charter expansion (Renzulli and Roscigno 2005).

For AAG, organizational growth includes both increasing the number of schools in the network and increasing the number of students at each school. All AAG schools enroll students in kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8). Upon their founding, however, network schools often serve only a cluster of elementary grades. AAG then adds one grade per year until the school reaches a K-8 structure. A principal runs each AAG school, and the principal supervises three or more VPs. Each VP oversees a particular group of teachers or teachers' assistants (TAs). For instance, an AAG school might appoint a middle school VP, who oversees operations and supervises teachers for grades six through eight.

Because AAG manages each school in its network, high-level administrators from national headquarters or regional hubs frequently visit schools. The presence of AAG higher-ups feels constant not only because they visit often, but also because they sometimes drop by unexpectedly. Staff become most familiar with regional directors, who schedule day-long visits at least monthly. Regional directors oversee a handful of AAG schools in a bounded geographic area. In addition to overseeing school quality, they directly supervise principals. National directors' visits occur less often but draw more careful preparations and staging. National directors oversee all network schools, and they supervise regional directors. Depending on a school's location, they may fly in for a visit. As a result, principals and VPs structure a school day—sometimes a series of days—around their presence. On the day of a

national director's arrival, one-third of classrooms might be staffed by substitute teachers to allow for standout teachers to participate in meetings and professional development.

AAG maintains a vast internal labor market, and the organization both allows and encourages staff to move between positions frequently. Occasionally, movement is lateral. More often, staff achieve upward mobility within the organization. This is by design. AAG runs specific training programs, through which staff obtain the certification necessary to qualify for higher-level administrative positions. Employees typically move up one level at a time; teachers become VPs, VPs become principals, principals become regional directors, and regional directors become national directors. Variations of this promotion path allow teachers and VPs to pursue educational specialties instead of school leadership positions. For example, employees might become specialists, then directors, of curriculum, instruction, or assessment. Later in this chapter, I discuss how AAG positions its internal labor market as a counterbalance to relatively low teacher salaries.

BRANDING THE BUSINESS

Companies use branding to distinguish their products and services to customers and other audiences. Brands include aesthetic elements, such as recognizable names, logos, symbols, and slogans. For organizations that offer services, brands also include experiences (Keller and Lehmann 2006). When one steps into any AAG school, certain commonalities produce a particular experience. This is intentional; each school is an extension of AAG and therefore a reflection of the brand. Physically, AAG schools appear almost identical. Although building structures differ somewhat, floors in any AAG school are carpeted with maroon, indoor-outdoor rugs and tiled with beige, vinyl squares. In empty hallways, two

stripes on either side of the floor draw one's eye. Each one foot in width, they span the length of the hallway and squeeze groups of students into straight lines as children transition between classrooms. AAG paint colors, signage, logos, and mottos are consistent across network schools. Visitors immediately confront walls decorated with the AAG color palette: maroon, slate, teal, and beige. These colors also appear on AAG's website and in its printed material. Here, bold block letters proclaim AAG students as "super scholars." An adjacent wall of well-known university mascots reminds visitors of the network's goal for its students: college readiness.

A main office lies at the forefront of each AAG school. Two front doors house the Eclipse office—one providing a first stop for visitors and the second providing office access for those already inside the building. Immediately inside the main office stand two, expansive L-shaped desks. Arranged side-to-side with only a small entryway between them, they create a customer-service counter of sorts. The counter displays business cards for its occupants—the administrative assistant, Ms. Thomas, who is a white woman in her fifties, and the admissions coordinator, Ms. White, who is a black woman in her forties. On the customer side of the counter, upholstered maroon chairs line the wall, interrupted by a coffee table displaying AAG literature and Eclipse printouts. Ms. Thomas checks in visitors by checking their licenses and noting a destination on hand-printed name badges.

Beyond the customer greeting area, a shared wall hides a teacher resource space. A busy copy machine and printer radiate heat, opposite a counter with dwindling office supplies and a row of locked cabinets. In the far corner of the resource space stands a skinny wooden table. On Eclipse's most put-together days, this table holds four, evenly-spaced laptops, and a

laminated sign on AAG letterhead declaring it a “Customer Work Station,” where parents can complete online satisfaction surveys by an approaching deadline. To the left of the resource area stand two offices, which house the Eclipse principal and one of four VPs.

In addition to establishing a consistent physical appearance for each AAG school, branding involves creating a standardized culture. Once staff and visitors clear the main office and enter the school building, they get a sense of this culture. Ideally, Eclipse schools feel orderly and purposeful. Students wear uniforms, leave their backpacks and jackets in their lockers, and walk in straight lines along a hallway stripe. In the classroom, students assume “scholarly position.” They sit up straight, two feet squarely under the desk and rooted on the floor, and they fold their hands on the desktop when not busy carrying out a teacher’s directions. Teachers configure their whiteboards in identical ways listing the day’s standards, objectives, and schedule. They also display student work on bulletin boards in the hallway. Each board is carefully manicured with not only the best student work, but also rubrics that measure and prove students’ achievement of specific goals.

Of course, students, teachers, and administrators sometimes fail to implement branding as AAG intends. In the middle-school section (grades 6-8) of Eclipse, for instance, I often watched students flood the hallway, while especially energetic pre-teens dashed through the crowd. AAG treats such deviations as infractions to be remedied. They send network officials to offending schools more often. Regional and national directors consult with school leaders and provide extra, school-wide professional development. A team of specialists sets up camp in the teacher’s lounge, examining problems and designing solutions for problems related to school culture, student retention, and remedial instruction. The scope

and intensity of AAG's involvement at Eclipse provides a stark contrast to external administrators' approach at traditional public schools. Among conventional school districts, board members and central-office employees are rarely so hands-on (Kerr 1964). AAG's involvement facilitates surveillance, which is designed to ensure that schools across the country provide a consistent, standardized experience for customers. As I discuss in more detail in *Chapter 4*, surveillance also provides information used to promote and terminate employees.

MARKETING THE BRAND

As a for-profit company dependent on voluntary enrollment, AAG allocates significant energies and resources toward marketing. The network's marketing strategies capitalize on broader policies and rhetoric that characterize business-oriented charter schools as superior to traditional public schools (Johnston 2014). AAG emphasizes two central messages in its organizational vision. First, the network argues that it produces results in the form of student achievement, and it does so more efficiently and consistently than traditional public schools. AAG claims that it offers a high-quality product to education consumers, enhancing student achievement over time by constantly measuring and pursuing outcomes. Its no-excuses attitude about obtaining results sets it apart from traditional public schools. Consequently, the organization presents itself as singularly equipped to close long-standing achievement gaps.

National Director Rory plays a major part in AAG's marketing. In an effort to advertise a new AAG school, Rory gave a televised interview to a local news program. He

explained the AAG approach by emphasizing that the organization provides a higher quality service than its competitors:

One of our greatest achievements—something we’re really proud of—is that we provide an excellent service to families. AAG schools do better than neighborhood schools three-quarters of the time. So, for a fifth-grade student, that student usually grows by 100% over the course of a year. He goes from a fifth-grade reading level to a sixth-grade reading level, for example. At AAG, our fifth graders grow more than that. Nationally, our students grow more than 125% every year. Those are the kind of results that we are achieving at AAG. We are making sure that students get a higher quality education than they would at the school down the road.

Articulating AAG’s overall marketing message, Rory argues that the network achieves results better than traditional public schools. He begins by talking about “growing” students, as measured by test scores. He uses the concept of growth to make two important contentions. First, Rory argues that AAG students learn more per year than what is expected in a single year’s time (i.e., 125% growth). This is a reference to closing achievement gaps; if students who start out behind their peers are to catch up, they must learn more per year than would otherwise be expected. Rory’s use of such specific data on student growth reminds the audience that AAG is results-oriented. Second, Rory makes two explicit references to traditional public schools. He suggests that AAG schools outperform local schools, and children get a better education with AAG than they would elsewhere. Rory not only suggests that the achievement gap is a problem worthy of attention, but he also contends that AAG is better equipped to solve it through its business-like focus on measurable outcomes.

The second message central to AAG’s vision holds that its superiority stems from a unique, standardized method of schooling. The network maintains tight control over all school operations, including who staffs schools and how they carry out their work.

According to AAG, this guarantees results; instead of handing over the goal of student achievement to teachers, the network designs, implements, and monitors its own system for achieving results, weeding out staff who are not on board. In the same radio interview, Rory explained AAG's ability to mold staff into effective teachers:

We know that extraordinary teachers are what make our schools great. AAG teachers are really outstanding, especially at [names of two local schools]. And we really support teachers. We invest in them—we bring in experts to consult with them, we do a lot of professional development. All of our teachers meet with their vice principals and principals every week. So the teachers are reflecting and improving and identifying ways to make sure that every AAG student is growing.

Rory characterizes AAG teachers as extraordinary largely because of the network's unique, results-oriented work environment. He reveals that AAG mandates not only professional development, but also weekly, one-on-one sessions with supervisors. This provides a stark contrast to the mainstream media's framing of traditional public school teachers as lethargic, overpaid employees protected by tenure (Swalwell and Apple 2011). Rory describes AAG teachers as "reflecting" and "improving" through one-on-one sessions but hints that the weekly meetings are evaluative; staff meet with supervisors, rather than colleagues, to discuss improving their teaching and thereby student performance.

Recruiting and Retaining Customers

AAG's branding and marketing reflect efforts to recruit new customers. Customers include students and their parents. Similar to a fast food restaurant or a big box store, the network designs its schools so that consumers can expect a consistent product no matter where they go. The national AAG marketing and recruitment divisions employ a number of specialists, associates, coordinators, and directors, charged with identifying and sourcing

leads. Potential customers in communities with AAG schools encounter advertisements in print, broadcast, and electronic forms.

At the regional level, recruitment specialists work with handfuls of schools. Jessie oversaw Eclipse, as well as two AAG schools nearby. She is an energetic white woman in her late thirties. Jessie spent days holed up in the Eclipse teacher's lounge, where she strategized how to boost low enrollment numbers. She sent out all-staff emails and spoke at staff meetings, attempting to uncover interesting and inspiring things teachers were doing that the network could "pitch to the media." She recruited staff to help her assemble Eclipse-themed treat bags that were later distributed at local events, such as youth sports games. Advertising also involves controlling negative publicity. For instance, Jessie led a focus group at an Eclipse professional development, and the group generated an idea for "Internet soldiers." Whenever a negative review of Eclipse emerged on social media, a group of parents and staff flooded the Internet with positive reviews.

At the school level, Ms. Thomas and Ms. White fielded daily phone calls from parents wondering about enrolling their children at Eclipse. Passersby regularly heard them explaining the process, namely that Eclipse is public and enrollment is free. Ms. White handled individual visits, which occurred frequently and year-round. She toured prospective students and their parents around the school building, always stopping by a few carefully selected classrooms as she pointed out students wearing uniforms and TAs providing extra help. AAG also harnesses existing customers' energies. For example, Eclipse teachers sent network-authored fliers home with students, asking parents to provide contact information

for other interested families. Classes that provided the most leads won ice cream parties, and AAG promised Wal-Mart gift cards to families whose references led to enrollments.

Equally important to the organization is retaining existing customers. For students already enrolled in AAG schools, both network and school administrators emphasize customer satisfaction. Keeping customers satisfied is critical for the network in a very concrete, financial sense. AAG receives federal and state funding based on the number of students who enroll in each network school. The organization loses money if it fails to fill available spaces, or if students leave. Enrollment and matriculation numbers are a constant concern for the organization because charter school attendance is completely voluntary. Because no students are assigned to AAG schools (e.g., according to their neighborhood's district), the network purposefully recruits its student body. Those who decide that they are unhappy at Eclipse can arrange a transfer to their zoned traditional public school at any time.¹⁸

Adopting corporations' focus on providing a satisfying customer experience, AAG implements a number of initiatives designed to keep parents and students satisfied—at a minimum, satisfied enough to stay with the network. At the school level, such initiatives aim to keep parents informed and involved. Eclipse communicates with parents through regular electronic, print, and telephone announcements. It also offers a variety of face-to-face meetings designed to make parents feel heard and influential, such as informal gatherings with the principal and periodic customer satisfaction surveys. Eclipse administrators

¹⁸ Mid-year transfers does not necessarily work the other way around. If a charter school is at full enrollment, it is not legally obligated to consider new applicants until its annual public lottery. In contrast, traditional public schools must accept students throughout the year.

encourage parents to participate in the Parent-Teacher Association, as well as volunteer for tasks like proctoring standardized tests. On the academic side, Eclipse advertises biweekly progress reporting and one-on-one conferences. While the bulk of formal customer satisfaction targets parents, all AAG schools also attempt to build school pride among students. Eclipse has daily, student-led announcements, weekly assemblies, and other school events, such as a slushy truck and a bouncy house for students who achieve certain academic and behavioral milestones.

In addition to school-level initiatives, administrators encourage teachers to actively facilitate customer satisfaction. For instance, Principal Ryan, a black woman in her fifties, sent this reminder in an all-staff email:

Please remember to focus on great customer service! You should be connecting with parents and students, and part of that is being near your [classroom] door [at designated times]. Building relationships is key. Call parents now with good news. I can't emphasize that enough. Build support before you have to make the difficult calls home.

Principal Ryan outlines a concrete AAG expectation that Eclipse VPs push regularly. Teachers must stand at their classroom doors before school and between class periods, making themselves available to students and parents. She also mentions a common piece of wisdom among veteran educators. She encourages teachers to establish positive relationships with parents *before* they have to make negative communications, for instance after disciplining students. Although this tip is well known among teachers in a variety of school sectors, Ryan hints that it is especially consequential at Eclipse. If negative interactions with teachers frustrate customers, parents may pull their children out of Eclipse and hurt AAG's bottom line.

Although AAG does not make public its retention data, I gathered that Eclipse's retention efforts were only somewhat successful. A handful of students in each grade left Eclipse at various points during the school year. Even more left at year's end. Among both students and teachers, a major topic of discussion during the last week of school was which students were leaving and which were returning. Students' staying and leaving was of special concern to staff because AAG administrators make decisions about staff positions and classroom structure based on "the numbers." For instance, high mid-year transfer rates plagued one Eclipse grade level. In response, national headquarters directed Eclipse administrators to merge three classes into two. Although this move was met with discontent from students and teachers, it saved the network money while still guaranteeing customers the advertised student-teacher ratio.

STAFFING THE SCHOOLS

Traditional Public Schools

AAG contends that its market-oriented style of schooling is good for students and teachers alike. Its hiring practices differ markedly from those of traditional public schools. Here I first discuss how conventional public schools are staffed. In the next section, I explain AAG's market-centered approach to staffing.

Traditional public schools hire teachers as full-time, permanent employees. "Permanent" means that, in the absence of district-wide layoffs or serious allegations of misconduct, teachers routinely keep their jobs with each subsequent school year. Historically, traditional public schools require that beginning teachers hold certain credentials, including a Bachelor's degree from a state-approved teacher education program at an accredited college

or university, as well as a state certification in the appropriate grade level (grades K-6) or subject matter (grades 7-12). After two to three years, many public school teachers become eligible for tenure, or a more officially permanent post that confers additional job rights (Ballou and Podgursky 1997).

Consistent hiring practices often emerge in public school districts due to the legacy and continued involvement of unions in public education. In addition to providing educational resources, legal assistance, and employment advice to their members, unions often engage in collective bargaining with schools. A common product is a contract that spells out qualifications for new hires, as well as restrictions on tasks, conditions, and hours (Kerchner 1986). Even in states that outlaw public sector collective bargaining, unions may influence employment terms through “meet and confer” agreements with employers (Freeman and Han 2012b). A number of conservative state legislatures recently rolled back states’ protections for public sector unions, using the 2008 global financial crisis and state budget woes as an impetus for reform (Freeman and Han 2012a). Still, 36% of public school teachers were union members in 2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016). Large public school districts remain accustomed to conceptualizing teachers as a group of similarly qualified and skilled workers with shared interests. They negotiate hiring procedures and employment terms with this in mind.

Traditional teachers’ salaries and raises follow specific, publicly available schedules. Starting salaries correspond to credentials and experience. Staff then receive predictable raises as they accumulate teaching experience, complete advanced degrees, or obtain special certifications. The state, district, and union (if one exists) jointly negotiate the amount of

teachers' salaries. For instance, states typically provide a "base salary" for teachers and other school employees. Individual districts then provide "local supplements" that increase the bottom line. If a district is unionized, the union may periodically negotiate for a greater base or supplement, especially as job requirements or costs of living change (Ballou and Podgursky 1997; Dee and Wyckoff 2015).

While a probationary period often precedes tenure, it is rare for administrators to systematically weed out so-called bad teachers. While only tenured teachers are formally protected by law, even beginning teachers typically receive due process in the face of serious allegations of misconduct or underperformance. When teachers are terminated in the public school sector, it is most often as a result of budget cuts or enrollment declines. In these cases, seniority traditionally dictates the order of lay-offs (Goldhaber and Theobald 2013).

Charter School Networks

AAG presents itself as an alternative to traditional public schools, arguing that its business-based approach allows it to better facilitate results-oriented schooling. A major assumption underlying this approach is that teachers must be hired, developed, surveilled, reprimanded, and rewarded in new ways. First, charters hire teachers on a much more individual basis. In addition to charters' autonomy, limited collective bargaining in the charter school sector enables this practice. Only 12.3% of charter schools reported collective bargaining agreements in the 2009-2010 school year. This percentage stands at less than 10% at network charters (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools 2011). Because networks are independent management organizations, their teachers are not subsumed into preexisting unions or collectively bargained contracts, as some teachers at non-network charters. While

network founders can institute unions, or teachers can organize to negotiate contracts, little collective action has materialized (Price 2011). On networks' part, this may be purposeful. Unions and collective bargaining tend to limit how organizations hire and fire employees, as well as structure work (Hoxby 1996; Kerchner 1986; Price 2011). Networks' market-centered approach hinges on autonomy in these areas.

Charter hiring practices reflect an assumption that good teachers come from a variety of training backgrounds, and stringent, bureaucratic credentialing requirements sometimes get in the way of hiring the best people. Because they do not face strict hiring regulations, non-unionized charters are more flexible with the credentials they require of new teachers. On average, fewer charter teachers hold degrees from state-approved teacher education programs (Bulkley and Fisler 2003). They also possess grade-level or subject-matter certifications less often (Hoxby 2002).

Many charter networks utilize short-term contracts negotiated on an individual basis and renewable only on the company's terms (Malloy and Wohlstetter 2003). Under these arrangements, employees must be invited back at the end of each school year. Contract renewal is hardly an inevitable formality, and this is purposeful on the organization's part. Network blueprints for schooling rely on particular definitions of good teaching. These blueprints require employees capable of understanding and executing them with steadfast commitment. From the organization's perspective, not everyone will be a good fit for the network, and incompatible staff should have the freedom to pursue other passions. From workers' perspective, losing one's job is a looming possibility. Further, along with the vast majority of charter networks (Price 2011), AAG teachers are not unionized. Instead of

signing on as permanent employees, AAG teachers sign one-year, renewable contracts. By evaluating employees yearly before extending employment, AAG communicates that no individual worker is entitled to a job because of past performance or union protection. Instead, workers must constantly strive for excellence as defined by AAG.

Although charter schools are public, the government does not require that they disclose staff pay rates, nor pay according to schedules. Even when a charter school is technically encompassed within a traditional public school district, teachers and administrators at the two locations may earn substantially different salaries. Business-minded networks, including AAG, understand collectively bargained salary schedules as inefficient and restrictive. They assume highly qualified individuals avoid or leave teaching to seek out careers that will reward their productivity with merit pay and vertical mobility (Hoxby 2002). In the absence of union-led contract negotiations, individual schools and networks have a great deal of autonomy in deciding what to pay teachers. As a result, salaries vary substantially between states, and many teachers negotiate salaries at their time of hire (Malloy and Wohlstetter 2003).

While AAG salary information is not public, I learned pay rates for a variety of Eclipse teachers by talking to them about the hiring process, including their salaries and raises. Mirroring the typical charter, Eclipse pays low teacher salaries, relative to similar public schools in the area (see *Table 1*). Based on my deductions, beginning teachers at Eclipse make an average of \$6,675 less than teachers with the same education (Bachelor's) and experience (0 years) in two nearby, traditional public school districts. Because traditional teachers' salaries follow schedules, the differential shrinks somewhat as Eclipse teachers gain

a few years of experience. However, teachers with 1-2 years of experience still make an average of \$5,525 less at Eclipse than they would at nearby schools. Pay disparities grow among teachers with more education and experience. For example, Eclipse teachers with master’s degrees and ten years of experience makes an average of \$13,075 less than comparable teachers in traditional public schools. Overall, because AAG salaries do not follow schedules, many Eclipse teachers receive the same salary, despite substantial differences in education and experience.

Table 1. Eclipse Salary Differentials Relative to Local Public School Districts*

	Public School A	Public School B	Average Diff
Teachers’ Assistant (BA ⁺)	- \$1,750	- \$22,000	#
Teacher (BA, no experience)	- \$7,550	- \$5,800	- \$6,675
Teacher (BA, 1-2 years experience)	- \$6,350	- \$4,700	- \$5,525
Teacher (MA, 10 years experience)	- \$14,100	- \$12,050	- \$13,075

*All salary differentials are rounded to the nearest \$50 to protect schools’ anonymity.

⁺While Public Schools A and B require that TAs hold a BA, AAG only requires some college.

[#]Public School B pays TAs and beginning teachers at the same rate. This is not typical (Giangreco, Broer, and Edelman 2002), and the average differential is not calculated due to the outlier.

Although AAG offers relatively low base pay, it advertises a number of other monetary benefits to working for the network. In a long-term sense, AAG appeals to potential teachers by encouraging them to imagine careers in *education*, rather than careers in *teaching*. Little existing research speaks to promotion structures at charter schools, but I found evidence of extensive promoting-from-within at AAG. Administrators encourage teachers to conceptualize their jobs as careers that hold infinite promotion potential within the network.

Over the short term, AAG offers incentives, such as performance-based bonuses. About half of charters use a similar strategy of implementing merit pay instead of scheduled

raises (Podgursky and Ballou 2001). Charter advocates argue that merit pay attracts excellent teachers and rewards their work. Norms for allocating raises vary by charter school, but most networks offer performance-based bonuses rather than automatic raises (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Miron 2007; Podgursky and Ballou 2001). Most returning employees at Eclipse receive at least small raises each year. AAG apportions an amount to Eclipse, and the principal divides this amount to allocate raises.

AAG also instituted a pilot program for increasing teacher retention, offering a one-time \$1,500 bonus for returning teachers. Further, the network awards small gift cards at staff meetings, offers catered breakfasts and lunches monthly, provides a coach bus to all off-site professional development meetings, and supplies a host of gifts and raffles throughout the school year. Teachers have the option of taking on after-school tutoring for up to four hours per week at a pay rate of \$20 per hour.

AAG advertises a number of nonmonetary benefits to working for the network. First, AAG's mission draws many teachers. This mission centers on offering quality education to all students, but especially to low-income students of color, who may enter school achieving below grade level. This is a proven strategy for attracting employees, since charter teachers often report accepting lower pay for a chance to work with like-minded colleagues toward an important goal (Johnson and Landman 2000).

AAG also appeals to teachers—particularly experienced teachers, who have more base-salary earning potential elsewhere—by emphasizing particular standards for student behavior and parent participation. Teachers who quit their jobs in the traditional public school sector often say they left because of frustrations in these areas (Friedman 1995;

Grayson and Alvarez 2008). AAG advertises not only smaller schools and smaller class sizes, but also a strict behavioral code. Students wear uniforms, teachers implement standardized behavior management techniques, and administrators know all students by name. Beyond these network guarantees, potential teachers may perceive an ease to working with AAG students and parents. While students are assigned to conventional public schools, charter applicants seek out the network. The choice to enroll one's child in a charter school reflects a certain degree of participation, as well as commitment to the school's philosophy. In addition, charters are notorious for weeding out so-called problem students (Bancroft 2008; Jennings 2010). At AAG both parents and students sign a network-specific code of conduct upon enrollment, which provides the basis for dismissing non-compliant families if necessary.¹⁹

Further, AAG schools provide teachers who have school-aged children with the opportunity to enroll their children in school at their place of work. Students voluntarily enroll in AAG schools, rather than being zoned for and assigned to them. As a result, teachers who live in a multitude of neighborhoods and cities may enroll their kids in the network. The schools serve grades kindergarten through eighth grade—a much wider range than typical public schools. In some cases, this arrangement even eliminates teachers' need for childcare because children hang out in their parents' classrooms before and after school. Overall, teachers' children can easily attend network schools, from kindergarten until high school.

¹⁹ Some charter schools use these contracts liberally (Becker, Nakagawa, and Corwin 1997). During my tenure at Eclipse, however, the school was reluctant to lose students. To my knowledge, administrators used the AAG contract to channel out a student in only one case.

MANAGING THE STAFF

Traditional Public Schools

At traditional public schools, teachers have historically enjoyed at least bounded autonomy, or the opportunity to use their expertise to decide what is best for students. In practice, this usually involves controlling a classroom's curriculum and environment (Gawlik 2007; Lee, Dedrick and Smith 1991). Administrators typically trust that certified teachers have the education, training, and experience necessary to make content and instructional decisions and to respond to student needs appropriately. As a result, employees pursue desired outcomes and establish themselves as effective teachers in a variety of ways.

Evaluation of traditional public school teachers has changed over time. Administrators, especially principals, have long been responsible for evaluating teachers. However, their power to dismiss alleged underperformers was restrained. Administrators had to prove just cause and perform due process in order to terminate employees (Dee and Wyckoff 2015). Economists targeted this arrangement as inefficient, calling for new forms of evaluation that measure teacher effectiveness with student achievement data (Ballou and Podgursky 1997; Hoxby 2002). These demands gained steam with the adoption of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, when mandated federal testing allowed policymakers to analyze achievement across schools and demographic subgroups. A growing, bipartisan movement supported performance-based teacher evaluation, and some wanted these measures to inform merit-pay measures that would replace schedules and tenure. In 2009, the federal Race to the Top (RTT) initiative crystallized these sentiments, requiring that schools

use test scores to measure teacher effectiveness to qualify for federal grant money (Ravitch 2013).

Despite pushes for increased scrutiny of teaching effectiveness, public school evaluation remains more localized than standardized. Some schools incorporate student test scores into teacher evaluations, while others focus on more holistic measures of teacher performance. These measures are works-in-progress across the board. Even schools that offer merit-based bonuses typically follow traditions for salary schedules and tenure (Dee and Wyckoff 2015). For example, traditional public school teachers might be given poor evaluations due to low test scores, but few are fired as a result of those evaluations alone. There are exceptions; most notably, during her time as Chancellor of Washington, D.C. Public Schools, Michelle Rhee terminated hundreds of teachers and school leaders because of alleged poor performance (Dee and Wyckoff 2015). However, she met significant pushback and resigned from the position after three years (Ravitch 2013). Even in extraordinary cases, then, high-stakes, performance-based evaluation of teachers is far from normal in traditional public schools; instead, it is controversial and contested.

Charter School Networks

At AAG schools, teachers enjoy substantially less autonomy. The network has carefully crafted a host of best practices, to which all teachers and schools subscribe. The network uses internal data analysis and research to develop what I call a “blueprint” for effective teaching (see *Chapter 5*). This is an extension of its business philosophy. Identifying and disseminating best practices encourage all network teachers to behave in ways that AAG believes will efficiently produce desired student outcomes. The model of

good teaching is meant to streamline the production of these outcomes. It also aids in AAG's branding goal, since network schools operate in relatively identical ways when all staff subscribe to specific, standardized work practices.

The content of AAG's model of good teaching is the subject of the next chapter. In a broad sense, the model reflects a major decrease in teacher autonomy compared to the traditional public sector. Network mandates govern the physical layout of classrooms, down to the configuration of each teacher's whiteboard. AAG also determines what is taught and how. When it comes to subject matter, the network requires certain textbooks and emphasizes the state standards most heavily tested in each content area. The nature of instruction is substantially routinized, as well. AAG expects teachers to use network-approved strategies for structuring lesson plans and responding to students.

In contrast to traditional public schools, constant, performance-based evaluation of teachers is a fundamental pillar of AAG schools. The emphasis on evaluation stems from the organization's business ethos. Being results oriented means frequently evaluating employee quality, including employees' adherence to the organization's model for how work should be conducted. Of course, AAG employees do not uniformly and consistently follow the model of good teaching as the network intends. A major priority for the organization is distinguishing between employees who are committed to the model and implement it effectively, versus those who are uncommitted or ineffective. In short, AAG administrators constantly distinguish between "good" and "bad" teachers. National and regional directors do this with abstract rhetoric, by talking broadly about what good teachers do. Principals and VPs, who interact with teachers more closely, participate in the concrete sorting of good and

bad teachers. They label staff as effective or ineffective with the formal evaluations, as well as informal boundary work.

AAG administrators implement staff surveillance to an extent that is atypical among traditional public schools. They observe and evaluate teachers and TAs on a weekly basis. They sit in on classes for varying lengths of time—sometimes ten minutes, occasionally for an entire 90-minute period. Some observations are planned and announced, while others are surprise pop-ins. VPs conduct the vast majority of observations, and they observe those staff members under their charge, such as middle school teachers or TAs. VPs follow a series of AAG rubrics in order to evaluate the teachers whom they observe. The criteria on AAG rubrics are extraordinarily specific and span a number of pedagogical categories. The most widely understood rubric is an electronic, AAG-authored checklist, which includes more than 100 skills.

VPs conduct weekly, evaluative meetings with teachers to discuss their performance. Although the AAG evaluation outcomes (e.g., weekly observations, weekly meetings, evaluation submission) are rigid, VPs enjoy some degree of discretion in how they complete the evaluation process. For instance, one Eclipse VP concealed the fact that he was evaluating teachers according to the 100-skill AAG rubric. Another VP was not only transparent about the existence of the rubric, but also allowed teachers to choose which skills to demonstrate during specific observations.

AAG's power to promote or terminate staff undergirds the organization's ongoing evaluation of teachers. Although teachers at traditional public schools face increasing scrutiny from administrators and external audiences, the weight behind this scrutiny varies.

At AAG schools, evaluations from administrators, colleagues, and customers directly influence teachers' job security and advancement prospects. Actually terminating staff members was saved for the most extreme circumstances at Eclipse, but it occurred at a greater frequency than at traditional public schools. For instance, two people (one teacher, one TA) were officially terminated during my fieldwork. A third person (a VP) was not officially terminated, but was forced to resign.²⁰

Eclipse's turnover rate stood at approximately 50% in each of two school years that I conducted fieldwork. Some staff left their positions because they were promoted within the organization. The majority left the organization all together by resigning. A great deal of turnover occurred during the school year, rather than at the end of the year. Although data on AAG turnover rates is not public, I inferred that high turnover rates are typical of AAG schools. I met staff from other AAG schools at regional professional development meetings. Colleagues from these schools relayed stories of movement and leaving that mirrored trends at Eclipse. I also observed personnel change from one regional meeting to the next. During each round of introductions to new people, many staff shared with the group that they had just started or were still in their first or second year at an AAG school.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I described how AAG uses business principles to guide its policies and practices. The organization's structure mirrors that of for-profit companies in other industries. Hundreds of employees at a national hub run schools in a multitude of states, opening new spokes each year. AAG's marketing division uses a vision statement to create

²⁰ These instances do not account for another handful of staff who quit voluntarily but may have faced non-renewal or termination if they had not first left. I discuss this process further in *Chapter 4*.

brand recognition, recruit new clients, and cultivate customer satisfaction. The business-based model of schooling garners increasing praise from national media and state legislatures. However, researchers know little about how it unfolds on the ground.

In response to academic and political critiques that paint traditional public schools and their teachers as failing, AAG's employment terms diverge from historical norms in public education. This reflects a fundamental shift in how legislators, schools, and publics conceptualize teachers. According to AAG's business-based model of schooling, teachers are not experts in need of professional autonomy, but workers in need of molding and monitoring. The network does not carefully select teachers with particular credentials or training, but accepts a wider variety of employees. This reflects a belief that a range of individuals can commit to the AAG model and implement it effectively. The network is not looking for teacher "professionals" in the traditional sense. It wants employees who are willing to carry out its vision statement, rather than employees who expect professional autonomy or collective bargaining rights.

AAG evaluation structures communicate a sink or swim philosophy. Workers must perform in the short term, rather than develop over the long term. The organization demands that staff execute its model of good teaching immediately and consistently. Further, AAG has institutionalized the monitoring of employees' adherence to the model. The evaluation system provides a way to weed out teachers who do not meet expectations, not only by documenting their flaws, but also by establishing a push-out mechanism. Unrestricted firing power attaches concrete consequences to this evaluation process. Unlike traditional public schools, AAG can easily rid itself of employees whom it identifies as a poor fit. The network

balances low starting salaries and poor job security with in-network promotion potential. But what are the consequences of encouraging teachers to prove their commitment to the AAG model, only to be promoted out of the classroom? I delve into the implications of this approach in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 4 COMPETING ON AAG'S CAREER LADDER

On my first day of work, I arrived thirty minutes before the school day began and reported to VP Adams, the first of three VPs to serve as the TA supervisor during my fieldwork. As VP Adams printed out a schedule for me to follow, I was surprised to learn that Eclipse's TAs often teach classes of their own for at least a few periods each day. I would be taking over two remedial classes taught by Mrs. Gaston, a TA whose transfer to another grade level corresponded with my arrival. In light of two TAs recently quitting, Gaston requested and received a transfer to a different grade level. Near the end of the day, I finally got a chance to ask Gaston for more information about the classes that I was supposed to teach. I described in fieldnotes,

I planned for another 5 or 10 minutes, and then Mrs. Gaston [black woman, mid-50s] came in. I told her that I had a few questions, and I asked, "How do you know what to teach?"

She smiled and said, "Oh, I lesson plan myself for the elective classes."

Still very confused about what I was being asked to do, I asked, "Are they actual classes?"

Gaston seemed a little bit confused by my question but replied, "They are."

I continued, "So how do you figure out what standards to teach, or what content to teach?"

Gaston began to show me how to log onto the AAG website, where the network lists all of the standards for each grade level. I tried to ask additional questions to get more specific answers, but Gaston just continued to emphasize that she creates everything for the class. She makes the worksheets, she makes the test, she decides what books they read. They started the year with a fairytale and fable unit, which they thought was going to be easy, but it wasn't because it was all grade-level reading. *Raisin in the Sun* is the first book that they've started.

I was kind of frustrated and overwhelmed that Gaston couldn't give me a more specific answer as to how I was supposed to plan for and teach this class. It seemed like she just wanted to emphasize that she knew what she was doing, and she created all the stuff for the class. And I'm thinking, "Well if you have done all the stuff for the class, can you share with me?" But I wasn't sure what else to say so I thanked her profusely.

Then, I asked if she had the [students'] parents' contact information that I could have. She said, "I do have it, but you should get it yourself." I was literally shocked when she said this. I cannot believe that she told me to get it myself! Apparently she saw the shock on my face because she added, "Let me tell you why. If you get it from the students themselves, they will know you're serious instead of thinking that you got it from the warden." As if this was all for my own good, she added, "You can use the sheets you had them fill out today and frame it as something positive... You know how to put a positive spin on it." Then, Gaston headed for the classroom door and added, "You can talk to me after tomorrow because I'm sure you'll do that [get parent info] tomorrow." I said, "And maybe I'll compare the numbers with yours to see if they're the same." She laughed and agreed.

Gaston offered selective help on my first day. Earlier in the day, she offered to secure my belongings, and she gave me permission to use the books that she had purchased. During this interaction, she tutored me on AAG's website. However, Gaston was protective of information that she created and gathered during her time at Eclipse—information much more central to the work of teaching. She did not (and would not in the future) offer to share worksheets, assessments, lesson plans, or parent contact information.

Gaston's selective mentoring illustrates a broader pattern that emerged at Eclipse. Staff do not succeed or fail together as team members united under a common mission of educating Eclipse's students. Instead, they compete as individuals. For new employees, this means proving oneself worthy of investment. Staff must prove to colleagues that they possess the skills and drive to do what the job requires. For me, that meant I was responsible for getting the parents' phone numbers and planning for the classes *myself*. This is an adaptation

to a workplace where jobs are demanding, competition is fierce, and people come and go frequently.

In this chapter, I argue that AAG has re-conceptualized the teaching profession, encouraging network employees to pursue careers in education, rather than careers in teaching. By infusing an extensive internal labor market with culture- and identity-based control practices, AAG incites competition among staff. On the ground, Eclipse teachers and TAs are assigned to informal career tracks that steer them toward promotion, plateau, or turnover. Administrators communicate track membership and treat employees in ways that correspond to placement. However, staff members actively reinforce—and occasionally challenge—track boundaries. I conclude by discussing the implications of structuring teachers' work around competition rather than collaboration.

RE-CONCEPTUALIZING THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Eclipse's competitive culture starts at the organizational level. AAG encourages its employees to think of themselves as individuals, who possess infinite potential to advance within the organization. This arrangement is a stark contrast from the traditional public school sector, where teachers are perceived—and often perceive themselves—as a collective interest group (cf. Kerchner 1986). Traditionally, teaching is a career. Teachers pursue higher degrees and participate in professional development toward the end of developing their craft (Borko 2004). A select few move up into administrative positions, and this is most common among men (Pounder 1988; Simpson 2004). In addition, teachers often fight collectively to be recognized as career professionals, who are deserving of the status, compensation, and

autonomy associated with comparably skilled occupations (Bacharach, Bamberger, and Conley 1990; Kerchner 1986; Troman 1996).

AAG has re-conceptualized teaching. Instead of understanding teaching as a long-term career, network leaders encourage employees and recruits to imagine careers in *education*. AAG's corporate structure creates unique opportunities for promoting employees within the network. AAG employs substantially more administrators than traditional public schools, and the number of positions grows annually as the network expands. For example, AAG schools employ an unusually large number of VPs, who oversee grade levels and supervise TAs. Some AAG schools also employ teacher coaches, who mentor staff. As discussed in *Chapter 3*, AAG's national headquarters employs a host of administrators in divisions such as marketing and recruiting, which are nonexistent in traditional public schools.

School leaders encourage staff to achieve upward mobility within the organization. For instance, AAG administrators urge teachers to participate in network-led trainings in administration, which occur throughout the school year while classes are in session. In an email to the staff, Principal Ryan praised teachers for pursuing intra-organizational mobility. She wrote,

Congratulations to Ms. Harris, who has been appointed VP at [AAG's] Bright Star Preparatory Academy! This says a lot about our entire Eclipse staff. We are growing people into leaders! I also want to extend praise to Mr. Lang, Ms. Burnett, and Ms. Jacobson, who participated in AAG's training to become VPs in the very near future. Again, we should be proud of the leaders we are growing here at Eclipse!!

Ryan extends congratulations to one teacher who secured a promotion, as well as three others who participated in training that precedes promotion. In contrast to a traditional public

school, Eclipse does not develop teachers, but “grows leaders.” Historically, education practitioners use the vocabulary of “growing leaders” in reference to students (e.g., Schneider, Paul, White, and Holcombe 1999). With AAG’s re-conceptualization of teaching, this language gets applied to teachers’ careers. Ryan and other AAG administrators encourage staff to move up, rather than to hone their craft over time.

There is an important underside to the push for upward mobility. Although intra-network promotions are formally available to all, a small minority of AAG staff are ultimately selected to fill a limited number of administrative jobs. Importantly, Eclipse teachers deemed unworthy of upward mobility, as well as those unmotivated to move up, rarely stay with the organization for long. These staff members do not settle into long-term teaching or TA positions but instead move out of the organization after a few years—and often after only a few months. Some employees voluntarily leave, while others experience push-out or even termination. As I explain later in this chapter, administrators frame this turnover as relatively natural. In Eclipse’s competitive, sink-or-swim environment, the job is not for everyone.

CULTIVATING EMPLOYEE COMPLIANCE

Internal Labor Markets

A firm with an internal labor market (ILM) assigns promotions to current employees, who have already gained entrance into the organization. This is distinct from an external labor market, in which employers advertise open positions and hire candidates from outside the firm. Organizations often maintain ILMs in a rather informal way, by advertising positions as open to anyone but nevertheless hiring from within (Burawoy 1979). Although

this practice might seem advantageous for workers on the surface, employers implement internal labor markets as a form of regulative control (see *Chapter 1*). In other words, managers can convince workers to follow organizational rules, work hard, and respect their superiors by providing job ladders, even if each rung is only slightly higher than the last. This is closely connected to market-centered logic. Employers structure their workers' decisions such that making decisions in one's best interest works in the company's favor (Edwards 1979).

ILMs tend to lateralize conflict. This means that workers compete against their peers and avoid directing criticism or aggression towards their superiors. In the context of an ILM, peers take on the role of competitors, and superiors become potential gatekeepers and colleagues. Burawoy (1979) provides empirical support for the lateralization of conflict. He identified an inverse relationship between worker promotion and interpersonal relationships, such that workers who were promoted more often experienced less trusting coworker relationships. Instability is a key mechanism in this process. When workers move around frequently, the result is overall instability, which leads to lower levels of social cohesion. In short, workers cannot develop meaningful relationships with one another if they are constantly changing positions.

ILMs also undermine worker solidarity by operating as a form of unobtrusive control (Perrow 1986). They organize work in a way that encourages people to exert a lot of effort. Because incentives are in place, and many positions seem available and within reach, it can be less clear to workers that a boss or capitalist is in control. For example, factory workers in Burawoy's (1979) workplace ethnography directed aggression at a truck driver, who could

hinder their work if slow or unresponsive. It was unclear to the employees that the firm was responsible for their frustration, since it kept only one truck driver on shift at a time in order to cut down labor costs. Similarly, white-collar workers at a prestigious engineering firm distanced themselves from coworkers who were perceived as unsuccessful “burnouts.” They did so in order to advance their own careers by appearing on the rise. They did not, however, recognize that the firm was using a competitive climate as a tool to get more work out of everyone (Kunda 2006). While employers are often to blame for setting up a situation where workers compete for jobs, lateralizing conflict through ILMs obscures this process.

Historically, internal labor markets emerged as a part of sweeping collective bargaining agreements. Factories began offering complex job ladders that motivated employees could climb, rather than finding themselves stuck in low-paying, low-status positions. These internal labor markets lateralized conflict and compelled compliance, but, from employers’ perspective, they still had one key weakness. Employers found it difficult to rid themselves of workers who resisted the internal labor market, since job ladders were accompanied by collective bargaining that provided for a host of other worker protections.

AAG implements an internal labor market with added sophistication. First, given the relative absence of unions and collective bargaining among network charter schools, AAG enjoys enormous hiring and firing flexibility compared to the corporations where internal labor markets first emerged. Absent bargaining agreements and other forms of collective resistance, AAG can easily push out or fire those who resist the labor process or challenge company interests. As a result, AAG can use promotions, in combination with firing

flexibility, to compel staff to comply with organizational directives (Gordon, Edwards, and Reich 1982).

In addition to cutting employees off from the collective, AAG encourages staff to think of themselves as entrepreneurs, capable of pursuing opportunities *outside* of the network. In an all-staff meeting, Principal Ryan revealed that staff cannot be faulted for pursuing career opportunities within and outside of the network, even if this means leaving mid-year.

Ryan announced, “[An elementary teacher] will be leaving us because she has a great opportunity elsewhere.” She didn’t mention what the opportunity was but continued, “She was so nervous to tell me and said she feels so bad for leaving. But if I had such a great opportunity—” Ryan silently waved goodbye to the room, to indicate that she would take the opportunity in a heartbeat. Then Ryan added, “If you have the opportunity to move up, move up.” This emphasized a message I received during my interview, when Ryan said, “My job is to help move people up.”

The principal’s framing bolsters AAG’s conceptualization of employees as “free agents” who should pursue their own interests over the long term. This logic taps into a broader trend in white-collar occupations, whereby workers develop loyalty to professions rather than firms (Heckscher 1995). Importantly, it also legitimizes AAG’s status as a for-profit corporation, which generates profit in a previously insulated sphere. Just as AAG employees should pursue their own interests by seeking out career opportunities, AAG decision makers should pursue *their* own interests by choosing courses of action that maximize organizational profits (Crowley and Hodson 2014).

Neo-Taylorist Principles

Many contemporary employers cultivate worker compliance by encouraging workers to manage themselves and each other. A number of evident strategies reflect a modernized

application of Frederick Taylor's principles of scientific management.²¹ Crowley, Tope, Chamberlain, and Hodson (2010:423) argue that Taylor's approach was typified by four key strategies:

- (1) amass working knowledge traditionally possessed by workers;
- (2) reduce those techniques to a series of smaller tasks dictated by written procedures;
- (3) scientifically select workers, train them, and ensure they use established methods;
- and (4) separate from manual workers the decision-making components of work tasks, including all aspects of planning and coordination.

These principles find rather straightforward application in manual occupations. However, they also emerge in the professions, where employers emphasize worker selection and discipline, as well as employee input (Crowley et al., 2010).

Many organizations implement neo-Taylorism, first through a stringent focus on hiring the right workers and quickly removing those who are not a good fit (Crowley et al., 2010). In neo-Taylorist environments, workers experience a great deal of lateral pressure to perform—and in particular, to *outperform* their peers. When employers regularly and visibly weed out nonperformers, workers get the message that they must continuously prove themselves in order to stay afloat. What results is synonymous to a competition over “badges of ability,” or socially-constructed personal merits that individuals accumulate in order to stand out from their peers (Sennett and Cobb 1972). Some research suggests that employees

²¹ Braverman (1974) argues that scientific management was constructed around three core principles. First, managers developed an understanding of the labor process, or how employees go about their work in order to produce a good or outcome. Next, managers monopolized that understanding by making it the domain of managers to plan work and the job of employees to follow directions. Finally, managers utilized their knowledge to control each facet of the labor process. Taylor presented this organization of work as optimal for solidifying the extraction of surplus value. In essence, controlling alienated labor to provide for fast and efficient production meant leaving no room for worker discretion or autonomy. Bruce and Nyland (2011) note that Taylor was focused entirely on achieving quantifiable production goals by isolating workers and offering monetary rewards. For instance, he calculated the time that it took a high-achieving worker to complete a given task and used that information to create specific expectations for an entire group of workers, paying each based on performance (Taylor 1939).

adapt to such competitive, intensified workplaces by engaging in practices that prioritize short-term performance over long-term organizational goals, and even over ethical considerations (Jackall 2009; Sennett 1998).

Second, a number of contemporary employers embrace neo-Taylorism by welcoming worker input. This reflects Taylor's understanding that workers' knowledge is critical for improving the efficiency of the labor process (Crowley et al., 2010). Using a variety of participative schemes, employers extend conditional autonomy to workers. This autonomy can be revoked if workers fail to produce in line with organizational goals, or if colleagues call individuals' reputations into question. As a result of this structure, workers begin to obsess over their personal successes and failures, with the understanding that their achieved statuses are reversible (Courpasson 2000). At a prestigious tech corporation, for example, Kunda (2006) identified a competitive culture that involved little direct supervision but garnered a great deal of work effort. Employees put in demanding hours and boasted about their successful projects. Burnout was a common consequence, but individuals navigated this issue cautiously in order to prove their worth to the company. Some distanced themselves from people who experienced burnout, while others displayed carefully-calculated burnout signals in order to demonstrate their commitment.

AAG adopts Neo-Taylorist managerial strategies alongside its internal labor market. AAG appeals to teachers on the basis of much more than economic opportunity. First, as discussed in *Chapter 3*, the network possesses extraordinary autonomy to select and discipline employees as it sees fit. More broadly, AAG tasks its employees with closing achievement gaps and accomplishing other organizational goals by pursuing their own

interests. This is an important means through which to establish a culture of overwork, in which teachers feel compelled to voluntarily exert effort toward achieving organizational goals. A culture of overwork is common in white-collar jobs, and it is especially prevalent when work can be constructed as meaningful (i.e., helping underprivileged kids).

Workplace Consequences

AAG's re-conceptualization of the teaching profession has on-the-ground consequences that impact students and families in concrete ways. In this chapter, I focus on competition and control. As I explain in the remaining sections, AAG's internal labor market creates a competitive workplace culture, since staff must distinguish themselves as performers. But cultivating a reputation as effective and promotion-worthy requires distancing oneself from nonperformers. Mirroring what scholars have found in similar workplaces, I find that employees adapt, for instance by sharing critical information strategically rather than broadly.

Organizational instability is another important consequence that results from employees' frequent movement between positions and outside of the organization. Eclipse's teacher and TA turnover rate hovered around 50% during the two academic years when I conducted fieldwork. This rate is exceptionally high, compared to 30% among all charters and less than 10% among traditional public schools (Ingersoll 2001; Malloy and Wohlstetter 2003). Further, many Eclipse employees left mid-year, leaving classrooms staffed by substitute teachers or TAs—sometimes for months. Giving voice to a body of research that connects high turnover to poor climate and lower stability (Bacharach, Bamberger, and Conley 1990; Guin 2004; Ingersoll 2001), Eclipse students expressed their awareness that

teachers come and go. This came up one day, when I was serving as a substitute teacher. I recorded in fieldnotes,

I put on Myth Busters during lunch, and Phoenix turned the lights off. Students were chatting, but relatively quietly and in their seats. Phoenix came up to the [teacher's] desk, where I was eating, and he asked, "Are you gonna be here next year?" I said, "Yes, why?" He said he just wanted to know, but I pressed him on it. He said, "People are always leaving, so I just wanted to know."

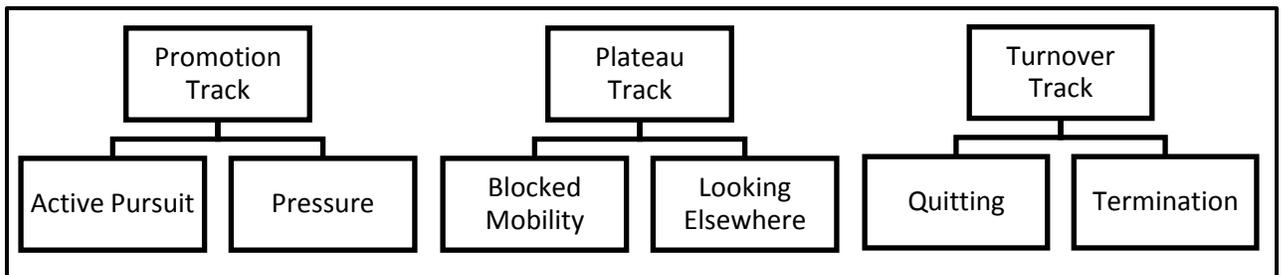
As a student who attended Eclipse for a number of years, Phoenix knew that staff came and went. His question was an especially heartbreaking moment for me,²² not only because I knew that I would be leaving Eclipse, but also because Phoenix was a particularly guarded student. Although he was outgoing, teachers knew him as a student whose trust must be gained before his cooperation would be offered. My conversation with Phoenix was not an isolated incident but something that at least five different students asked me during the time that I worked at Eclipse. With high turnover stemming from promotion, attrition, and termination, few Eclipse staff members remain in one position for long. Within this context, students learn to be wary about the longevity of their teachers.

²² Phoenix's question presented an ethical dilemma. At the time, I was unsure of how long I would continue to work at Eclipse. Still, I knew that my fieldwork would end before Phoenix's time at the school did. In the moment, I decided to lie to Phoenix about my longevity because that is what all Eclipse staff did as a matter of informal policy. When teachers and TAs gave notice, administrators instructed them to withhold the news from students until a few days prior to the resignation date. This practice was designed to aid in the management of student behavior; when a teacher divulges her plans, she relinquishes some power to students. Why should they obey someone who is leaving? Although I followed this policy when asked by Phoenix and others about my future plans, I worried that staff's routine dishonesty (including my own) exacerbated the negative effects of high turnover. Perhaps these practices taught students to be wary about the longevity *and* the trustworthiness of their teachers. While I do not believe this harm can be fully undone, I took care to have personal conversations with each student, from whom I withheld information, before I left Eclipse. In these conversations, I explained that I would be resigning in order to, "finish school and become a doctor so that I can teach college students."

TRACKING THE TEACHERS

I found that Eclipse staff were quickly channeled into informal career tracks. Similar to the educational tracks that students often follow, career tracks shape the information, resources, and opportunities available to their members. In *Figure 1*, I outline three tracks that emerged at Eclipse. They include the promotion track, the plateau track, and the turnover track. These tracks are informal in that they were neither explicitly named, nor formally assigned. However, administrators and veteran staff communicated track membership to new staff very quickly—sometimes on or before the very first day.

Figure 1: Informal Career Tracks



Eclipse’s informal career tracks are important because they infuse everyday work with competition. Given job insecurity and the race to get ahead, staff do not readily offer information and resources to new coworkers but instead withhold help until one’s membership on a particular track begins to emerge. This occurs not because Eclipse hires uniquely self-centered employees, but because badges of ability are few in the organization, and they must be earned and protected. As described at the beginning of this chapter, I received this message rather bluntly on my first day. Gaston spent years generating lesson plans and building a reputation as a no-nonsense TA. Handing over these hard-built resources to a young, white, college-educated newbie would set someone else up for undeserved

success in Eclipse's sink-or-swim environment. Of course, this is a twisted practice from a pedagogical perspective; yet, it is a reasonable adaptation in a workplace that revolves around competition. In traditional public schools, new teachers can grow into their positions, attaining scheduled raises and promotions, as well as job security (i.e., tenure). At Eclipse, staff only succeed by appearing better than their coworkers.

Promotion Track

The "promotion track" includes teachers and TAs identified as high-achieving and worthy of promotion. Some on the promotion track actively pursue upward mobility within the organization, while others receive unsolicited pressure to move up. The promotion track provides relative job security because membership offers benefits such as decreased administrative scrutiny and increased decision-making autonomy. Perhaps because administrators perceive promotion-track teachers as their future colleagues, they treat them more as friends than subordinates and give them the benefit of the doubt when problems arise. However, job security is not absolute. Informal membership can be revoked, and even administrators are sometimes fired.

Harris was a teacher who chased and achieved upward mobility during my fieldwork. A biracial woman in her mid-30s, Harris was a fourth-year Eclipse teacher with a big smile and a no-nonsense approach. She followed a traditional path to teacher certification and was pursuing a master's degree. I first met her when I volunteered at Eclipse. After only two weeks of assisting in her classroom, Harris began encouraging me to get a job at Eclipse, and she exerted her influence as a respected member of the promotion track. I recorded in fieldnotes,

At the end of the period, [Harris] thanked me again with a big smile and told me, “I want you to start working here. I was talking to Ms. Ryan [the principal] about you and how we have to get you to start working here.” She continued, “Come with me to meet Ms. Ryan, and we’ll see if they have any jobs open.” I agreed and mentioned, “The last time I looked, they had a second grade opening, and I like 2nd graders but don’t know anything about teaching them.” She said, “Oh, let’s go see,” with a big smile.

Principal Ryan was busy with a meeting that day, and I did not meet her. Nevertheless, I walked away with an understanding that Harris was a major player in the Eclipse workplace. She had already urged the principal to hire me. Later that year, when I interviewed for a TA position with Principal Ryan, it was clear that Harris had continued to advocate for me. I recorded,

[Principal Ryan] mentioned again that Harris spoke so highly of me. I said, “She is a great teacher and a pleasure to work with.” Ryan agreed, “She *is* a great teacher. I’m hoping Ms. Harris will move up into a VP position. That’s my job—helping people move up. And that will leave an open position...” Ryan paused to hint that the position would be open for *me* if I wanted it. I smiled, seriously considering it.

Harris did, in fact, land a VP job at another AAG school by the end of the school year. As Principal Ryan suggested during my interview, I also became a member of the promotion track. As a certified teacher in a TA position, I faced constant pressure to move up, although I did not actively pursue promotion as Harris and others did. Still, Principal Ryan offered me a number of teaching positions, especially as teachers quit mid-year. She even recruited other promotion-track teachers to encourage me to move up. I was barraged by advice from teachers on the promotion track on ways to pursue upward mobility within the organization.

Administrators not only communicate track membership, but also apply pressure for staff to pursue movement that corresponds to their placement. Similar to other corporations that prize upward mobility (e.g., Kanter 1977), employees not pursuing movement are seen

as stuck. Men who work in female-dominated occupations often face pressure and support for moving into higher-level positions (Budig 2002; Henson and Rogers 2001; Williams 1992), but this pressure was more generalized at Eclipse. For members of the promotion track, pressure centers on moving up. I received frequent pressure to move up, in part because I had a teaching license, as well as teaching experience. Principal Ryan regularly offered me teaching positions. When we passed in the hallway, she often shook her head and joked, “Ahh, there goes the teacher who won’t teach!”

Another TA reported similar pressure, but actively pursued promotion, instead of resisting it. Quarless, a black woman in her mid-40s, held a Master’s degree in education. She worked as a TA at an AAG school in another state before requesting a transfer to Eclipse. Now in her fifth year, Quarless was more willing than most Eclipse employees to extend help to new staff. This stemmed from her security on the promotion track. In a conversation one afternoon, she divulged:

Quarless said, “I don’t know if you know this, but [Principal] Ryan is always trying to get the two of us to be teachers.” I nodded and said, “Yeah, she’s asked me before.” Quarless replied, “She needs to put us together to team-teach a class—now that would be on point!” I agreed and said it would be, “Awesome.”

I asked Quarless, “Do you have a teaching certification?” She replied, “I don’t but I’m thinking about going back to school to get one. Ryan told me that it would be easier for you to teach because you already got yours, but they need me to get certified so I can teach too.”

In the coming months, Quarless signed up for the exam required for obtaining a teacher’s license. While many TAs did not have the credentials necessary to move up within AAG’s internal labor market, Principal Ryan and other administrators communicated that Quarless and I were different. I was seen as an oddity for being content with a TA position, while

Quarless was encouraged to pursue the credential needed to teach. As I explain later in the chapter, our membership on the promotion track provided additional benefits, including increased autonomy and decreased scrutiny.

Plateau Track

The “plateau track” is composed of staff who enjoy relative job security but are not viewed as promotion worthy (i.e., blocked mobility) or do not aspire to promotions (i.e., looking elsewhere). Some staff on this track have sought promotions but been blocked, often due to mismatching credentials or insufficient backstage knowledge (see *Chapter 6*). Others are looking for jobs elsewhere. Notably, no one on the plateau track perceived her position as long-term. Staff were either stuck or looking for work elsewhere. For instance, I chatted with Lacy, a plateau-track teacher, one day after school. Lacy was a Latina woman in her mid-30s, who taught for three years in Chicago before getting a job with AAG. She was in her fourth year at Eclipse. I recorded our afternoon conversation in my fieldnotes:

I asked Lacy, “How was your day?” when she was standing in her doorway during dismissal. She said that she was upset, and she looked it—her eyebrows were raised, and she spoke quickly in whisper-yells. She explained, “They lost my state evaluation from last year. I need it to get my one-year certification converted into a two-year one, and I need the new license in order to get a new job at Christmas.” She added in a deeper whisper, “No one knows that.” Lacy said that [another teacher] texted [former VP] Adams on her behalf. Adams replied that he filed the evaluation last year, but for some reason, no one could find it now. “How can you just not find it?!” she demanded. “I’m going to have to go talk to *somebody* about this.”

Lacy and I had socialized outside of work hours, and I knew her to speak candidly about the things she liked and disliked about Eclipse. Lacy had been looking for another job since the previous school year. As she emphasized in our conversation, she wanted to keep secret that she is looking elsewhere. While Principal Ryan formally praised teachers for pursuing

opportunities even outside of the network, staff members were wary of vocalizing disloyalty. Although AAG frames staff as entrepreneurs who should pursue their own interests, the flip side of this framing suggests that the network does not owe employees anything and will also pursue *its* own interests. If teachers visibly look for work elsewhere, they risk jeopardizing whatever security they have established. Administrators and colleagues may withdraw support, unwilling to invest in someone who is leaving. In this instance, Lacy discovered that it was not easy to get the concrete help required to find a new job; her paperwork had been lost, and the VP responsible had already resigned.

Although most teachers' tracks were clear, this was not true of everyone. I was less sure, for instance, about Freeman's track membership. A fit black woman in her early thirties, Freeman was a respected middle school teacher, who founded Eclipse's Quizbowl team and organized a number of field trips, including an annual band trip to Disney World. She was recently appointed "Lead Teacher" for her grade level (an intermediate promotion that comes with more work and a small, one-time bonus); yet, she had not started a Master's degree or participated in AAG training—both required of aspiring VPs. I learned of Freeman's aspirations to leave Eclipse during a teacher work day, when I was hanging out in Lacy's classroom. I wrote the following in my fieldnotes:

Ms. Freeman came in and started chatting with us, too. Lacy said, "I just saw a job at the College that would have been good for you! But it only pays about \$38,000." The conversation turned toward colleges and universities. Ms. Freeman asked where I went to school, and I explained that I'm still in school. She replied, "Oh! I didn't know that! What are you going for?" I responded, "Sociology." She asked, "Are you doing a Ph.D.?" I answered, "Yes," and Lacy interjected, "I didn't know it was a Ph.D.!" Ms. Freeman asked me, "Oh, so you don't want to be a teacher then?" I hesitated a little, and Lacy said, "You can tell her, Brooks. She [Freeman] doesn't want to be here either." Lacy read my mind!

This is the first time I learned that Freeman, too, was looking for work elsewhere. While I had a good working relationship with Freeman, I was hesitant to share my career aspirations (or lack thereof) with a teacher whose allegiances and aspirations I could not readily identify. Sharing information with the wrong person could jeopardize my reputation. My tentativeness was common at Eclipse; Lacy quickly recognized it and calmed my fear. Staff members discreetly investigated coworkers' tracks, relying on the advice and opinions of trusted others. Staff offered information about neither themselves, nor others, without assessing the safety of the audience. I learned this during my second semester as a TA, when a number of returning teachers—and even administrators—asked me how new teachers were doing. As an assistant inside others' classrooms, I was privy to valuable information that others could use to discreetly assess the tracks to which new staff belonged.

Other staff on the plateau track aspired to upward mobility at AAG but found themselves blocked from moving up. Flynn, for example, did a lot of things by-the-book in pursuit of a promotion but was repeatedly blocked. Flynn was a white man in his early 40s, who was in his sixth year of teaching at Eclipse. Flynn's systematic implementation of AAG requirements was insufficient for getting him on the promotion track. As I describe in *Chapters 5 and 6*, Flynn failed to comply with informal expectations for managing student behavior, which were essential to cultivating a reputation as effective and promotion-worthy.

Turnover Track

Finally, the “turnover track” includes teachers and TAs who resign or are terminated. Membership in this group is apparent prior to an actual turnover event for a few reasons.

First, as I describe in the next section, administrators communicate staff members' potential in formal ways. As a result, staff are keenly aware of one another's reputations and, by extension, their placement on particular tracks. Second, some staff who find themselves on the turnover track begin to talk candidly about their reputations and intentions. Their comments call attention to the disparate treatment that staff members receive as they come to occupy divergent tracks. For example, Holmgren was a white woman in her early 30s, who became an Eclipse teacher following four years of experience at another charter network. Early on during my fieldwork, I asked Holmgren how long she had been working at Eclipse. She responded, "This is my first year—and it will also be my last." To my surprise, she continued:

It was bad from the very first day because the students were out of control. I remember looking at [another new teacher] at the end of the first day, and we were both like, "What the fuck?" We have all these stupid meetings about data, but the students don't care, and most of the parents don't care either.... I've never been at a school where the administration is so hands-off. [Two students] came 40 minutes late to my first period today, and [VP] Adams said they were skipping and I should write them detentions. *Write the detentions yourself if you caught them!* He just doesn't want to be the bad guy.

Holmgren's accusation that administrators are "hands-off" was a perception expressed by many on the turnover track. In contrast, many staff on the promotion track reported instances of administrators offering critical information, as well as concrete help. In the context of a classic internal labor market, Holmgren's vocal resistance could be damning for a corporation. However, the absence of collective bargaining at AAG, in combination with the network's unique firing flexibility, renders such protests less consequential. Most employees

are candid with their criticism of supervisors or working conditions only when they are already on the way out.

COMMUNICATING TRACK MEMBERSHIP

Formal Methods

Eclipse administrators communicate track membership to staff. This occurs in formal ways, when school leaders grade staff according to various performance metrics. AAG's notorious "Improvement Plan" provides the most formal notice that one is on the turnover track, or residing dangerously close to it. Improvement Plans are the initial, corrective action that school administrators take against teachers. While AAG presents Improvement Plans as supportive in nature, teachers unanimously interpreted them as punitive. For instance, Holmgren expressed anger after learning of an impending Improvement Plan. I wrote,

As Quarless and I were getting ready for the after school program, Holmgren said, "I am so pissed—I was just informed that I'm going to receive an Improvement Plan at my [evaluation] meeting tomorrow." Ms. Quarless (whom I've never seen talk to Holmgren before) said, "I wouldn't react like that because you can't get off an IP for a whole year from the time you get on it."

The next day, still prior to her evaluation meeting, Holmgren told a small group of teachers, "I've read other people's [Improvement Plans], and I refuse to read that about myself. He can shove it up his ass!" She added, "I'm teaching one more year, and then I'm *done*." While AAG characterized Improvement Plans as supportive, they carried no discernable benefits but a number of drawbacks. They require additional work, as teachers must document and demonstrate corrective steps. Further, Improvement Plans make staff ineligible for bonuses. In the most extreme cases, they contribute to the paper trail used to justify termination.

Informal Methods

Administrators also communicate track membership in informal ways, when they speak candidly to staff members about their performance and potential, as well as others'. Just as the secretary and principal bragged about Harris, administrators were equally candid about staff who fell short of the promotion track. For instance, VP Lang informed me one afternoon that I would need to "assist" Randall, who was under investigation following student allegations of misconduct. He called me into his office and said,

I don't know how much you've heard, but some stuff went down yesterday. Things are being said, and we're not sure what's true and what's not. So, we are going to need you to sit in on fifth period for the rest of the year. We are trying to determine the validity of some accusations, and we can't just believe what the teacher says.

Although Lang does not mention the accused teacher by name, I knew that he was referring to Randall because I regularly assisted with her fifth period. Randall had over a decade of teaching experience at a traditional public school nearby, as well as a master's degree. She was in her first year teaching at Eclipse. A white woman in her late 30s, Randall was known for her outgoing demeanor, frequently joking with students and coworkers alike.

It was not uncommon for students to accuse teachers of misconduct. The most outspoken students demonstrated an awareness of their status as AAG "customers" by threatening to withdraw from Eclipse if administrators failed to address their complaints. On a weekly basis, students alleged teacher misconduct by reporting incidents—some of them fabricated—to administrators. However, these reports were only occasionally taken seriously. More than the severity or credibility of the allegations, the status (i.e., track) of the accused teacher shaped the way administrators responded. Although it was only her first year at

Eclipse, Randall was firmly rooted in the turnover track, and she was the most vocal of its members.

Administrators were sometimes even more candid about criticizing teachers. For instance, Neal (promotion track) described initiating a conversation with Principal Ryan, regarding Flynn (plateau track). The conversation centered on the printing of report cards. This was a tedious task that occurred every other week at Eclipse, as teachers kept families abreast of students' academic progress in accordance with AAG policy. Neal asked Flynn to "sync" his gradebook so that she could print report cards for her homeroom students. Flynn responded by saying that the VP gave him a two-day extension. Neal later told me that she did not understand what Flynn meant (or more likely did not *believe* it) and took her concern to Principal Ryan:

According to Neal, she told [Principal] Ryan, "Flynn isn't syncing [his gradebook] because of something [VP] Lang said about waiting a few days. I don't understand what's going on! I need to get these things printed." Ryan rolled her eyes and said, "Ugh! I need a pump-up to go talk to him." Neal buttoned Ryan's blazer and told her, "You're not going in there to fire him, you *just* need to ask what Lang said to him."

Neal's informal tone with Principal Ryan illustrates a familiarity and collegiality that many promotion-track teachers enjoyed with administrators. Neal initiates the conversation as if she is talking to a friend, and Ryan responds in kind. Beyond the interactional style, the content of the conversation provides an opportunity for Neal to reinforce her status as a performer. She frames herself as taking initiative (by printing report cards) but being held back by a colleague. Then, Neal and Ryan demonstrate a shared understanding that Flynn is *not* on the promotion track and is a nuisance to be managed. Importantly, Flynn was relatively secure on the plateau track; he was a skilled, veteran teacher who pursued

promotions but experienced blocked mobility. Nevertheless, Neal brought up the possibility of “firing” him because this threat was a looming possibility for almost every Eclipse staff member.

In addition to conspicuous and inconspicuous criticism, members of the turnover track faced intense administrator scrutiny. One example of this emerged when Holmgren was singled out on a teacher work day. Teacher work days occurred periodically throughout the school year. On these days, students would not report to school, providing time for AAG professional development and independent preparation time. Teachers typically enjoyed a great deal of autonomy during work days. In between meetings, many worked in one another’s classrooms and took a leisurely lunch break. Teachers were issued small assignments, but they typically completed them half-heartedly with the understanding that these tasks were mere formalities. On one teacher work day, staff were asked to write a reflection on how they planned to improve each of seven Teaching Toolkit items (see *Chapter 3*). I recorded in fieldnotes,

When I returned to Neal’s classroom after playing basketball with Hyde, Randall and Neal explained something that happened in our absence... VP Adams walked by the classroom and looked through the window, then abruptly returned and said that he’d like to speak to Holmgren. She’d been gone ever since.

When Holmgren came back into the room, it was clear that she was on the verge of tears and had been crying already. Her eyes were red and watery, and her lips were quivering a bit. She slammed the door loudly—as hard as anyone could possibly slam it, I’d say. She asked Lacy, “Can I borrow your computer charger?” but it sounded more like a demand. Lacy handed the charger over. Randall was finishing up a phone call with a parent... Randall put one finger up to indicate that Holmgren should wait to vent until the phone call was finished. When the phone call was over a minute later, somebody asked Holmgren what happened. She said, still on the verge of tears, but keeping it together rather well, “I am so mad! [VP] Adams told me to re-do the assignment with more concrete examples, and he gave me all these comments.” She

held up the typed assignment, and I could see his handwriting, in thick, black, ink, in each of the boxes on her worksheet. The other teachers expressed surprise at this and asked to look at what she had written.

I saw that one of the topics was “high expectations,” and VP Adams had written in response to Holmgren’s answer: “I saw a boy wrapping his legs around a girl in the back of your class... That doesn’t show high expectations.” Holmgren demanded, “What was I supposed to do?! I didn’t even notice that.” She added, “That observation was during the 18-minute fourth period, and I had no idea it was even an observation! I thought he was standing by my door to help, since that class was giving people behavior problems all day.”

Holmgren demonstrated visible rage about being asked to redo the assignment. Although VP Adams’ comments may have been based in fact, she was singled out. Of the five teachers in the room, she was the only one given *any* comments. Everyone expressed surprise, given that Eclipse teachers enjoyed substantial autonomy on teacher work days. VP Adams’ singling out of Holmgren reflected her precarious position on the turnover track. As I mentioned in my fieldnotes, I was under very little administrative scrutiny that day. Rather than working, I had played basketball in the gym during the thirty minutes when Holmgren was facing reprimand. While this was a visible act of slacking off, my position on the promotion track made it a less risky move.

Another form of increased scrutiny emerged in the form of heightened administrator surveillance. In the aforementioned example, Holmgren noted that VP Adams surveilled and evaluated her unexpectedly, during a short period when she believed that he stopped by to offer assistance. Teachers on the turnover track were observed more often and more closely, at times that they did not expect or even perceive. For instance, I spoke with Crosby at the front of her classroom one morning. I chatted with a number of middle school teachers at the beginning of each day, to decipher my assignments as a TA. Crosby was a petite white

woman in her early forties, whose toned arms revealed her rock climbing hobby. Crosby was in her first year at Eclipse, and she expressed more initial excitement about the school's mission than any other teacher I met. Before landing at Eclipse, she taught for ten years in New England and worked briefly with juvenile offenders. On this morning, Crosby's class was getting increasingly out of control. Most kids were up out of their seats, and the noise level was rising. I recorded in fieldnotes:

It was already ten minutes past the official start of the school day. I had my back to the students and the door, so I could only see Crosby, plus a few students in my peripheral vision. She whispered, "Ooh—he's here, I need to get started." I turned around, and VP Lang was standing in the back of the classroom. He was full-on *in* the classroom, standing near the table that is at least five steps inside the doorway. Lang did not appear to be doing anything, except putting pressure on Crosby to get the class under control and get started. She started talking to the class, and I walked out without saying anything to him.

Lang's appearance (and demeanor) is important because I never saw him step in another teacher's classroom this way, nonverbally redirecting the teacher as you might a student. I understood exactly what he was doing, in part because of the reaction that his presence generated from Crosby. She immediately alerted me that he had arrived and was watching, as if she was caught doing something wrong. Then, Crosby quickly changed her behavior by abruptly ending our conversation and addressing the classroom full of students. I observed many instances of selective scrutiny applied to turnover-track teachers. I came to understand this scrutiny as administrators' way of communicating track membership. As I discuss in the next section, selective scrutiny also shaped teachers' decisions to "opt out" (Stone 2007).

CULTIVATING TRACK INVESTMENT

While administrators communicate track membership and apply pressure, Eclipse staff actively participate in the process. Workers cultivate reputations, framing themselves as deserving of membership in particular tracks and contesting track assignments that do not align with their expectations. As with the broader struggle on AAG's internal labor market, cultivating a reputation is a competitive endeavor. Staff only appear effective and worthy of promotion in comparison to others (Sennett and Cobb 1972). As a result, they become invested in demarcation lines and actively participate in constructing group boundaries.

Many teachers perform track membership and police track boundaries because track membership offers perks that go beyond job security and promotion. Staff who cultivate reputations as promotion-worthy experience everyday work differently. They receive less scrutiny and more autonomy. They also access backstage information and tangible resources. As I demonstrate in *Chapter 6*, these benefits influence the extent to which they can comply creatively with AAG policies and move up within the organization, as well as achieve dignity through their work.

First, promotion-track teachers and TAs face less scrutiny. For instance, Neal and Harris reported that administrators often skipped their observations and evaluation meetings. I experienced something similar when VP Burnett forgot about our evaluation meeting on multiple occasions. This nonchalant attitude toward evaluation was not typical for teachers on lower tracks. Randall and Taylor described dreading their evaluations, which occurred regularly. I recorded,

Ms. Randall and Ms. Taylor said that they hated their evaluation meetings. I asked, “Do you have them every week?” and they replied in unison, “Mmmhmm,” rolling their eyes. Randall said, “Every week, you get to hear about everything that you’re doing wrong.” Taylor added, “I know! I feel like I would be a better teacher if I had a little bit of autonomy.” They both agreed that everything was so much better last week, when VP Adams was gone.

Randall notes the punitive tone of her evaluations, and Taylor wishes for more autonomy for demonstrating her expertise. For these teachers, weekly evaluations occur without fail, and they are a source of stress.

Promotion-track teachers and TAs often enjoyed the autonomy that Taylor envied. For example, VP Burnett regularly told me that she trusted my judgment. I sometimes used her trust to negotiate my schedule, rather than following the schedule as issued (as most TAs were required to do). I wrote,

I saw VP Burnett in the hallway during a passing period and asked, “How much flexibility does my schedule have?” She asked what I meant, and I explained, “Sometimes I’ll go into a class, and there’s not really anything that I can help with during that time, but I know I could be working with a kid in another class. Is it ok to go?” She replied, “Oh yeah. I’m not worried about you.”

Burnett’s extension of trust freed me from worrying that I would be penalized for deviating from the formal TA schedule I had been issued. Her trust also provided opportunities for me to experience efficacy and dignity through my work (Hodson 2001). This opportunity was not afforded to all TAs. Burnett did not respond to my question by answering that it was good practice for TAs to decide where to go, but by replying that she trusted me specifically. In fact, Burnett reprimanded many plateau- and turnover-track TAs who failed to follow their schedules closely.²³ In contrast, I had the autonomy and security to exercise professional

²³ Based on coworkers’ accounts and my own experiences, TAs typically deviated from the schedule in order to take restroom breaks. Mirroring the experiences of Eclipse teachers, TAs’ schedules did not include built-in

judgment and go where I was needed. For example, I developed an important strategy for pulling students out of class for remediation. VPs assigned particular students for remediation, and TAs were to “pull” them for small group work based on analyses of their test scores. I found this method taxing because it often meant I was “pulling” students on days they wanted to stay in class and leaving them on days that they were motivated to get help. Given Burnett’s trust in me, I began pulling students on the basis of their attitudes, rather than their test scores. This is an explicit deviation from AAG protocol that TAs on less privileged tracks were not positioned to execute.

However, the promotion track can have drawbacks, when staff perceive that they are held to a higher standard. Quarless, the TA who divulged our shared membership in the promotion track, brought this up one day after a TA meeting. As we were walking out of the building together, she asked, “Do you get the feeling that they hold us to a different standard?” Her question came after a somewhat stressful meeting, during which VP Burnett had informed TAs of a substantial increase in workload. I noted that the stress was apparent in Quarless’ unusual behavior:

[Quarless] had really shut down in the meeting; she was quiet, rather than asking questions and engaged, and that’s really out-of-the-ordinary for her. I asked her about it later, and Quarless said, “I knew I was just going to blow up at that point, so I decided not to say anything.”

While Quarless is relatively secure and promotion-bound, she experienced substantial stress amidst proving herself as a performer. Similar to other members of the promotion track, she was careful about expressing criticism of supervisors and policies. When an administrator

breaks. Choosing to take restroom breaks was especially risky for members of lower tracks, since administrators might conduct surprise evaluations and find staff missing from their assigned posts.

introduced new work requirements, she purposefully remained silent in order to withhold her criticism. As it happened, Quarless ended up working unpaid hours in order to complete the work requirements. Some TAs refused to do this, but none of them were on the promotion track.

Promotion-track teachers are also assumed to be able to handle more and are sometimes given less help. For instance, Harris helped get me hired in part because she hoped I would continue helping with her so-called “difficult” class. Instead, VP Adams assigned me to assist other teachers, many of whom resided on the turnover track. These teachers were perceived to need help more than promotion-track teachers. Although Harris’ class included students who were achieving behind grade level, as well as students with special needs, TA help was directed elsewhere.

Resisting and Reinforcing Track Boundaries

Inter-track coworker relationships were tested—and often went awry—when staff from lower tracks tried to mobilize help from those on higher tracks. For instance, Harris and Neal (promotion track) distanced themselves from Randall when she was investigated for student allegations of misconduct. Neal initially tipped off Randall about what was coming, having learned of the allegations earlier that day. Going off of Neal’s tip, Randall confronted a VP about the impending investigation, which may have otherwise remained secret. Following the confrontation, Randall spoke with Harris, Neal, and me in the parking lot. I recorded in my fieldnotes:

Randall had clearly been crying and was both upset and shaken. She said, “Those kids are just vicious! You guys know how I am as an adult, but I am professional with them. I’ve been teaching for a decade, and I feel like I’m getting back-doored!”

...Harris responded, "You [administrators] wonder why morale is low! Because you will believe these ratchet kids over a teacher! They launch an investigation for everything!"

Neal said to Randall, "If you can, please just keep my name out of it as much as possible." I thought this was a very weird and insensitive thing to say! Neal didn't do anything wrong and had no reason to be worried, but Randall's job was literally on the line

...Randall responded, "Oh I don't plan to bring your name into it." Then she turned to Harris and said, "I know you're close with [Principal] Ryan, and I wouldn't mind if you told her about what's going on." Harris cut her off and said, "Oh I'm not going to bring it up or get in the middle of things." Randall clarified, "I'm saying I *wouldn't mind* if you did," perhaps thinking that Harris didn't understand her the first time. Harris said, "That's okay, I won't get in the middle of it." I inferred that Harris knew *exactly* what Randall was saying the first time but didn't want to get involved.

Although Neal tipped off Randall initially, her tone changed when Randall made the decision to confront an administrator. Neal became wary that her reputation could be tarnished. Harris exhibited similar tentativeness, blatantly refusing Randall's request to talk to Principal Ryan on her behalf. What is especially significant about this refusal is that Harris believed that the investigation was uncalled for because the students' allegations were false. Further, Randall asked for Harris' help knowing that Harris had gone to bat for colleagues in the past. However, those instances did not involve a member of the turnover track.

Staff members who were positioned closer to the turnover track often constructed track boundaries more forcefully and conspicuously. These teachers were not vying for promotion behind closed doors but were fighting to keep their jobs. For instance,

Holmgren [turnover track] divulged to me that she had been issued an Improvement Plan only after Lacy [plateau track] asked Principal Ryan, "With all due respect, why am I on an Improvement Plan and Holmgren is not, if I have better scores on the Teaching Toolkit?"

Lacy's blunt question illustrates the particular fierceness of competition among employees on lower tracks. Her revelation also suggests that administrators have some discretion in their issuing of Improvement Plans. While AAG's extensive performance metrics frame the network as objective and data-driven, Lacy discovered a hiccup, and administrators scrambled to cover their tracks.

In the context of AAG's internal labor market, teachers must build reputations as performers. An essential part of building a reputation as a good teacher involves allying oneself with respected teachers and distancing oneself with perceived failures. When a teacher has been identified as a member of the turnover track, administrators and colleagues cease to perceive that person as someone with potential to be developed. Instead, that person is labeled as a bad teacher, and others start to speculate about how long he or she will "last." For staff, this labeling and distancing does not arise out of malice but out of necessity. In order to achieve success (i.e., promotion) or stability (i.e., plateau) in the organization, staff must distance themselves from stigmatized teachers. This parallels what others have found in professional workplaces, where getting too close to another's failure is enough to jeopardize one's own career (Kunda 2006). Further, the job itself is extraordinarily time-consuming and emotionally taxing. Teachers also lack the time, energy, and motivation to invest significantly in those likely to leave. Given administrators' conspicuous communication of track membership, these people are fairly easy to pick out.

ELIMINATING NONPERFORMERS

One of the staples of neo-Taylorism is employers' ability to rid organizations of nonperformers (Crowley et al., 2010). Staff on Eclipse's turnover track were the targets of administrative pressure to move out of the organization. Occasionally, the pressure was explicit. For instance, one day after school, Hyde and I approached VP Lang, who was the TA supervisor at the time. A black woman in her late 20s, Hyde was a second-year Eclipse TA who had a bachelor's degree in business. Lang invited us into his office, where we sat down and began to ask about how to generate instructional materials for the objectives he had asked us to teach. After five minutes, Lang turned the conversation toward Hyde's performance. I recorded the following in my fieldnotes,

Mr. Lang told Ms. Hyde, "Some teachers are saying you're not doing anything, or not doing enough." I wanted an invisibility cloak. Why was he talking to her about this in front of me?! Lang attempted to tone down the harshness of his comment, adding, "You just need to document, document, document so that when teachers say things like that, we can show exactly what you were doing—that I was working with this students on this objective, or I was making copies because you asked me to make copies." ...At one point, Mr. Lang told Ms. Hyde, "You should think about whether this is really what you want to do. You may need to leave." I was horrified!! We got up to leave, but Lang asked to continue talking to Hyde. So, I was the only one who left.

Employees on the turnover track reported explicit pressure from administrators to move out of the organization, but these conversations usually took place one-on-one. This instance—not the only one of its kind—illustrates that pressure was applied even in the presence of coworkers. Although I was shocked at the time to be privy to Lang chastising another teacher in my presence, this was consistent with a host of messages about teacher performance that administrators conveyed informally. Teachers and TAs quickly learn the downside of AAG's internal labor market: although some staff are destined for promotion, a greater number have

a very short life as network employees. The meeting served as a reminder for me that no one's job is really secure. Hyde later told me, "I would rather work two part-time jobs than come back here."

More often, those on the turnover track face omnipresent but somewhat intangible pressure to leave Eclipse. As I describe in *Chapter 6*, staff must access behind-the-scenes information and resources in order to achieve success by AAG's standards. Staff who are quickly channeled into the turnover track often have difficulty accessing this behind-the-scenes information, and they face more administrative and peer scrutiny. Crosby described that the pressure can become overwhelming. She appeared to be at a breaking point after learning of a new documenting protocol, which would demand more of her time. I recorded in fieldnotes,

After explaining the new documenting requirements to me, Crosby held the data sheets up and demanded, "When? I don't even have time to go to the bathroom! And we're supposed to write [students] up for every little thing. And I'm supposed to call parents for every little thing. I was here until 6 o'clock last night! They wonder why there's so much turnover. It's just too much! They say they want the scores up, but then they say, 'Yes, we want scores, but...' Well which is it? Do you want the scores, or do you want all the AAG stuff?"

While Eclipse teachers faced similar work demands, those on the turnover track often became overwhelmed by them. This is not due to individual deficiency, but related to the increased scrutiny and decreased support that they experienced. Crosby resigned before the end of her first semester, after securing a teaching job at a traditional public school. I learned of Crosby's impending resignation before other Eclipse staff, when Principal Ryan offered me her job.

Not all turnover track teachers were as candid as Crosby, who made it clear she was leaving because of Eclipse's poor working conditions and administrators' mismanagement. Most gave family reasons to administrators while revealing other truths to trusted coworkers. For example, Ms. Sitton [white woman, early 30s] applied for a transfer to another AAG school after her class was reconfigured mid-year. I learned of the reconfiguration in the teacher's lounge, when I greeted the school social worker. She explained that AAG administrators instructed Principal Ryan to cut the number of second-grade classes from four to three. Second grade was under-enrolled, and AAG wanted to merge the classes then move one of the teachers to a vacant position in another grade level. This meant students would be shuffled, and the remaining second-grade teachers would face larger class sizes. When I asked the social worker, "How are you?" she replied, "It's been a rough day. I've been in second grade *all day*, and a bunch of kids are crying, or refusing to leave the classroom, or both." I learned more later that afternoon, as I was chatting with TAs who worked in the elementary school. I recorded in fieldnotes:

Quarless explained, "The decision came down from AAG today, so it's not like [the teachers] were able to explain it to the kids or anything. Sitton was just removed right away. She cried a little—not in front of the kids of course—but wasn't in an angry rage about it. It was just hard because she'd already bonded with the kids. And they bonded with her! Especially this one, who doesn't bond easily." Quarless pointed to [a student who has a lot of academic and behavioral challenges]. I knew that [another student] was in Sitton's class. I learned [while volunteering] that he has PTSD and doesn't bond easily either.

Sitton later expressed discontent about the decision to the social worker, as well as to the TAs with whom she worked. Yet, Principal Ryan wrote the following email to staff a few weeks later: "I hate to report that another two members of our family have decided to resign.

Ms. Sitton is moving back home to [another state] and is hoping to join an AAG school there.” My TA informants confirmed that Sitton provided this rationale to Ryan, rather than voicing her discontent.

Similarly, Randall resigned after Principal Ryan and VP Lang conducted a two-month investigation into her classroom conduct. Following student allegations that were later proven false, administrators opened an official investigation and required that a second adult (usually this was me) be present in Randall’s room at all times. I was asked to continue watching Randall even after she was cleared and the investigation was closed. She expressed her anger about the continued surveillance to me: “No offense, but that kind of makes me mad. Like why do you need to be in here if the investigation is closed?” Randall’s indignation was related to administrators’ drastic and inequitable response. Promotion-track teachers had faced similar allegations over the course of the school year, but none were taken seriously. However, when Randall turned in a letter of resignation the next week, she told Principal Ryan, “I want to stay at home with my kids.” Women quitting their jobs to care for children or other family matters is an accepted vocabulary of motive (Mills 1940) in many professions (Stone 2007), particularly a female-domination occupation such as teaching (Pounder 1998; Simpson 2004). In addition, workers looking for new jobs may be wary of tarnishing relationships with former employers, on whom they may depend for references. Still, the accounts these teachers gave to administrators speak to the extent to which AAG successfully atomizes its workers. Many teachers are unwilling to challenge poor working conditions and supervisor abuse on their way out of the organization, even when they explicitly name these things as reasons for leaving.

Staff also experienced pressure to leave their jobs with the onset of burnout. Although burnout materializes as individual exhaustion, scholars have long identified its organizational roots (Farber 1991; Ingersoll 2001). Many teachers on the plateau track experienced burnout. While they possess some job security, these staff cannot access many of the benefits associated with the promotion track. In particular, they cannot hold onto the hope of a promotion in the near future, which promises relief from the struggle of everyday work. For instance, Rodgers described being exhausted only eight weeks into the school year. A black woman in her early 30s, Rodgers had six years of teaching experience and five years of administrative (VP) experience in a nearby public school. At the beginning of the year, she expressed an eagerness to get back into the classroom. Two months later, I recorded the following conversation in my fieldnotes:

I asked Rodgers how she was doing this morning, and I could see the exhaustion all over her face. It was a straight face—much less bubbly than when I met her and Matthews on [their first day of work, a few months earlier]. Her face was kind of sunken, and her eyes were on the constant verge of a roll. I commented, “I can’t believe it’s only Wednesday—this week feels so long!” She replied, “I can’t believe how much of the *year* we have to go. I wake up thinking about it every morning... This class may only be 15 [students], but that one [pointing to a student] is about 6, she’s 4, he’s 2....” We were interrupted by a student, and I wandered off.

Rodgers’ demeanor and comment illustrate how quickly Eclipse teachers can reach a state of burnout. As a member of the plateau track, Rodgers was not under as much scrutiny as some of her colleagues. Instead, her burnout reflects the weight of overwork with no perceivable end.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After working at Eclipse for one semester, I was a veteran by AAG's high-turnover standards. As a result, I was in the position to scrutinize new staff when a new school year began. I noted my perception of one new teacher, whose class I observed from the hallway:

The after-school program took awhile to get going, so I witnessed some chaos happening in the new English teacher's room. It was similar to what would be going on with [two teachers who quit] last year—I could hear yelling, see kids moving around a lot, and see kids darting out of the classroom. Peyton was one of them. She managed to escape into the hallway three times, and I went to retrieve her from the bathroom the third time. The teacher was sending out kids one at a time to go to their lockers, and each student who left the classroom would dilly-dally and attempt to talk to students who were in nearby classrooms. From the hallway, it felt like his class might explode each time the teacher tried to send a student to a locker. I think that he sensed this too because he kept retreating back into the classroom and closing the door.

I had a weird feeling as I watched this. I was thinking, "Oh God, another one of *these* teachers. I can't believe he has them acting like this on the first day of school." Only a few hours later, I feel bad for not having more empathy! I remember having a terrible time with some of the same kids.

Although I had no intention of working for AAG over the long term, I quickly internalized Eclipses' competitive climate. I immediately judged a new teacher as doomed to failure—on the first day of school, before ever meeting him. AAG's frontstage characterizes network teachers as a skilled team of professionals, who work toward a common goal of student achievement. This aligns with popular conceptions of other charter networks, where uniquely skilled charter school teachers work tirelessly to achieve results (Kumashiro 2012; Sewell and Apple 2011). On the ground, however, I found that a competition over recognition and resources actually characterized the school climate. What explains this discrepancy?

AAG's sophisticated system of worker control melds an internal labor market with neo-Taylorist managerial strategies. Charter networks are capable of establishing such systems because they possess a unique degree of autonomy in their abilities to limit collective bargaining and utilize hiring and firing flexibility. This autonomy is granted on the basis of market-centered logic—logic that also suggests AAG's pursuit of organizational profit will result in high-quality schooling for network customers. However, my findings add to a body of literature that casts doubt on this reasoning (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Johnson and Landman 2000; Kumashiro 2012; Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, and Henig 2002; Ravitch 2010, 2013; Spence 2012). My analyses suggest that AAG creates a competitive climate that undermines collaboration. For instance, teachers and TAs withdraw help from perceived failures, as to not risk their own reputations. This “lateralization” of conflict is particularly concerning in the educational realm because scholars have identified collaboration as critical for quality teaching and schooling. Further, AAG and many charter networks specifically target low-income communities of color, which are already historically underserved.

Other scholars have argued that market-centered policies spark organizational instability (Crowley and Hodson 2014), and my findings echo this claim. High teacher turnover is especially concerning in the context of schools because it shapes the quality of education that Eclipse is able to provide. Although AAG prescribes a very specific model of schooling that includes a particular culture, a consistent school culture is difficult to maintain with constant turnover—especially as turnover occurs throughout the school year and not just at the end of it. It takes time for new teachers to learn the ropes and become acclimated to the

school, and this process is inhibited both by a lack of veteran teachers to socialize new staff and by the tendency for veteran teachers to distance themselves from perceived failures. Then, as teachers quit or are fired mid-year, short- and long-term subs (often many different subs per class) step in. A few exceptional subs manage student behavior strictly and offer baseline instruction (of course, it is more textbook-based than a good full-time teacher might provide). The vast majority of subs, though, are lucky if they can keep students inside the classroom, and they offer students no actual instruction.

Lying just below the surface of all student-teacher relationships and interactions is students' knowledge that staff can and probably will leave—sometimes mid-year and often by the end of the year. This was a considerable source of anxiety for some Eclipse students, as illustrated by the question that a handful of students asked me: “Are you gonna be here next year?” However, other students recognized the norm of staff movement as an invitation to exert their power as customers. I found that most students were well aware of Eclipse's informal tracking of staff. In fact, students even influenced the tracking process, for instance providing information to staff about new teachers' performance, or complaining to administrators about disliked teachers' actions. Students in any school—even a conventional public school—understand some distinctions between staff, such as the difference between a principal, vice principal, and teacher. However, Eclipse students seemed to develop an understanding of the finer distinctions among teachers and TAs, perceiving the career tracks to which many teachers belonged. Such insight is consequential because it reveals to students which teachers they can (and perhaps even should) challenge.

High staff turnover reinforces the culture of proving oneself as a performer. With constant streams of people moving up or out, employees get the message that reputation and track membership matter. Staff members' ability to prove themselves as good teachers has immediate, concrete consequences for their job security and promotion potential. Second, high turnover urges staff to invest in coworkers selectively. Veteran teachers and TAs likely use caution when devoting the time and energy necessary to extend help, given that half of coworkers leave each year. Third, high turnover encourages returning employees to compete with one another. Achieving success as an Eclipse employee requires identifying the tracks to which coworkers belong, in order to forge alliances and distinguish oneself from the fray. Of course, first-year teachers have high turnover rates across schools, and they are far more likely to succeed when mentored by veteran teachers (Smith and Ingersoll 2004). As a result, Eclipse's competitive culture exacerbates turnover problems among first-year teachers. In AAG workplaces, teaching is understood as a stepping stone, rather than a life-long career. To survive—much less succeed—staff must distinguish themselves as performers quickly and constantly.

CHAPTER 5

AAG'S FRONTSTAGE AND ECLIPSE'S BACKSTAGE

The Academic Achievement Group (AAG) carefully crafts its marketing campaign to resonate with salient political, economic, and cultural themes. The network claims to tackle long-standing achievement gaps in pursuit of social justice, using research, data, and business principles to succeed where public schools have failed (Johnston 2014). However, little empirical evidence speaks to how charter networks' impressive rhetoric unfolds on the ground (Renzulli and Roscigno 2007). This is especially concerning because a growing number of scholars raise concerns that charters do not achieve the results that they claim (Jeynes 2012; Lubienski 2013; Ravitch 2013; Teasley et al. 2016), that their pedagogical methods produce negative unintended consequences (Golann 2015; Goodman 2013), and that their management practices discriminate against some demographic groups (Ertas and Roch 2012).

Charter networks operate in a deregulated niche of the public education sector, where they enjoy substantial discretion in structuring personnel policies (Green, Baker, and Oluwole 2014; Podgursky and Ballou 2001). However, network teachers face increasing standardization, as networks seek to ensure a consistent "product" for a nationwide customer base. This trend is on display at AAG, which presents staff with an internally authored "blueprint" for effective teaching. This blueprint, which AAG argues is data-driven and research-based, positions the network as a legitimate organization deserving of authorization, autonomy, and funding. But outside of student achievement data (Almond 2012; Angrist et al., 2012; Bulkley and Fisler 2002; CREDO 2013; Dobbie and Fryer 2011; Gleason et al.,

2014; Jeynes 2012; Silverman 2012), scholars have enjoyed limited access to charter networks. How do Eclipse administrators and staff define high-quality teaching on the ground?

In this chapter, I look behind the curtain at teaching practices in the for-profit charter context. I ask: What does it mean to be a successful teacher at Eclipse? And, to what extent are the frontstage and backstage meanings of high-quality teaching consistent? I begin by outlining the AAG frontstage. The network's public face presents staff as accountable for achieving measurable results and facilitating customer satisfaction. Next, I analyze the network's backstage. Despite AAG's achievement-centered blueprint and elaborate performance metrics, I find that Eclipse administrators emphasize controlling student behavior as staff members' first—and sometimes primary—task. I explore the implications of this focus in the discussion.

AAG's FRONTSTAGE

Staff Accountability for Results and Satisfaction

AAG's frontstage presentation centers on student achievement. To both internal and external audiences, AAG positions *measurable results* as the key criterion for success among schools and staff. This criterion aligns with political and economic rhetoric that exalts big data as key to educational reform (Ravitch 2013), and it also reflects an understanding that charter schools' survival is closely connected to student test scores (Schwenkenberg and VanderHoff 2015). For AAG, measurable results consist of student achievement data in a variety of forms. Unlike learning in an abstract sense, stakeholders can pre-package these data for publication in AAG soundbites and mailers as evidence of the network's success. An

Eclipse vice principal (VP) communicated the network's expectations around data at a staff meeting.²⁴ I recorded in my fieldnotes:

At today's meeting, there was a huge focus on testing. VP Lang talked about [a standardized exam provided by an external company], which is a test that AAG really cares about. Lang said that the network uses language that's really aligned to this test. They think of growth in terms of "typical growth," "no growth," or "negative growth"... [He specified,] "Our kids are only about 30% proficient, and we've got to get that up. Do less of the cooperative learning, and just do teaching the basic skills. [Students] might miss four questions just because [they] don't know how to round. You don't have to lesson plan to hammer home those skills."

VP Lang shared that AAG uses a specially-contracted standardized assessment to measure student performance. He emphasized that student growth, as measured by ongoing assessment, informs the network's language. Because only 30% of Eclipse students scored in an acceptable category on a recent test, staff should be especially focused on helping individual students "grow." Lang notes that an important technique for facilitating growth is teaching basic skills. He encourages staff to minimize cooperative learning²⁵ in favor of a basic-skills approach, and this course of action aligns with AAG's public face as a network committed to closing the achievement gap.

AAG markets itself as an organization that holds teachers accountable for getting results. According to its public face, the network does not reward and retain teachers for simply showing up. Instead, it implores staff to make data-driven decisions that facilitate student growth. *Figure 2* contains an excerpt from literature mailed to families near one

²⁴ As described in *Chapter 2*, information that could be used to identify this study's setting or participants, including names, descriptors, and internally or externally published material, has been disguised to protect anonymity.

²⁵ Cooperative learning occurs when teachers facilitate "structured interdependence" among student groups. Students interact with one another on a shared task toward individual and group goals (Johnson and Johnson 2009).

AAG school. The network emphasizes that teachers are results-oriented, utilizing assessments not only to provide students with feedback, but also to adjust their instruction according to students' needs. Although teachers' methods are data-heavy, the advertisement notes that staff members take the time to get to know individual students and make all children feel important. Overall, the network's public face suggests that teachers provide individualized instruction and attention as a way to obtain measurable results.

Figure 2. AAG Mailed Advertisement Excerpt

EXTRAORDINARY TEACHERS

Our teachers work hard to inspire every student who joins the AAG community!

- They get to know students as individuals so that every child feels important.
- They learn students' strengths and challenges.
- They teach the whole child, promoting academic and emotional learning.
- They assess student growth and tailor teaching to individual needs.
- They use AAG's research-based best practices in the classroom.

AAG uses not only student achievement data, but also performance metrics to measure teacher effectiveness. Performance metrics describe, “quantifiable classification systems that purport to connect practice, goals, and outcomes” (Colyvas 2016:168). AAG utilizes numerous performance metrics, including weekly observations and quarterly evaluations, as well as student scores on standardized exams authored by the network, the state, and external assessment companies. Although employees face ongoing evaluation according to these metrics, the network presents administrators as mentors eager to help staff refine their craft. According to this approach, school leaders use weekly observations to help teachers identify areas for improvement. An AAG job advertisement boasts, “AAG cares about the professional excellence and personal well-being of all staff who join the network

family. Because *we want you to feel like a valued member of the AAG team*, school administrators will advise and support you regularly” [author’s emphasis]. Further, in an internal memo, an administrator from national headquarters wrote:

AAG seeks to ensure that employees receive regular updates about their job performance in as transparent a way as possible. To this end, school leaders conduct weekly evaluations and quarterly reviews for all instructional staff. If performance improvements are deemed necessary, employees may receive a caution, a warning, a development plan, or a corrective plan. Every member of the AAG team should feel comfortable asking their leaders for further information and clarification in regards to expectations and performance.

Both communications illustrate that feedback and follow-up are ongoing for AAG staff.

Employees receive weekly evaluations and quarterly reviews, sometimes accompanied by formal corrections with varying degrees of severity. Still, the network frames its protocol as a beneficial one that contributes to teachers’ development. School administrators maintain transparency regarding staff performance, and AAG encourages teachers to initiate conversations with their supervisors.

Finally, AAG presents *customer satisfaction* as a critical component of the educational service that it provides. *Figure 3* contains an excerpt from an online advertisement, in which the network markets itself as uniquely responsive to students and parents. This aim aligns with the organization’s position as a for-profit network that must constantly enroll an increasing number of students. As such, the network encourages staff at all levels to facilitate customer satisfaction. For instance, Eclipse’s principal emphasized customer satisfaction in an all-staff meeting:

Principal Ryan said that something she wants to focus on is improving our customer service. Our parent surveys were not great this year... [She emphasized,] “without *students*, there is no school. We are in the customer service business, and this is not a traditional public school, where if there are no students, the district will place us in another school. If we don’t have students, we don’t have jobs.” Ryan went on to say that we are not hitting our enrollment numbers in at least three grades right now, and that’s a problem.

Compared to network advertisements that emphasize responsiveness and care, Principal Ryan’s conception of customer service is grounded in more concrete concerns. She identifies enrollment numbers as an indicator of customer satisfaction—an indicator that has real consequences for people’s jobs. Still, Ryan’s explanation aligns with AAG’s front-stage presentation as attuned to the needs of students and parents, and thereby distinct from traditional public schools.

Figure 3. AAG Online Advertisement Excerpt

Parents and students choose AAG schools over the competition!

- ✓ We provide a safe place for students, fostering physical and psychological wellness.
- ✓ We maintain a caring climate where all people are welcome.
- ✓ We get to know all AAG families in order to understand their unique needs.
- ✓ We are responsive to all concerns raised by our parents and students.
- ✓ We believe that competition helps our schools improve constantly.
- ✓ We hold students to the highest expectations for conduct and achievement.
provide a CULTURE that is warm, nurturing and inviting

AAG’s Blueprint for Effective Teaching

In addition, a general approach centered on measurable results and customer satisfaction, AAG gives specific edicts to employees through what I call its “blueprint” for effective teaching. Employees at AAG’s national headquarters use scholarly and internal

research to construct a blueprint, which is composed of a host of manuals, rubrics, and other documents. These plans tell teachers, as well as other staff who interact with students, how to conduct their work. From constructing bulletin boards, to delivering instruction, to correcting misbehavior, the AAG blueprint leaves little room for ambiguity. In fact, the network presents standardization across classrooms and schools as a key strength. Implementing a blueprint ensures that all network schools deliver a consistent and high-quality product. As research-based and data-driven, AAG's blueprint for effective teaching is an ever-evolving plan that school administrators communicate and execute throughout the academic year. Although constantly under revision, the blueprint includes three chief components: Network Norms, Accountability Categories, and Teaching Toolkits.

First, *Network Norms* comprise the broadest piece of the blueprint. These include standards and procedures that are consistent across all AAG schools. These specifications span curriculum, instruction, grading and classroom set-up, as well as student dress and behavior. For instance, each AAG teacher is allotted one bulletin board in the hallway, and the network handbook outlines how it is to be used. The handbook reads:

Teachers must keep bulletin boards neat at all times and change content by the first day of every month. Bulletin boards must include:

1. Subject matter corresponding to an academic unit
2. I can statements derived from standards-based objectives
3. Explicit use of grade-level vocabulary
4. A rubric and score for each student
5. Written feedback for each student

The bulletin board directive is one of a multitude of Network Norms designed to create standardization across all AAG schools. Akin to a franchise restaurant or retail store, the company attempts to create a consistent experience for customers.

Second, *Accountability Categories* are the broad skill groups, which inform AAG’s definition of exemplary teaching. *Table 2* outlines these categories, as listed on AAG’s employee quarterly performance evaluation. According to the network’s frontstage presentation, these qualitative measures of teacher effectiveness are important forms of data that AAG uses (alongside student test scores) to measure employee success. Staff receive the most “ratings,” or scores, in the Professionalism and Instructional Practice categories, suggesting that these skill groups are especially important to the network. Importantly, a close reading of the expectations outlined in the evaluation rubric begins to reveal challenges that teachers may face when trying to prove their effectiveness. In particular, the “Genuine Commitment” category requires staff to take initiative while also demonstrating loyalty to the network. This is an important contradiction because taking initiative typically requires autonomy. One must use discretion, deciding what needs to be done and often deciding how to do it. This is a difficult—perhaps impossible—to demonstrate while also displaying commitment to AAG by following the network blueprint.

Table 2. Quarterly Performance Evaluation

Category	Description
Professionalism (4 ratings)	<p><i>Reliability</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds a solid attendance record • Delivers on expectations • Follows the social contract <p><i>Genuine Commitment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a clear commitment to AAG • Embraces the AAG blueprint • Takes initiative • Seeks to grow as a professional <p><i>Communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses appropriate communication methods • Strives for clarity • Seeks to understand the truth <p><i>Teamwork</i>²⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps others achieve success • Shares information with teammates • Supports the team’s direction
Instructional Practices (2 ratings)	<p><i>Feedback</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides clear, concrete feedback • Encourages students to track their own progress <p><i>Planning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans effectively in consultation with teammates • Uses training and insight to facilitate learning
Student Achievement (1 rating)	<p><i>Achievement orientation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes that every student can be successful • Creates a learning community in the classroom <p><i>Effort toward learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides individualized support to students • Works with teammates to constantly improve results
Classroom Management (1 rating)	<p><i>Classroom climate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains a positive tone in the classroom • Builds relationships with all students • Promotes student engagement • Maintains high expectations
Parent Communication (1 rating)	<p><i>Parent engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish relationships with families • Encourages parent support • Uses appropriate communication methods

²⁶ The “teamwork” expectation is especially interesting, given the competitive culture endemic to Eclipse. I would suggest that staff *are* graded on the basis of teamwork. However, not all staff are perceived to be members of the team. While it is important to support those on the promotion track—and sometimes those on the plateau track—it is normative to withdraw help from those on the turnover track (see *Chapter 4*).

Third, a variety of *Teaching Toolkits* outline specific pedagogical techniques that network staff must demonstrate. This piece of AAG's blueprint for effective teaching is the most specific and unique. Many traditional schools incorporate rubrics comparable to Accountability Categories; however, few regulate the practice of teaching with the specificity of AAG's Teaching Toolkits. I sat alongside a teacher who was reviewing a particularly long Toolkit. Prompted by a staff meeting earlier that afternoon, she was combing through an electronic document to select techniques that she would demonstrate during an observation. I wrote the following in my fieldnotes:

She was picking out three new Teaching Toolkit items that she would “work on this week.” She said there were more than a hundred different things—I saw at least three pages, front and back, containing skill names and explanations... For example, *Pick your Position* is when students walk to a particular area of the room to demonstrate their answer to a multiple choice question... Another one was *Energize*, where you end class with an inspirational poem or quote.

During weekly teacher observations, VPs note whether teachers demonstrate particular skills, documenting performance in the network's electronic database. On the network's frontstage, then, Teaching Toolkits are consequential. Teachers must use them not as occasional reference guides, but as everyday job manuals.

In sum, AAG's public face suggests that employees achieve success (i.e., measurable results and customer satisfaction) by following the AAG blueprint. In a weekly email, for instance, an Eclipse VP emphasized that visitors from network headquarters want to see the blueprint in action. He wrote,

Remember to study your Teaching Toolkits when it comes to instructional practices and classroom management. Toolkits will help you improve, and they are important for evaluations and AAG [director] visits. Directors and others notice and mention when they don't see AAG skills happening. The network expects these to be in operation throughout the building. Please be sure to study and use your skills consistently so that you don't risk unnecessary attention to your instructional practices and classroom management. ***“You can make excuses or you can get the job done, but you can't do both.”*** [author's emphasis]

The VP highlights that AAG officials are specifically looking for evidence of the blueprint's implementation during their visits to individual schools. By all accounts, the network's frontstage maintains that employees achieve success in their classrooms—and in their careers—by following AAG's blueprint. The network positions itself as superior to traditional public schools; motivated by competition for customers, AAG uses data and research to constantly improve its comprehensive blueprint for teacher effectiveness.

ECLIPSE'S BACKSTAGE

Managing Student Behavior

While AAG's frontstage approach to schooling appears calculated and data-driven, happenings on the ground were rarely that neat. I found that success was measured not only by employees' performance metrics with regard to student achievement and customer satisfaction, but also—and in some situations primarily—by their demonstrated capacities to manage student behavior. Commonly referred to as “classroom management” or “behavior management” in educational literature (Milner and Tenore 2010), managing behavior involves controlling the words and actions of the students who occupy a classroom or another area under one's charge (e.g., lunch line, hallway segment, assembly row).²⁷

²⁷ Processes include a practically unlimited number of rules, procedures, and techniques that teachers implement to direct student conduct and curb misbehavior. For instance, teachers may assign seats and require that students

The importance of managing student behavior emerged early during my fieldwork. For instance, Principal Ryan brought it up during my interview for the TA position. Near the end of the interview, Ryan asked if I had any questions, and I asked her to describe her vision for Eclipse's culture. I recorded her response in my fieldnotes:

[Principal Ryan] nodded her head as I asked the question and said, "I'm big on respect. In the elementary grades, I think we have it down. In the middle school, it's a little more..." she paused. "Of a challenge?" I filled in. "Yes, challenging. Ms. Harris and the guy across from her are great. So that grade is really on lockdown. The other middle school grades, we're having a lot more trouble with. Some of the teachers wanted to be friends first, and now come March they're getting irritated with things that they didn't seem to care about in the beginning. So they're sending students out for all these little things."

A common term among educators, school culture is a broad concept that describes the values, beliefs, and traditions that emerge within a particular school (Deal 1993). Principal Ryan's answer centers on student behavior. She envisions a school in which students demonstrate respect with their obedience. She uses the phrase "on lockdown" to describe classrooms where this occurs consistently. This phrase is popular slang that means to maintain control over something or someone. Importantly, "lockdown" is a reference to imprisonment (Alexander 2010; Parenti 2000). This metaphor is especially striking given AAG's frontstage presentation as a network focused on closing race- and class-based achievement gaps through an unusual level of accountability to historically underserved families. In addition to presenting lockdown as desirable, Principal Ryan points out that being too friendly towards

raise their hands before speaking or moving about the classroom. They might reinforce positive behaviors by giving compliments or awarding prizes when students display kindness or follow directions (Grossman 1995). Teachers also use punitive measures to manage student behavior, and consequences often take the form of exclusionary school discipline. Pane (2010:88) defines this as, "the administration of punishment to disruptive students on the premise that isolation gives the perpetrator time to reflect on what happened, realise the error of his or her ways, and return to the same situation but with a change of behaviour and attitude." Exclusionary discipline can occur within the classroom, through a timeout or detention, or outside of the classroom, with in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or even expulsion.

students is a problem. She suggests that teachers must resist being too friendly—especially at the beginning of the year—because this undermines authority. She hints that the way to get respect is to demand it inside one’s classroom. It is problematic, she stresses, to send student out of the classroom for “little things.”

Staff regularly received emails about managing students’ collective behavior by fulfilling individual duties. For instance, Eclipse required that teachers stand at their classroom doors during all transition periods, in order to monitor students’ behavior. When teachers did not implement this expectation consistently, VP Lang addressed it in an email to the middle school:

Hi All,

I want to resolve a few issues we are seeing during before school, lunch, passing periods, and after school. Please read this entire email because I will hold teachers accountable to the requirements outlined here.

Before school, please be at your door by 7:45.

- This requirement is not negotiable.
- You must supervise students at all times.
- You may not do prep or make copies during this time.

While standing near your classroom

- Every teacher must actively supervise children. Make sure that students follow AAG’s hallway protocol. They should not be loitering.
- This will take all teachers being vocal and persistent.**

At Lunch

- Ensure that your class follows you to get lunch according to AAG procedures:
- Students should walk on the right, in a straight line.
- All students must be in line so no child is left in the classroom unmonitored.
- Lines should be quiet.

.... We have almost 200 students trying to pass, in a space that is significantly tighter than a small classroom.

We are a few weeks into school. That means we must stay strong in training our students in appropriate behavior. That goes for both hallways and classrooms. I'm looking for everyone to do their part to make Eclipse an orderly and safe place. [emphasis in original]

The above excerpts from Lang's email outline a few of administrators' expectations with regard to managing student behavior. Teachers are to closely monitor students' behavior, including outside the confines of periods and classrooms. This sometimes takes precedent over instructional concerns. For instance, Lang reminded staff that no teacher is allowed to prepare for class before school in lieu of monitoring students. This is especially significant because Eclipse teachers do not receive other breaks throughout the day. Rather, they must supervise students in between classes and during lunchtime. Eclipse does not employ a hallway monitor, as some traditional schools do, but instead requires that teachers forgo breaks (including lunch breaks) in order to supervise students. In addition, VP Lang notes that there is too little space for the number of students moving about. Each of these expectations is a cost-cutting measure that saves AAG money but adds to teachers' work.

In addition to managing students' collective behavior, administrators urged teachers to remain in control of their individual classrooms. I received praise for doing this well, when VP Lang observed me for the first time. During the ten minutes that Lang sat in the back of the room, I was supervising as students completed a worksheet. I described in my fieldnotes:

VP Lang mentioned in our weekly email that he was going to do [TA] observations this week, so I knew that's what was happening when he walked into my remediation class about halfway through the period. I immediately felt aware of his presence and a little bit nervous... The students were completing a worksheet. They were going at different speeds, some writing on the worksheets and others writing on whiteboards. I circulated around the room to check their work... It was a good day to be observed because [the students] were all working.

Alex stopped working and began chatting with Mercy about five minutes into the observation. As I walked by I said firmly, “Please get back to work. If I have to say it again, I’m going to move your seat.” I made eye contact with both of them as I said it, but then I turned around quickly to start helping [another student]. I didn’t want to invite Alex into an argument.

I noted that the observation was well-timed because students in the class were working. This is intimately tied to behavior management because students did not always cooperate with my directions. Mirroring my observations in most teachers’ classrooms, my students’ behavior oscillated wildly from day-to-day. Sometimes I could tell that this was connected to my actions. For instance, the white boards and dry-erase markers, which I brought from home, motivated a number of students to complete work that they otherwise resisted. Other times, students’ mischief seemed to stem from reasons outside of my control. I sometimes found soccer players restless on game days. Similarly, students’ conflicts with teachers or peers earlier in the day visibly affected their moods. I mentioned that I used eye contact and a firm redirect strategically, in hopes of avoiding an argument with Alex, whom I found especially difficult to manage. Following the observation, VP Lang complimented me, and his praise centered on my handling of the situation with Alex and Mercy:

After the period, VP Lang hung around for a few minutes and asked, “Have you taught before?” I replied, “Yes, two years of ninth grade math.” He said, “I can tell. I’m very impressed. All the students were engaged, and there was that little thing between Alex and Mercy, but you handled it quickly.”

VP Lang’s choice to focus on student engagement and behavior management was significant in part because of what he did *not* say. In the brief moment that we chatted, he might have focused on my preparation or instruction. For instance, Lang could have asked how I selected students’ worksheets, to what extent I differentiated instruction and assistance, or whether

my approach addressed multiple learning styles. While these considerations seem beyond the scope of a TA's position at first glance, they were common expectations for Eclipse TAs. This lack of attention to the content of teachers' instruction emerged as a patterned absence (Kleinman 2007) when administrators talked about successful and unsuccessful teachers. Administrators' comments and descriptions about good teaching routinely centered on teachers' abilities to control students' behavior. In this instance, Lang emphasized students' engagement, as well as my handling of misbehavior. These two concepts are closely connected because, at Eclipse, "engagement" was a code word that was often synonymous with "obedience."

Principal Ryan emphasized to me the importance of managing one's students on a number of occasions. This came up during a week of standardized testing, when Ryan spent more time than usual in the middle school hallway. I described in my fieldnotes that Ryan stepped in when Ms. Holmgren and I lost control of a class that was transitioning into a testing room:

I followed Holmgren and her class into the new classroom. Students began sitting down in desks, and they started to get loud, as I've seen this class do every other time I've worked with them. [Two students] ignored Holmgren's multiple, direct requests to please sit down. I could still see Ryan in the hallway, and I'm sure that she was aware that the noise level was rising because the classroom door was still open. Within another minute, Ryan stepped into the classroom and, in a raised voice, commanded that everyone take a seat. Students followed her directions quickly—everyone except [one of the students who hadn't followed Holmgren's request], who walked slowly to a desk and sat down at his leisure. Ryan scolded the class, "You need to be getting in testing mode!"

While this was going on, Holmgren slumped her shoulders and watched, displaying the awkwardness that I'd also felt for myself a few times—how are you supposed to act when an uninvited administrator steps in to regain control of your class? As Ryan finished, Holmgren announced to Ryan and me that she was going to check in with [one of the VPs] to get her testing box, and Holmgren asked me to get the students seated in alphabetical order, handing me a roster. I prayed to myself that Ryan wouldn't leave because I knew the students would get out of control quickly if I was the only adult in the room. As Holmgren left, Ryan announced that I'd be telling students where to sit, and I felt thankful that she stayed and was going to oversee the process. I instructed students, in a loud and firm voice, to listen for their names and remember their seats, but don't move yet. I walked up and down the rows, announcing each name loudly and touching a desk or pointing to one. When I reach the end of the list, I said "go," and students moved very efficiently (to my surprise).

Eclipse staff maintain situated power when it comes to managing behavior effectively. As principal, Ryan easily commanded control of the class. Only one student was bold enough to continue resisting directions, and even this student ultimately followed her command without protest. In contrast, I expressed fear that Ryan would leave me to handle the class alone. I often had a difficult time managing students' behavior not because I failed to assert authority early and often, but because students knew I had very little power over them. I did not issue their grades, and I could not distribute consequences to the extent that teachers could. Due to these structural constraints, many TAs reported challenges to effectively managing behavior.

After the students were each seated, I walked over to the door where Ryan was standing. She was facing the doorway, out of students' purview. I recorded in fieldnotes,

[Principal Ryan] rolled her eyes and shook her head, mumbling to me, "Her students are out of control." I agreed and said, "Yep, for a lot of reasons, I think." She replied, "Well... mainly one reason," and raised her eyebrows. I knew that she was talking about Holmgren, who wasn't there at the moment. She followed up with more definitiveness, "No, there *is* just *one* reason." She added, "That's why we need *you*, Ms. Brooks." I just shook my head and sighed, not really knowing what to say. I thought to myself that—at least as a TA—I couldn't keep students under control any more than Holmgren could. It might be different if I had my own classroom, but who knows?

Ryan refers to the class as “Holmgren’s students,” suggesting that a teacher is responsible for how her students behave. She then blames Holmgren more explicitly, hinting that she is the sole reason for student misbehavior. Administrators often used this line of reasoning, arguing that students’ behavior in some classrooms and misbehavior in others was a direct reflection of teacher success or failure. In this instance, Ryan goes so far as to say that I need to move into a teaching position, assuming I would do better. Importantly, I had not done better up to that point. Just a few weeks earlier, in fact, I almost quit after substituting for a single period that virtually ended in a coup. But my failure happened behind closed doors, on a day when administrators were busy in another part of the school. In addition, I faced less administrative scrutiny and pressure as a member of Eclipse’s promotion track (see *Chapter 4*). Holmgren’s failure was more visible, and she occupied a more precarious track.

Principal Ryan continued keeping close tabs on teachers’ behavior management that week. One afternoon, I realized that she was keeping a log of the number of students who left each classroom. I was transitioning from one classroom to another, when I saw Principal Ryan sitting in a desk in the hallway, writing in a notepad. I asked how she was doing and recorded her reply:

Principal Ryan replied, “Irritated.” I veered over to the desk because that wasn’t a typical response. She explained, “I’ve been keeping track of how often students are being let out of classrooms.” She pointed to her notebook paper. I saw that the page was $\frac{3}{4}$ full with cursive handwriting. She had listed times and teacher names, with a bullet point under each (I think describing who had been let out and why). Ryan added, “We want to get mad at kids for cuttin’ up in the hallway, but...” She didn’t finish the sentence but instead shrugged, raised her eyebrows, and looked around as if to indicate that the teachers should be keeping kids in the rooms.

Ryan used her increased time in the middle school hallway as an opportunity to see for herself which teachers were managing behavior well. She again suggests that teachers are responsible for the behavior of the students under their charge. She demonstrates that control and authority have a geographical component; teachers are responsible for ruling their classrooms, and they are also culpable for the behavior of students who leave those classrooms. As I discuss in the next chapter, a critical part of managing behavior is keeping one's students inside of the classroom. Principal Ryan's comment also connects to the absence of paid staff monitoring Eclipse's hallways. She makes reference to teachers expressing dissatisfaction with students "cuttin' up," or misbehaving, in the hallway. But rather than seeing this as a problem to be solved at the school or network level, Ryan suggests that teachers can prevent the issue themselves by effectively managing behavior in the first place.

Policing the Details

Teachers and TAs picked up on administrators' emphasis on managing behavior. The most successful among us implemented it by policing the details of student behavior. I received a window into this on my first day of work, when a coworker emphasized managing behavior over what I perceived as more pressing concerns. My first day of work began when I arrived thirty minutes before the first bell and reported to VP Adams, the first of three VPs to serve as the TA supervisor during my fieldwork. As VP Adams printed out a schedule for me to follow, he mentioned that I should take over two remedial classes taught by Mrs.

Gaston, also a TA, whose transfer to another grade level corresponded with my arrival.²⁸ VP Adams reassured me that Gaston would provide further instructions and pointed me in her direction. I described in fieldnotes,

I walked down the hall and found the TA room toward the end, on the right. Somebody was talking to a tall, black woman with a long weave, who was standing near a corner desk. There were teacher and student desks crammed all over—6-8 teacher desks along the outside and student desks in the middle. When the two finished talking, I told the adult that I was looking for Mrs. Gaston, and she said that was her. She seemed to be expecting me too and said that she was moving to the “elementary hallway” today. She told me that I could keep my purse in her desk and started to explain where all the students should sit. She was really specific about where they shouldn’t sit, and I wondered why she was telling me that instead of what I was supposed to teach in 10 minutes. She motioned to some things she had written on the board, like a “Do Now” and homework, which both appeared to be from last week. She said that students were reading *A Raisin in the Sun* and had a homework sheet, so I could go ahead with that or pick a new book to start—whatever I wanted. I looked at a messy shelf of books that she pointed to, only recognizing *Hunger Games* and *Lord of the Flies*... Although I was unclear up to this point, I realized then that they were expecting me to teach at least two classes that day, which I had not planned for at all—not to mention I don’t know anything about teaching English/reading.

...Next, Mrs. Gaston said that students can use her pencils [which she systematically loaned to students], but they have to write their names on the board when they take one. (Later in the morning, Mrs. Gaston happened to be in the classroom when I was teaching. She asked, “Did you get the pencils back?” I replied that I’d forgotten. She pursed her lips and said, “That happens if you don’t stay on them and notice whose name is on the board.”

I was in a panic after finding out that my TA job involved not only assisting teachers, but also teaching two classes independently. Although she mentioned a book and a worksheet, Mrs. Gaston’s instruction centered on student conduct. She spoke at length about where students should and should not sit. She glossed over what content I was expected to teach, then offered to let me loan out her stash of pencils. However, she later scolded me for failing

²⁸ Gaston requested this transfer when another TA quit mid-year, leaving a vacant position in a grade level that she preferred (see *Chapter 4*).

to get them back. I felt confused and overwhelmed because I figured that the most important thing was that I figure out what to teach that day. This belief stemmed from my understanding of Eclipse as a results-oriented school. Gaston’s contrasting approach mirrors what others have said about no-excuses charter schools. They use a broken-windows approach by policing the details (Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004) of student behavior. In this environment, where students sit and whether they return borrowed pencils are as important (and sometimes more important) than what they learn.

Mrs. Gaston was one of a handful of exceptional behavior managers at Eclipse. Others in this group—many of whom occupied the promotion track (see *Chapter 4*)—also carefully policed the details of student behavior. One of the most outstanding examples of this occurred at the beginning of the following school year, when two new teachers conducted a similar lesson in very different ways. Crosby and Matthews each guided their students in constructing “interactive notebooks” to be used throughout the rest of the year. Popular among teachers in a variety of sectors, these notebooks provide a personalized place for students to take notes, complete assignments, and track grades. They are designed to be fun, as students get to personalize their covers, and teachers present material using creative foldables and pop-outs that students can paste inside their notebooks.

Crosby [white woman, mid 40s] announced, “We are going to make interactive math notebooks today!” and asked students to get out the notebook that they were supposed to bring (per Eclipse’s school supply list). Assuming that some students would be without notebooks, Crosby had bought a stack of back-ups. She asked who needed a notebook, and a few students raised their hands. Crosby began peeling the plastic off bundles of new

notebooks and distributing them, as a handful of students asked to go retrieve notebooks from their lockers. Students were chatting—many of them with friends because they had chosen their own seats—but they were relatively attentive and polite, as most Eclipse students were during the first weeks of the school year. Crosby directed students to create a table of contents, and she wrote a title, subtitle, and page number on the overhead projector as an example. As I circulated around the room, I saw that students' implementation of Crosby's instructions varied widely. Some, for example, constructed their tables of contents halfway down the page of a partially-full notebook, not understanding that Crosby intended them to use a new notebook designated for her class alone. Crosby quickly transitioned to explaining new material, and she asked students to take notes on the page following the table of contents. At the end of the period, I left the room thinking that most students would forget to bring their notebooks tomorrow, and the whole idea would be abandoned in a few weeks.

Matthews [black woman, early 30s] took her class through constructing their notebooks in a meticulously detailed fashion. As she created a sample table of contents, she pointed to the proper positioning of the page number and date in relation to the paper's red, margin lines. Before allowing students to glue in a rubric for their first assignment, she showed a *Toaster Strudel* commercial. "I better not see anybody *toaster strudel-in* with glue sticks!" she warned. In other words, students should avoid wasting glue by smearing it all over their cut-outs; four dots with the glue stick would suffice. Next, Matthews granted students a little more freedom to begin decorating their notebook covers, allowing two students at a time to get up and retrieve materials. They used scissors, rulers, colored pencils, and construction paper to decorate the covers with the most creative math-related designs

they could muster. Matthews promised to protect each cover with clear tape once students turned in their completed designs. Sure enough, I saw more than 100 hand-taped notebooks the day after students turned them in.

Notebook design proceeded smoothly—in fact, remarkably smoothly compared to how I had watched the exact same students act in their classes last year. That day, like the days and weeks that would follow, Matthews’ class was not completely without interruption. Those students whom I had come to know as outgoing or off-task were still prone to talking and laughing. But Matthews addressed these transgressions firmly and quickly, sometimes with joking comments and other times with formal consequences. During work time, I noticed students’ collective voice level begin to rise somewhat. Matthews noticed too. She responded in slightly more than a whisper, “Scholars.” About half of the class replied in unison, “Stop.” Matthews continued, “Scholars.” More students answered, “Look.” With a final, “Scholars,” the entire class retorted, “Listen.” Matthews utilized this call and response to redirect students regularly. The “scholars” call and response was a longtime procedure in her teaching toolbox, rather than one of the network’s many codified strategies for managing behavior. On the rare occasion when Matthews raised her voice, one firm, “Excuse me!” silenced the entire class.

Matthews’ lesson on interactive math notebooks filled the two-hour period. Importantly, she teaches a high-pressure subject. Administrators stress that math teachers must keep up with the AAG pacing guide and emphasize the most tested standards. Yet, one could argue that she spent an entire block guiding students through a glorified coloring exercise. How is this allowed in a results-oriented school where teacher performance is under

tight scrutiny? Although Matthews did not address a math standard that day, she accomplished something critically important for succeeding as a teacher at Eclipse: she established authority quickly and firmly, while infusing small displays of care. First, she commanded students' attention, quickly and purposefully regaining control each time a giggle or a side conversation threatened to derail order. Although it was only one week into the school year, she already had a procedure in place for recapturing the whole group's attention (the "scholars" call and response), and students participated in this procedure dutifully. Next, Matthews bolstered her authority by demonstrating to students the detail with which she would guide, monitor, and score their work.

Matthews also demonstrated to students, in small but significant ways, that she cared about them. She provided a tightly structured space for students to express their individuality—via notebook covers. In keeping with the primacy of authority, this space was tightly regulated. A rubric described exactly how covers would be graded and limited students to math-related designs. Matthews allowed a set number of materials per students, closely regulating and monitoring students' retrieval of supplies. She even told them how *not* to use glue sticks. Still, her approach included displays of care. She incorporated a familiar commercial and made up her own slang term, giving students a laugh. She expressed excitement about their creativity and promised to reward it by protecting their completed designs—a promise that she quickly kept.

At first glance, Matthews appears to be a much better behavior manager—perhaps simply a better teacher—than Crosby. While they were different in some ways, these two teachers came from traditional public schools, where they each successfully taught similar

student populations for a number of years. They executed the interactive notebook lesson with very different aims based on different understandings of what high-quality teaching meant at Eclipse. Crosby treated the notebooks as relatively unimportant, glossing over them to get to what she understood as the *real* learning. Little more than a week earlier, in fact, she had announced to other middle school teachers that she couldn't wait to dive into math content and planned to get students through all the basics quickly. Her approach aligned perfectly with AAG's frontstage presentation, as a network that is laser-focused on achieving results. While Crosby glossed over notebooks as a simple step preceding something more important, Matthews used notebook design as a critical opportunity for establishing authority. Having worked for Principal Ryan before, Matthews knew that policing the details of student behavior was critical to framing oneself—to supervisors, colleagues, and even students—as no-nonsense.

Inciting Fear instead of Feeling Afraid

During my first quarterly evaluation at Eclipse, VP Lang gave me mostly positive scores (see *Table 1*). After going over individual categories with me, he offered a compliment: “The teachers say you’re doing great. And we can see you’re not afraid of the kids.” He was not the only person who brought up a fear of students. A TA offered me a similar compliment. Although I found such comments odd at first, I came to understand them as subtle references to some teachers’ fear of Eclipse’s mostly black student body. This reflects racialized fears that stem from deep-seated conceptualizations of black children as adult-like and dangerous. A substantial body of research discusses white fear as directed at young, black males (Alexander 2012; Ferguson 2001; McIntyre 1997; Picower 2009), and

an increasing number of studies point out that young, black females face similar predicaments (Jones 2010; Morris 2007). Eclipse teachers whom others characterized as afraid—particularly white women—often exhibited leniency in their interactions with students. For instance, many took a friendly approach, rather than a strict one, in hopes of avoiding conflict with students. In contrast, VP Lang pointed out that “bravery” is an essential prerequisite for being an effective teacher at Eclipse because good teaching requires authority. In order to manage behavior, teachers must abandon trepidation stemming from racialized fears and incite fear in their students, policing the details in order to deter misbehavior.

Mrs. Starks, an Eclipse TA, was exceptionally successful at managing student behavior, although she rarely occupied a classroom of her own during my fieldwork. A black woman in her late 50s, Starks had an unusually long tenure at Eclipse (see *Chapter 4*). For a decade-and-a-half she had occupied positions that ranged from TA to VP. Starks had a reputation of managing behavior extraordinarily well, in difficult situations. Substitute teaching was one such situation. One day, I assisted Starks as she substituted for an absent teacher. I observed her issue detentions, call parents, and withhold bathroom breaks all day in order to cultivate obedience from students who were eager to goof off in their teacher’s absence. I recorded the following interaction just before the afternoon’s final bell:

[Mrs. Starks] asked me, “Ms. Brooks, how long you been here?” The question startled me because she asked it in front of the entire class. I replied, “About two weeks.” She said to the class, “Okay, Ms. Brooks been here two weeks so she still relatively new. She doesn’t know you all like I do yet. When she starts handing out consequences, you guys are going to hate her, too.” I wondered why Mrs. Starks said this, and I felt slightly irritated. She continued, referring to herself in the third person, “Mrs. Starks has been calling parents for 15 years, and I don’t care. I have a call log, and I *will* call your parents. You are a reflection of your parents, and if you think you’re not, you *are*!”

After a long day of commanding obedience, Starks speculates that students hate her.

However, she contends that Eclipse’s seasoned teachers disregard whether students like them. Instead, they survive by exercising authority—in this case, by handing out consequences and calling parents. While Starks’ forte was authority, I also saw her display care. For instance, I learned that she kept a desk drawer full of personal hygiene items that a handful of students could use without their peers knowing.

Inciting a certain degree of fear among students was an important part of managing behavior well, according to backstage definitions at Eclipse. In addition to observing respected behavior managers (e.g., Starks) incite fear, I learned about it when a group of colleagues discussed one administrator’s inability to manage behavior. A number of teachers, who spanned all career tracks, expressed disdain for VP Adams, and this was connected to his style for managing student behavior. When I was still relatively new at Eclipse, I shared a lunch with a number of middle school teachers, during a professional development meeting. They asked what I thought of VP Adams so far, then shared their perspectives:

Ms. Neal said, “Adams is such a little bitch.” Everyone nodded along and many offered, “mmm hmm!” Randall explained, for my benefit, “He’s scared of a lot of the more difficult students. For example, he won’t call home for some of the students or stand up to them.” Harris added, “We [teachers] have to make three phone calls a week and then turn in [our call logs] to Adams.” She continued, “I’m calling this one, this one, and this one because I know *you* not gonna do it!” she said as if she was talking to Adams. As a result of his fear, Neal said, “The kids don’t take him very seriously or have good relationships with him. It’s not like they all straighten up when he walks by.”

Everyone agreed that Adams was bad at managing student behavior because he was afraid to establish authority, literally fearing Eclipse’s most difficult students. While administrators were not responsible for controlling student behavior in the same way that teachers were, Adams’ fear had dire consequences for his career at Eclipse. After only two years in the position, he was forced to resign at year’s end.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Teachers’ ability to manage students’ behavior emerged as a central backstage measure of success at Eclipse. This is important because scholars in a number of disciplines have pinpointed behavior management practices as a critical source of race, class, and gender inequality within schools and between communities (e.g., Anyon 1980; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Gregory, Skiba and Noguera 2010; Morris 2007). For instance, schools label, suspend, expel, and criminalize black students at disproportionately high rates compared to white students (Pane 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson 2002; Morris 2007). Removal from the classroom has far reaching effects, as students labelled troublemakers are at higher risk for failing and dropping out, or falling victim to the school-to-prison pipeline (Cuellar and Markowitz 2015; Noltemeyer, Ward, and McLoughlin 2015; Pane 2010).

More specifically, I found that effective behavior management at Eclipse involves *establishing authority* and *displaying care*. While AAG's frontstage markets individualized instruction and relationship building (cf. *Figure 2* and *Figure 3*), successful Eclipse teachers exhibit authority first and foremost. Establishing authority means commanding respect from students who are under one's charge at a given time. This occurs when students follow a teacher's directions, for instance sitting down or being quiet when directed to do so. Second, successful teachers infuse their authority with displays of care. Displaying care means convincing audiences that one cares about students as individuals. I saw teachers do this in diverse ways, for instance talking to students about their hobbies, asking about their families, and teasing them about crushes. Care also unfolded in more serious situations, such as when I carried an ill student to the office, or when another TA secretly offered deodorant to a student. It is critically important to note that the care component of managing behavior centers on appropriate *displays*. Every Eclipse and AAG employee with whom I interacted visibly cared about his or her students. However, people exhibited this care in different ways, and their approaches garnered varied responses from organizational actors, including colleagues and supervisors, as well as subordinates and students.

As charted in *Figure 4*, Eclipse employees who successfully manage student behavior achieve the intersection of high authority and high care (*Quadrant 1*). That is to say, these teachers maintain control over the behavior of students under their charge at any given time. They are also widely known as teachers who care about their students. In contrast, teachers falling in *Quadrant 2* wield authority over their classrooms but fail to convince audiences that they care about students. Few Eclipse employees fall into this category, but those who do

are known as old-school disciplinarians whose teaching styles and social locations (i.e., as middle-aged white men) undermine their relationships with students. Substantially more employees fall into *Quadrant 3*, displaying high care but failing to establish authority. Many enthusiastic new teachers settle into this category as they resist developing a reputation among students as a “strict” teacher who is disliked. TAs may also land in *Quadrant 3* because they lack organizational power relative to teachers and administrators and therefore face additional challenges to establishing authority. Finally, *Quadrant 4* teachers establish little authority and display low care. I did not meet any employees who fell into this category initially. Rather, teachers and TAs sunk into it over time, as they became disenchanted with the job. For instance, some *Quadrant 3* teachers withdrew their displays of care as they lost control over student behavior, shifting to *Quadrant 4*.

Figure 4: The Authority-Care Typology for Managing Behavior

	High Authority	Low Authority
High Care	<i>Q1</i>	<i>Q3</i>
Low Care	<i>Q2</i>	<i>Q4</i>

Eclipse’s backstage emphasis on managing behavior is somewhat surprising because it diverges from the organization’s marketing themes and performance metrics, which center on student achievement—namely measurable results and customer satisfaction. Two key things explain the frontstage-backstage discrepancy. First, AAG’s frontstage presentation

garners the organizational legitimacy needed to generate profit by serving more customers and expanding into new markets. Even if AAG's public persona does not speak very well to staff experiences on the ground, it is critical to the organization as a ceremonial myth (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Second, managing behavior may have emerged as especially prominent at Eclipse because it is central to maintaining the network's image on the ground. While data in the form of test results and performance metrics may appeal to charter authorizers examining Eclipse on paper, visitors need to be impressed by what they can see. The appearance of tightly controlled student behavior contributes to AAG's public face as a network that creates strict, productive cultures in each of its schools. At no-excuses charters, including Eclipse, students wear uniforms, follow strict hallway procedures, and assume "learning position" in the classroom (Carter 2000; Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Lack 2009; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004). Although these visible markers cannot attest to the network's broader aims of student achievement, they suggest to important audiences that AAG follows through on its promises. The appearance of order distinguishes AAG schools from the stereotype of urban schools, and it positions the network as deserving of public money and organizational autonomy.

AAG's emphasis on creating an appearance of order connects to broader narratives around race and class inequality. The dominant narrative that paints traditional public schools as failing includes an important storyline about low-income children of color. These children are portrayed as unruly and unmotivated in the absence of militaristic structure (Reay 2007). A number of books charting the journeys of market-centered reformers begin by drawing

from such a storyline (e.g., Mathews 2009; Rhee 2013), which is also evident in popular films (Guggenheim et al. 2011; LaGravenese et al. 2007). In this story, a young, idealistic (often white) teacher begins working at a school that serves low-income black students. The teacher is quickly trampled by unruly students, sparking an existential crisis. The teacher changes, raising her expectations, imposing structure, and building relationships, and the students behave and excel as a result. The unspoken assumption in this familiar story is that low-income black students are out-of-control and defiant in the absence of a “no-excuses” approach to schooling (Carter 2000; Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Lack 2009; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004).

Eclipse’s backstage emphasis on student behavior does not mean that results are unimportant. Student test scores, for instance, were a part of teachers’ formal evaluations. As such, they can and did have concrete consequences for job security. However, the way that consequences were actually applied varied according to other, important criteria. Along with the litany of performance metrics at Eclipse, test scores were used to build a case against teachers who were perceived as failing at other, locally important tasks—namely, managing student behavior. In contrast, poor test scores were explained away for members of the promotion track (myself included), particularly when these staff appeared capable of managing behavior. In the next chapter, I demonstrate that managing student behavior at Eclipse is not simply a matter of skill or hard work. Rather, teachers’ access to behind-the-scenes information and resources shapes their management strategies and ultimately their success.

That behavior management emerged as the central measure of teacher effectiveness at Eclipse is concerning. Behavior management practices have historically served as an important mechanism through which schools accomplish social reproduction (e.g., Anyon 1980; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Gregory, Skiba and Noguera 2010; Morris 2007). A number of scholars have critiqued “no-excuses” charter schools (Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Lack 2009; Ravitch 2010), but few have gained access to these organizations in order to explicate the processes that unfold behind closed doors (Golann 2015). AAG schools claim to obtain measurable results by training staff to follow an innovative, research-based blueprint for effective teaching. However, my analyses suggest that AAG teachers and schools continue to discipline low-income students of color in ways that mirror common practices in traditional public schools. A focus on managing behavior emerged at Eclipse despite AAG’s extensive use of performance metrics to evaluate staff. Since exhaustive performance metrics are thought to produce a “close coupling” between organizations’ public faces and backstages (Colyvas 2012), this finding suggests that contemporary organizations do not necessarily increase transparency, nor reduce inequality, simply by measuring employee performance according to detailed, explicit criteria. Instead, the backstage remains consequential for how, and under what conditions, organizational actors define and achieve success.

CHAPTER 6 COMPLYING CREATIVELY WITH AAG'S BLUEPRINT

AAG's blueprint and performance metrics are important for the company's image—and thereby its profit margin—because they signal that the network runs high-quality schools (Colyvas 2012). However, teachers sometimes experience blueprint requirements as added difficulties, which make their jobs harder. For example, as I watched Neal comb through an AAG Teaching Toolkit on her computer, she described a recent conundrum. A Toolkit strategy that she implemented the previous week gave her trouble. I recorded in my fieldnotes,

Last week, she worked on *5 questions*, which is a behavior management technique. The teacher asks a series of questions to a student who is misbehaving. She can stop after two (or more) questions, when the students self-corrects. Neal had these questions written on a post-it on her desk:

- What are you doing?
- What are you supposed to be doing?
- Are you doing it?
- What are you going to do to change what you're doing?
- What is going to happen if you don't change what you're doing?

She said, "I keep getting stuck on the second question because the kid who's acting out usually doesn't know the directions and can't answer the question. So I usually just ask the question to another student, but I don't know if that's right." She added, "But the whole thing is kind of dumb because I work on something for a week to get it checked off [in the AAG system], but then I forget about it."

Although she committed to a rather time-consuming strategy from the Teaching Toolkit, Neal noted that it invited additional problems that she did not know how to solve (i.e., What happens when students do not answer the *5 questions* in a way that AAG predicts?). Further, she revealed that she does not consistently utilize blueprint strategies as the network intends, but instead does just enough to meet performance metrics. As with other TAs, teachers, and

even administrators, the immediate tasks and challenges that she faces at Eclipse often conflict with AAG's explicit policies.

In contrast to AAG's regional and national personnel, Eclipse staff members work with students on the "shop floor." As a result, they must find practical ways to implement network policy each day. In this chapter, I explore how Eclipse staff navigate network policy on the ground. I focus on a central policy related to managing student behavior, since controlling behavior was a critical measure of employee effectiveness at Eclipse (see *Chapter 5*). I focus on depth over breadth in order to interrogate the processes through which staff follow, resist, and bend organizational policy.

My analyses will demonstrate that teachers take a variety of approaches when navigating the expectation that they "manage" student behavior. Some attempt to implement network-backed strategies faithfully, while others diverge from network mandates purposefully. Both of these groups experience little success; many resign during or after their first years, and some are even fired. The most successful employees instead find ways to comply creatively with the policies that matter most. I use the term *creative compliance* to describe employees' tactics for adhering to formal policies in strategic ways, which allow them to bend the rules and cope with job-related challenges yet adhere to workplace policy. I explore the implications of this strategy in the conclusion.

NAVIGATING FORMAL POLICY ON THE GROUND

In what follows, I explain how five teachers, who fall in different quadrants of the authority-care typology discussed in the previous chapter, navigate a formal organizational policy, "keeping kids in the room." I focus on this policy because it emerged as especially

important for establishing oneself as a successful manager of student behavior. I begin by describing the policy, situating it within educational research and practice. Then, I describe how Eclipse teachers navigate the policy. While not everyone attempts to comply creatively, those who do experience varying degrees of success and failure. The effectiveness of teachers' creative compliance hinges on: 1) the visibility of strategies; 2) the salience of narratives used to justify them; and 3) the mobilization of support. I discuss implications in the conclusion.

Formal Policy: Keeping Kids in the Room

AAG implores teachers to “keep kids in the room,” or to ensure that students stay inside their classrooms during class periods. While all students are assigned to classrooms throughout the day, there are a number of reasons why they might be permitted to leave. Teachers sometimes issue students restroom passes or ask students to run errands; they may send students to a special education teacher or TA to receive special services; or they might send students to the office in response to misbehavior. While administrators perceive some of these situations as valid reasons for students leaving a classroom, they emphasize that teachers should do everything possible to keep kids in the room. In particular, administrators ban teachers from sending students into the hallway as a punishment for misbehavior or defiance. They also instruct teachers to severely limit the frequency with which they send students to administrators' offices due to misconduct.

The AAG blueprint contains a host of directives for managing behavior, but administrators emphasized keeping kids in the room more than other policies and strategies. Distinct from many components of the AAG blueprint, keeping kids in the room was a

Network Norm that resonated with Eclipse administrators. It was important in a big-picture sense for maximizing instructional time, as well as for avoiding the harmful consequences associated with exclusionary school discipline (see Pane 2010). In a more concrete way, though, keeping kids in the room was critical for the pressing goal of recruiting and retaining customers. Keeping students inside classrooms creates the appearance of order—an appearance critical to AAG’s marketing efforts. Impression management centers on recruiting not only students, but also political advocates and funders. The “keeping kids in the room” policy positions the network as superior to traditional public schools, many of which use exclusionary discipline practices that remove students from classrooms (see Gregory, Skiba and Noguera 2010).

The Challenge of Keeping Kids in the Room

Although formal policy required keeping kids in the room, many teachers perceived sending students out as a critical component of managing behavior. When rule-breaking escalates into defiance, it threatens a teacher’s control over the class. If she does not meet the student’s actions with an appropriate consequence, one defiant student might snowball into many, or students may perceive that defiance is acceptable. While sending students out risks reprimand, many staff perceive a need to use send-outs when misbehavior threatens to derail the entire class, or when transgressions reach a certain level of severity. I became involved in a two-student send-out that illustrates both motivations. I recorded the following in my fieldnotes:

[When I was working in another classroom,] I heard a huge commotion coming from Flynn's class, which had a sub. I opened the door and looked across the hallway to see what was going on. Ms. Neal was doing the same thing, and she called for me when she saw me. "Can you go get Lang for her?" she asked, pointing towards the classroom with the sub. I nodded and headed for the room. As I looked through the window, I could see a few kids up and yelling. Although kids typically act up for subs, this looked more concerning than usual. I opened the door, and all of the kids who were standing up stopped what they were doing, turned around, and became quiet. They looked stunned, like they'd been caught doing something wrong. Elliott was one of the kids standing up; he was breathing hard, and tears were streaming down his face. He looked enraged about something, which is a state that I've never seen him in before. I motioned for him to come out of the classroom, and I told everyone else to sit down. They obeyed (which surprised me quite a bit).

I shut the classroom door, and Elliott was still panting in the hallway. I told him, "Take a few minutes to calm down, and then you can tell me what happened." Fists clenched, he started to pace in the hallway, staying within twenty feet of the classroom. Meanwhile, I pulled another student from Flynn's class to ask what happened. She explained that Tegan and Elliott had been arguing. Elliott told Tegan to "shut up" about something, then Tegan slapped the books out of his hand, and Elliott pushed her in response. Then, other students started holding back Elliott, who was trying to get away as if he wanted to fight Tegan. This set off a chain reaction, in which half of the students in the class began arguing with one another on behalf of either Tegan or Elliott (but mostly Elliott). The sub had already sent Tegan to the office.

I sent the student back in the classroom and encouraged Elliott to take a few deep breaths. He obliged, but I still saw tears welling up in his eyes. Elliott corroborated the story. As he recounted the events, he kept raising his voice in indignation, so I reminded him to stay calm. When he finished, I said, "I understand your frustration, and I can see that this is really upsetting for you. But pushing another student is serious enough that you need to have a conversation with Mr. Lang." To my amazement, Elliott nodded in agreement and walked beside me down the hallway.

Lang's door was closed, and his office was dark, so I took Elliott to the main office instead. I saw Tegan sitting near Ms. White's desk, so I sat Elliott as far away as I possibly could, then let Ms. White know that Mr. Lang was needed. I'd seen Lang in a meeting with [Principal] Ryan and the other VPs, and the meeting was now over two hours long.

As witnesses to the commotion in a nearby classroom, Neal and I both perceived that something needed to be done to calm students' collective behavior. By intervening, I was

able to reestablish authority in a substitute's classroom. I learned that she had already issued a send-out to a student, in an apparent attempt to regain control over the class (i.e., one motivation for send-outs). However, the send-out did not quell the chaos because a number of students had already become involved in the argument and near fight. Because I was a more established presence at the school and knew students by name, I was able to silence the class. After learning more about the incident, though, I decided a second student should also be sent out due to the severity of his behavior (i.e., a second motivation for send-outs).

Soon after the incident, I went back to the main office to check on the situation. There I found Ms. White relaying the happenings to VP Lang. As VP of the middle school hallway, Lang was often on the receiving end of students in grades six through eight, who were sent out of classrooms. Lang, a black man in his mid-30s, became an administrator after teaching physical education (PE) at Eclipse for five years. A tall and quick-witted figure, he commanded the respect of the middle schoolers, many of whom he knew well from teaching PE. When Lang learned of the argument and near-fight between Elliott and Tegan, I recorded:

He rolled his eyes and smacked his lips, obviously frustrated. He motioned for Tegan and Elliott to follow him out of the office. As they did, he commented to Ms. White and me, "We can't let Ms. Walker [the substitute teacher] be in the middle school anymore."

While the substitute and I understood it as important to invoke VP Lang's authority by sending students out, he expressed frustration that he could not depend on Ms. Walker to keep students under control. He responded by saying that she will no longer be allowed to work in the middle school because she cannot keep kids in the room. Lang was called out of

a meeting with other administrators to deal with the send-outs. In addition to interrupting his schedule, this made him look bad in front of his colleagues and a supervisor; just as students' performance and behavior reflects on teachers, teachers' performance and behavior reflects on VPs.

Keeping kids in the room was important for not only substitutes, but also full-time classroom teachers. I described in my fieldnotes one teacher's send-out, which was later addressed at a staff meeting:

When I was working with one group [of students] in the hallway, London [a student] stormed out of Ms. Rodgers' class and down the hallway. I asked where she was going, and she yelled back, "I'm going to talk to Mr. Lang because this lady is tryna call my mama when I didn't even do nothin'!" I told her to calm down and take a breath, and I asked her to sit in the hallway for a few minutes. Meanwhile, I could see Ms. Rodgers outside the classroom door, cell phone up to her ear. When London spotted this, she huffed back toward the classroom, and I couldn't see what happened from there. Rodgers later told me that she sent London out.

Although students viewed Lang as an authority figure, many also felt comfortable coming to him when they felt slighted. Cognizant of her influence as an Eclipse "customer," London intended to report unfair treatment to the VP. She eventually returned to the classroom, only to be sent out soon after. At our after-school meeting that afternoon, VP Lang expressed frustration with such send-outs, which were not unique to Ms. Rodgers' room. I wrote in my fieldnotes,

VP Lang told teachers, "Please be careful about why you send students to me. Two students came to me today already trying to say Ms. Rodgers was picking on them." He continued, "And besides the fact that I could have written them a detention right then and there for so many uniform violations, I told them to go fix it because I've seen them laughing in every class." Ms. Crosby chimed in, "This week it's Ms. Rodgers, last week students were trying to do that to me, and next week it will be Mr. Peppers!"

Lang expressed that, while send-outs are occasionally necessary, teachers send students out too often. In the presence of students, Lang appeared to reinforce teachers' authority, encouraging students to take responsibility for their misbehaviors before raising protests about individual teachers they dislike. However, in a meeting with teachers, Lang subtly connected send-outs to teachers' poor behavior management as he retold the story of the day's events. He pointed out that Rodgers' students arrived at his office wearing their uniforms incorrectly—a behavior for which teachers are presumed responsible. He suggested that keeping kids in the room begins with establishing authority by policing details (such as students' uniforms) and that Rodgers was failing on both counts.

It is important to note that Lang instructed teachers to be careful about “why” teachers sent students out, but his language did not prohibit send-outs all together. This strategic language connects to AAG's formal policy. The network allows for send-outs when misbehaviors reach a certain level of severity. A high-level network administrator explained the following in an all-staff email:

Frequent suspensions are unacceptable because absence from the classroom hurts students' academic growth. That said, it is equally problematic when teachers fail to hold students accountable for their behavior. We cannot compromise when scholars fail to behave according to AAG standards. Students must receive consequences (including send-outs and suspensions) that correspond to the severity of their misbehavior.

There is an obvious contradiction here, since the network interprets suspensions as unacceptable, yet implores staff to issue them. This contradiction arose from AAG's public face as simultaneously caring and no-excuses. On one hand, AAG claims to be a network that outperforms traditional public schools by caring for and educating low-income students

of color in ways that others have failed to. On the other hand, AAG's no-excuses approach involves demanding student accountability, in part by issuing consequences (Carter 2000; Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Lack 2009; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004). When it comes to consequences, the network works within the same confines of traditional public schools. Although staff may police the details more closely (see *Chapter 5*), they still rely on detentions, send-outs, and suspensions for student misbehavior. An excerpt from the same email hints at on-the-ground tension that arises due to this contradiction:

Schools that have too many send-outs and suspensions must get to the root of the problem by identifying the underlying causes of high rates. Under no circumstance should administrators fail to issue appropriately severe consequences as a way to artificially control or reduce the send-out and/or suspension rate.

While AAG's formal language allowed for some send-outs, network administrators pressured schools to keep their rates low. The email instructs schools to determine the underlying causes of any rates deemed high. This was not something that school administrators did autonomously. They regularly told teachers that AAG would literally come in and take over if the numbers did not look good. The final line of the email is a reference to this threat of increased scrutiny. AAG anticipates that school administrators may be tempted to withhold consequences in order to fudge their numbers. Probably as a result of all these pressures, VP Lang and other administrators did not tell teachers that they could *never* send students out. However, administrators did pressure staff to keep kids in the room as a way to avoid increased scrutiny from the network. If students were sent out, VPs learned about misbehaviors that were supposed to be met with particular consequences as outlined in the AAG blueprint. Issuing too many consequences (especially suspensions) invited scrutiny as

AAG officials would become concerned about statistics that portray the network unfavorably. Keeping kids in the room released VPs of liability, since they never learned of students' misbehaviors.

Many Eclipse teachers used send-outs to establish and maintain authority. But because send-outs defy AAG's formal policy of keeping kids in the room, engaging in this practice posed a risk for staff. They could face reprimand, and their reputations and jobs would be in jeopardy. I found that the most successful Eclipse teachers nevertheless sent students out in order to cultivate reputations as good managers of student behavior. However, they complied creatively with the mandate to "keep kids in the room," rather than defying the policy outright. In other words, these teachers deployed strategies that both removed so-called difficult students from the room *and* formally adhered to the policy of keeping kids in the room.

COMPLYING CREATIVELY

Creative Compliance: Matthews Sending Students out—for Pullouts

Of the nine Eclipse teachers with whom I worked most closely, only one never sent a student out as a punitive measure²⁹—Matthews. A petite black woman in her early thirties, Matthews had five years of teaching experience in a neighboring public school district but was in her first year at Eclipse. Principal Ryan purposefully recruited her, after working with her previously. Matthews accepted a pay cut and a longer commute by taking the Eclipse job, but she trusted Ryan's vision for the school and planned to enroll her daughter in the

²⁹ Of course, Matthews might have sent students out when I was not there. I made special arrangements to assist with Matthews' most difficult group of students to explore this possibility, but I still did not observe any send-outs. Even if there were send-outs that I did not witness, Matthews sent out students with far less frequency than other teachers.

kindergarten class. Matthews quickly established herself as an excellent manager of student behavior at Eclipse, displaying high authority and high care (see *Figure 5*). Importantly, she did not abandon her previous experience for the AAG blueprint as some other teachers did. Instead, she implemented classroom management techniques that she developed at her former job in a traditional public school.

Figure 5: Where Cases Fall in the Authority-Care Typology

	High Authority	Low Authority
High Care	<p><i>Q1</i></p> <p>Matthews, Neal</p>	<p><i>Q3</i></p> <p>Daniels, Crosby</p>
Low Care	<p><i>Q2</i></p> <p>Flynn</p>	<p><i>Q4</i></p> <p>Crosby</p>

Although Matthews never sent students out as a punitive measure, she did send them out for academic pullouts. A “pullout” occurs at Eclipse when an adult other than the classroom teacher takes a student out of class, usually for an academic reason. I will demonstrate that Matthews’ extensive, strategic use of pullouts was a relatively invisible form of creative compliance with the policy of keeping students in the classroom. She utilized the sole form of acceptable student removal (a pullout) to address both achievement and behavior. However, the behavior aim remained invisible because she deployed a results-oriented narrative, which helped mobilize TA support.

My main duty as a TA was to pull out small groups of students to remediate particular skills. Similarly, special education teachers often pull out students to provide a separate exam setting, which is a common accommodation spelled out in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities (Pitoniak and Royer 2001). The AAG blueprint outlines a particular pullout structure: teachers should select students to be pulled during allotted times, then provide instructions and resources for the TA in charge. The network presents this format as an effective way to provide small-group, targeted instruction. However, pullouts occurred in a much more haphazard way than what AAG prescribed. Every morning, I checked in with each middle school teacher to see what she would be covering that day and to determine whether I should “pull out” a group of students to work on a skill, or remain in the classroom to assist with instruction. For the first few months of the year, I often remained in classrooms as an assistant because most teachers were not sure how to use me, or preferred not to prepare additional lessons and materials on top of their own work. Matthews was the exception; our morning conversations were always brief but information-packed. I found her at the threshold of her classroom, and I stood near her while I greeted students whose assigned seats were close to the door. She told me exactly what she was teaching that day, gave me a handout or two, and rattled off information about students who would probably struggle with the material. Although she typically asked for my thoughts, Matthews always had a plan for how to use me during the two to three hours that I was assigned to her classroom, and that plan usually involved pullouts.

Matthews typically sent a group of two to five students with me to work on a specific skill or assignment. For instance, she sometimes asked me to work with students who were

recently absent. This provided an opportunity for students to catch up on material that they had missed. However, Matthews did not assign *all* recently absent students to pullouts. With the vast majority of absences, students simply rejoined the class uneventfully the next day, sometimes copying missed notes from their desk mates, other times asking for extra help during work time, and still other times proceeding as if they had not missed a thing. The pullout strategy was instead reserved for students who were especially likely to misbehave. For particular students, missing a lesson due to absence seemed to catalyze latent potential for goofing off.³⁰ Micah and Paris were two such students, who were well-known for tendencies to bend and break school rules. Now in eighth grade, both boys had attended Eclipse throughout their middle school years (6th-8th grade). Micah, a fit soccer player popular among his peers, loved to joke with students and teachers alike. Most teachers liked him, and his misbehavior only occasionally escalated into what teachers perceived as defiance treated as punishment-worthy. Paris, a chubby, outgoing student, often told funny, outlandish stories and performed freestyle rap for his peers. Teachers viewed Paris with more suspicion because he displayed wildly oscillating behavior, owing in no small part to a documented behavioral disorder. On good days, he was eager to help his teachers and classmates; on bad days, he was volatile and threatened peers with violence.

Micah and Paris were both in Matthews' fourth period class, which I assisted. One day, they had just returned to class after absences. When I arrived, they were sitting in the

³⁰ A significant body of research (cf. Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver 2007) confirms a commonsense notion among teachers, which holds that students are especially prone to misbehavior when course content is too easy or too difficult, leaving the bored or discouraged. The latter often applies to absent students, who may miss material and fall behind as a result.

hallway, making up a quiz, under the supervision of a TA. I recorded the following in my fieldnotes:

By the time they [Micah and Paris] finished, the class had been through the notes and almost all of the examples. Pointing to the notes and the two students who had just returned, I silently asked Ms. Matthews if she wanted me to pull them and go over what they'd missed. She said, "Yes, that would be great." Micah and Paris followed me into the hallway. They sat in the two desks that are already out there, and I went through the notes with them (for memory). Paris got it quickly, and I told him to go back in [to the classroom] once he breezed through all but one example. Micah was a little bit slower on the examples. He has a bit of trouble with distributive property—I think because it has a number of steps, and he often gets lost when he forgets a multiplication fact. He seems to just need more practice in general. We worked through the bell, and I told Ms. Matthews this afterwards. I ended up staying so long that I missed my whole first session in Daniels' class, but I felt most useful doing this, and I think both students would have fallen behind without being pulled.

This was not the first time that I worked with Micah and Paris. Matthews asked me to catch Micah up after an absence a few weeks prior, and she sent each student for help as a member of larger pullout groups. Given this precedent, Matthews did not assign me a pullout group; rather, I suggested one that she quickly approved. This is partly because I developed a rapport and a routine with Matthews, allowing me to anticipate her next move. But I also thought to pull Micah and Paris specifically because of how I understood those students and their typical behavior. I knew both boys fairly well and had worked with Micah extensively. Based on my interactions with them in this class and others, I assumed that they would be quick to act out and derail the class if their transition back into class was not smooth.

Matthews utilized me as a pullout leader during the times that I was assigned to her classroom. She also drew on the assistance of other TAs, whose services were technically available to all teachers but not equally used. For instance, Matthews thoroughly implemented students' accommodations, sending eligible students with a special-education

teacher whenever she administered a quiz or test. Although this procedure seems standard, meticulousness in this area was not typical of Eclipse teachers. Many staff—especially new teachers—did not know which students had disabilities,³¹ or were unsure of how or whether to schedule pullouts for students who needed assistance. Instead, other teachers allowed students to decide whether they preferred to stay in the classroom or test in a separate setting, particularly when it came to short assessments, such as quizzes. In fact, it would have been impossible to do comprehensive pullouts for all classes, given the vast number of tests administered relative to the small special education staff. Matthews' use of accommodation-based pullouts removed as many as four students from her class at a time. Although the decisions were in line with AAG policy and federal law, and were based on academic factors, they changed the behavioral landscape of the classroom, leaving fewer students whose behavior needed managing. The pullouts also removed students who teachers perceived as especially likely to misbehave.

By utilizing the assistance of a number of TAs, Matthews deployed pullouts as a way to *both* provide academic assistance and manage student behavior. This strategy for creative compliance was relatively invisible because pullouts were an accepted form of student removal at Eclipse. In addition, Matthews constructed a results-oriented narrative to justify her pullouts, using achievement data and IEPs to assign students to pullout groups. However, managing behavior was more than an added bonus of these pullouts; it was consequential to

³¹ I cannot speak to what information teachers were or were not given regarding students with disabilities. However, many communicated to me, during the first few months of the school year, that they did not know about students' disabilities. In addition, when I took over two elective classes as a beginning TA, I was not informed of my students' disabilities and IEPs but instead learned of these through conversations with other teachers.

student learning—or lack thereof. Although pullouts were beneficial for the students pulled most often, students with equivalent academic difficulties but better behavior received fewer opportunities for assistance.

Matthews' creative compliance bolstered her displays of authority and care, thereby shaping her reputation as an excellent classroom manager. The strategy strengthened Matthews' authority because pullouts left her with smaller classes to manage, and it often removed so-called difficult students. This made it easier to manage behavior, helping her develop a reputation as a promotion-track teacher (see *Chapter 4*), which ultimately provided more autonomy and diminished surveillance. In addition, Matthews used strategic framing of pullouts to display care. She presented pullouts to students as opportunities to receive special attention. Because she appeared to assign students based on academic considerations, and because she shuffled group configurations daily, her methods seemed calculated and fair. The same students who protested pullouts and even refused them in other classes welcomed them during Matthews' class. In light of her positive framing, they were not made to feel unfairly targeted or punished. Instead, students rotated through a perceived opportunity to get special attention. This, in turn, made my job a lot easier and undoubtedly shaped my positive perception of Matthews' tactics. I even became a willing participant in Matthews' strategy for creative compliance.

Failed Creative Compliance: Crosby Sending Students out—for Pullouts

Crosby attempted to use the same pullout strategy for creative compliance with a very different result. Crosby (white woman, early 40s) expressed more initial excitement about the school's mission than any other teacher I met. During her first days on the job, she

characterized AAG as a unique organization better equipped to close the achievement gap than traditional public schools. She repeatedly commented to me—and also told her classes—that “the students here are great,” and, “the students here are so responsible.”

Crosby fell in *Quadrant 3* of the authority-care typology (see *Figure 5*), displaying high care but establishing little authority. I noted during Crosby’s first week that she purposely resisted an authoritarian approach to managing students’ behavior. I recorded in fieldnotes:

[Crosby] overheard some of [the students] saying they don’t like “him” (she pointed down the hall and later said “Mr. Flynn” explicitly). Crosby asked me, “Is that true?” and I nodded that it was. She replied, “I don’t want to be a drill sergeant. I’ve worked at schools like that, and I *can* do it, but I don’t want to. I don’t want the kids to hate me.” She repeated this exact same thing to me three different times, as I returned to her classroom throughout the day. Each time, she followed up with questions, asking if I thought such an approach was okay, and whether the [students’ collective] noise level was acceptable at Eclipse. I tried to remain neutral, responding, “I think it’s fine. Every teacher is different.”

Crosby feared that strictness (similar to Flynn, a high-authority/low-care teacher) would undermine her displays of care, causing students to dislike her. This could be interpreted as a novice mistake; education scholars note that most effective teachers emphasize rules and procedures during the first days of the school year (Bohn, Roehrig, and Pressley 2004). However, Crosby is an experienced teacher who made this decision thoughtfully, according to her understanding of AAG’s frontstage. Recall that AAG’s marketing messages focus on measurable results and customer satisfaction. The network’s public face characterizes students as disciplined because of the structured environments that network schools provide—*not* because teachers wield authority tyrannically. Many new Eclipse teachers, including Crosby, chose to emphasize care at the expense of authority because they perceive

AAG schools as uniquely disciplined places.³² School uniforms and standardized procedures suggest to customers, as well as staff, that the network empowers teachers to focus on teaching rather than discipline.

Somewhat predictably, Crosby lost authority quickly, experiencing major challenges to managing student behavior only one month into the school year. For instance, I checked in with Crosby one morning to find students socializing throughout the room, some sitting on top of desks. Most students flaunted uniform violations, which drew detentions in stricter classrooms. I navigated around people and over backpacks to get to Crosby, noticing that students' collective volume was enough to spark an instant headache. I found Crosby at a front table that held a projector and teaching materials—a few bins of student work, a teacher's edition textbook, and some fresh handouts. She was annotating the textbook and shuffling papers. Crosby looked up and demanded,

“Do you see how loud they are? I can't take it. They're always this loud.” She yelled at the class to sit down and be quiet... There was a temporary lull, then the loud again. Crosby continued, “They just don't care. The scores are so low, and they don't care.”

Crosby's difficulty in establishing authority shaped her displays of care. Her attitude toward students shifted visibly, as she went from characterizing them as distinctly “responsible” to loud and careless.

Once Crosby lost control over students' behavior, she began utilizing my work as a TA differently. In the beginning of the school year, I remained in Crosby's room daily, assisting students and answering her questions about how things worked at Eclipse. As

³² This perception aligns with previous research suggesting that many teachers seek out charter schools because of a perception that students are more well-behaved due to the “no-excuses” climates that many charters cultivate (Golann 2015; Goodman 2013).

behavior-related challenges arose, though, Crosby began deploying a pullout strategy similar to Matthews'. She hoped to reestablish authority by removing the most challenging students from the classroom. My fieldnotes describe how Crosby initiated a pullout one morning:

I asked Ms. Crosby who she'd like me to take and what we should work on. She was the only teacher to fill out the lesson plan template [for TAs], but it was a little bare—including about one student and one skill for each class... In addition to [the student who was listed on the template], Crosby assigned me [three students], who she said give her tons of trouble behaviorally. I didn't think I could announce their names loud enough, given the noise level of the classroom, so I tapped each of them on the shoulder. [Two of the students] complained they didn't want to go, but I eventually convinced them to grab textbooks from the back of the room and come outside.

Crosby assigned four students to the pullout. She identified one student as needing academic assistance but sent three others because she wanted a reprieve from their behavior.

Importantly, Crosby demonstrated an attempt to use the AAG blueprint for pullouts, by filling out the lesson plan template that was to accompany pullouts. This was something that no other middle school teacher did—not even Matthews. However, Crosby's lesson plan provided only a partially convincing framing of her pullouts as results-oriented. While the lesson plan might cover her tracks with administrators, she revealed to me that she was intentionally assigning troublemakers to the group.

Crosby's strategy initially produced contested creative compliance, or precarious success vulnerable to challenge. Similar to Matthews' pullouts, Crosby's pullouts were relatively invisible because they were an acceptable way to remove students from Eclipse classrooms. However, Crosby's strategy differed in that she offered a behavior-centered narrative. She attempted to document group assignments in a data-driven way, but it was an unconvincing attempt that failed to mobilize my support. Whereas I became complicit in

Matthews' pullouts, I came to resent Crosby's. Each day, she sent me the students who she perceived as most difficult. They often resisted leaving the classroom, then refused to work when they did, making my attempts at managing behavior more taxing.

I accepted Crosby's decisions for a while but soon complained about her methods to my supervisor, VP Burnett. In TA meetings, Burnett regularly pressured staff to demonstrate that pullout students were achieving "growth," and she occasionally analyzed students' test scores to measure this. In our one-on-one meetings, I spoke frankly when Burnett asked how things were going in Crosby's classroom. I worried that my difficulty in managing the behavior of "her" students would ultimately hurt *my* reputation. During the previous school year, I developed an understanding that maintaining a good reputation in Eclipse's competitive workplace hinged on distancing myself from turnover-track teachers. I saw respected teachers utilize this strategy, and I felt pressured to engage in it myself as I saw other TAs reprimanded for not doing enough work. This occurred when they worked in lower-track teachers' classrooms; if a TA followed a teacher's incorrect instructions, or waited passively in the absence of instructions, administrators characterized the TA as complicit. Only a few days into working with Crosby, I identified my time in her classroom as potentially treacherous and began to act with caution. In particular, I made conscious, visible attempts to distinguish my classroom management style from hers. For example, when I conducted pullouts, I often preemptively told groups of students, "I don't care how you were acting in *her* classroom, that's not how we do things when you're with *me*."

In acting as an informant to Burnett, I made Crosby's strategy visible, thereby undermining its success. Because she employed a behavior-centered narrative and had a

tenuous reputation as a turnover-track teacher (see *Chapter 4*), Crosby's form of creative compliance was vulnerable to challenge. Burnett and other administrators continued to touch base with me about Crosby's performance, and this was a more active, consistent form of surveillance than what promotion-track teachers experienced. Although Matthews' and Crosby's pullouts were geared toward a similar end—removing and assisting so-called difficult students—Crosby's strategy for sending student out ultimately failed.

Contested Creative Compliance: Neal Sending Students out—to Other Classrooms

Neal deployed a second strategy for creative compliance, which involved sending student to other classrooms. An energetic white woman in her early twenties, Neal taught seventh grade social studies. She majored in education and spent a year abroad in the Peace Corps before stumbling upon AAG's website and landing a job at Eclipse mid-year. Now in her second semester, Neal was actually somewhat of a veteran in the middle-school hallway; due to Eclipse's high turnover, new teachers outnumbered returners 2:1. Although I did not work with her directly, I frequently stopped to check in with Neal because she became a good friend, as well as a key informant. We began chatting regularly a month or so into my work at Eclipse, and we became closer with the start of a new school year, when new faces on the staff seemed more abundant than familiar ones.

Neal fell in *Quadrant 1* of the Authority-Care Typology, maintaining high authority and displaying convincing care. Each morning, she greeted a number of students as “baby” and turned around a few to correct their uniforms before entering the classroom. She and I talked in her doorway, as students ate the school-provided breakfast at their assigned seats. A few scurried across the room to chat with their friends, and Neal saw it but did not protest. As

the day went on, Neal often maintained control over her classroom by being louder than her students. While she was strict about silence during exams and independent worktime, she allowed talking and group work during other periods as long as students were seated. She elevated her voice and told students to, “Listen for a sec!” when she needed their attention, other times reminding especially rambunctious students where they belonged: “IN YOUR SEAT!” She was often a little smart with students, for instance saying, “Nuh uh, girl, I don’t know whose classroom you think this is!” to redirect off-task students. Neal’s approach mostly worked because she had good relationships with almost all of her students. They knew her as someone who cared about them and who would “call out” anyone, but especially habitually off-task students. It helped that Neal knew many of her students’ parents—particularly those of her most challenging students. By carefully navigating relationships with these parents, Neal mobilized their help in her efforts to manage behavior. For example, when some students misbehaved, she threatened to call their parents on the spot in front of the class. After doing this with a few (carefully selected) students, the threat was enough to mitigate most behavior problems.

Neal deployed a strategy for creative compliance that involved sending students out informally, by moving them to other classrooms for colleagues to supervise. After learning the strategy from an informal mentor,³³ Neal began sending students to other rooms often—at least once during a typical week. While strange to the untrained eye, sending students to other rooms was a practice I came to understand quickly. I regularly saw displaced students sitting in the back of a classroom, to which they did not belong. A student would arrive with

³³ Neal learned the strategy from Harris, a member of the promotion track who was promoted to VP (see *Chapter 4*).

work in hand. Once the receiving teacher realized that the student was not there on an errand, she pointed to an open desk in the back of the room. The student sunk quietly into the desk with folded arms, dropping a textbook that remained unopened for the duration of the period. Occasionally, an especially upset student would require more of a receiving teacher's attention. One redirect would usually squash any protest, since the student was in an unfamiliar environment. Overall, students sent to other rooms were relatively invisible, since they were quiet, contained, and supervised.

Cameron was a student teachers sent out often. When it came to managing behavior, Cameron was a particularly challenging student for Neal, as well as his other teachers. Along with fifteen other seventh graders, he was new to Eclipse at the beginning of the school year. Cameron did not make friends with other students easily. Although he wore the same uniform as everyone else, his clothes were dirty and stained by the third week of school. Many students used bright, colorful sneakers as a way to bend the uniform policy and express their individuality, but Cameron wore a tattered pair of black Nikes every day. Already noticeably different, Cameron's behavior toward the most popular kids in class further distanced him from other students. He antagonized high-status classmates by calling them names under his breath and by staring at them while the teacher was talking, quickly threatening anyone who reacted.

From his teachers' perspectives, Cameron's combination of antagonistic behavior and low academic performance made him difficult to manage. He was performing well below grade level in both reading and math. Almost all material seemed over his head, even though teachers' instruction was laced with remedial elements designed to address widespread

underpreparedness among Eclipse students. As education scholars note, many students who do not achieve academic success turn to misbehavior as an alternative method for status acquisition among peers (Grossman 1995; McLeod 2010). One morning, I worked in the back of Neal's classroom as she taught a class, of which Cameron was a member. I watched her attempt to manage his behavior, recording the following fieldnotes:

When I arrived, [Neal] was introducing new material with a PowerPoint. I've never sat in on this class before, even though I've visited a few times. It's the same group that Daniels [for whom I TA] has in the afternoon. I was interested to know how the students would act in Neal's class, but the whole period was pretty uneventful. I don't know if it's because they're coming from Flynn's class, or because it's the morning and they're not very awake, but even [two students who are usually talkative] were pretty quiet. The only exception came when Cameron started turning around and mouthing something to Amari. [Cameron] was sitting in a stool at Neal's desk so [I assumed that Neal moved him because] he had already gotten in trouble for something. I couldn't tell what Cameron was saying, but Amari's hand shot up in the air. "MISS NEAL, CAMERON IS SAYING INAPPROPRIATE THINGS TO ME!" he protested in a single breath. Although Amari hadn't waited to be called on before shouting, I was impressed that he was tattling instead of snapping at Cameron like he did most afternoons... Neal whipped around and yelled, "Get in the hallway and take 5!" at Cameron. He smacked his lips and pushed the table as he got up, then jumped at Amari on his way out. Neal looked at me with bugged-out eyes and pursed lips to silently (but just as clearly to all the students who were watching) communicate her frustration.

Neal did not leave Cameron in the hallway for the five minutes that she mentioned. Instead, she finished talking about a PowerPoint slide, gave worksheets to a student for distribution, and rattled off directions to the class. Then, she closed the textbook lying open on Cameron's desk and collected that, along with his three-inch, chewed-up pencil, as she headed for the classroom door. Neal opened the door to speak with Cameron, straddling the threshold and holding the door tight to her body, so that she remained present in (and thereby in control of) the classroom, yet also maintained some privacy for the one-on-one conversation.

Cameron did not return to the classroom but instead followed Neal's instructions to go to another classroom for the rest of the period. The remaining students worked on an assignment that eventually turned into homework. Periodically, students got up without permission, drawing a comment such as, "Um, why are you up?" from Neal. Other times, the collective volume of the room rose to unacceptably high levels, inviting threats of silent, independent work time. It was business as usual. In this situation, sending out Cameron made it easier for Neal to maintain authority, or control students' behavior. The strategy for creative compliance effectively removed a so-called troublemaker from her room, allowing her to eliminate a major threat to her authority—authority that she was still fighting to establish in her first and second semesters as a teacher.

After the period was over, Neal told me that she had sent Cameron to Freeman's room. I knew that this choice was a strategic one. As she had in other instances, Neal chose to send a misbehaving student to a classroom run by a teacher with high authority. Neal's usual option was Mr. Flynn (white man, early 40s), an eight-year Eclipse veteran, whom students and teachers knew as a strict authoritarian. Flynn was a logical choice because he was just across the hall, he had the same schedule (since he also taught seventh grade), and he rarely had trouble maintaining control over students. In this case, however, Neal also considered the student's relationship with the receiving teacher and students. Cameron made no secret of the fact that he hated Mr. Flynn, and Neal knew from experience that Cameron did not get along with any of the other seventh graders. As a result, she sent him to Freeman's room instead. A soft-spoken teacher with a big smile, Ms. Freeman (black woman, early 30s) exuded confidence and professionalism. I once saw her command the

attention of the entire middle school with a few simple “excuse me’s,” as students crowded loudly into the gymnasium for an assembly. Freeman taught eighth grade, so her students were older and “cooler” than Cameron, adding peer pressure for him to adhere to Freeman’s high standards for classroom behavior. Further, eighth grade students were not distracted by Cameron, whom they did not know very well. They did not recognize him as the antagonist that many of his seventh-grade peers did.

Neal’s technique of sending students to other classrooms was less confrontational than other teachers’ more formal send-out methods (discussed in the next section), and the technique provided strategic opportunities for her to display care. When Neal sent Cameron to Ms. Freeman’s room, she initiated the send-out with a conversation. The “hallway conference” was a typical preamble to Neal’s send-outs. Rather than banishing a misbehaving student to the hallway for the rest of the class period—a relatively common practice that drew administrative scorn—Neal sent students to the hallway in short stints. This gave an overexcited or angry student a few minutes to cool off. It also provided Neal with a short window of time to prepare the class for her momentary absence by finishing instruction or adjusting it so that students were ready to work independently. Instead of drawing additional anger from students, then, Neal’s send-outs actually provided opportunities for displaying care. Because she spoke with students before sending them to strategically chosen classrooms, she communicated that she cared about them and was not simply trying to get rid of them. In actuality, Neal’s most immediate goal *was* to get rid of misbehaving students in order to move forward with her class; however, her small displays of care smoothed what was otherwise a combative, punitive measure. This was consequential

for her relationships with students, since students who perceive a lack of care from their teachers have less incentive to follow classroom rules (Schlosser 1992). It was also significant for her job security, making it unlikely that students would use their power as “customers” to complain about her, as they did other teachers. Given Neal’s technique, students received an explanation, and they also avoided an escalated, official consequence because the send-out was informal. Students rarely appreciated any send-out in the moment, but Neal’s particular strategy for creative compliance built visible trust over time. For example, Cameron often remained angry after Neal sent him to another classroom. As time went on, though, he began to inform her on the way into the classroom when he was having a bad day, occasionally *asking* to go to another room.

Neal’s strategy is a form of contested creative compliance. Her informal send-outs were relatively invisible, helping her avoid administrative reprimand. Because the students whom she sent out were not sitting in the hallway, the main office, or a VP’s office, they did not necessitate an administrator’s attention and time. The fact that students had been sent out at all remained invisible to what was perhaps the most important audience—the one composed of Eclipse visitors, including AAG administrators, governmental lobbyists, and prospective families. However, Neal’s strategy remained vulnerable to challenge because it was laced in a behavior-centered narrative. Her technique for creative compliance would be jeopardized if colleagues refused to be complicit with her strategy, or if supervisors were motivated to increase scrutiny over her practices. Employees obtain unequal access to the information and autonomy needed to comply creatively, largely on the basis of their membership in Eclipse’s informal career tracks (see *Chapter 4*). Relationships with powerful

organizational actors shape the information and resources that they bring to bear on these tasks.

Resigned Compliance: Daniels Sending Students out—to a VP

Teachers who sent students out in formal ways often did so as the angry finale to a back-and-forth battle for control. For instance, Daniels, whom I assisted each afternoon, regularly struggled to manage arguments between Cameron and other students in the class. A thin white woman in her early twenties, Daniels majored in education and taught for three years in another state. Before the first day of school, Daniels used scrapbooking materials to decorate her classroom from floor to ceiling. Ignoring Neal’s recommendation to arrange desks in rows, she intentionally created student groups, placing a supply bin with manipulatives and materials in the middle of each cluster. Although the AAG blueprint encourages collaborative learning groups,³⁴ many veteran Eclipse teachers found this approach counterproductive to managing student behavior, particularly at the beginning of the school year.

Daniels settled into *Quadrant 3* of the Authority-Care Typology, displaying high care, but struggling to exert authority. Like Crosby, Daniels suggested that she *could* establish authority but did not perceive a need to do so. When introducing herself to colleagues during the first days, she characterized her former school as a “rough” place and recalled deescalating arguments between armed students. In her first year at Eclipse, Daniels expressed great enthusiasm about meeting Eclipse’s students, and she demonstrated to

³⁴ Collaborative learning groups occur when students work toward a common goal in small groups. Teachers must actively manage group activities and student behavior to facilitate effective collaboration, and this can be a difficult task for inexperienced teachers (Emmer and Stough 2001).

colleagues that she viewed Eclipse as a distinct environment compared to her previous school. Students' behavior took a quick downward spiral in Daniels' class, though, and she grew exasperated by the third month of school. But unlike Crosby, who promptly withdrew care and resigned before winter break, Daniels worked through illnesses in an attempt to make up for in care what she lost in control.

Sensitive to AAG's public face, which portrays administrators as teachers' mentors, Daniels relied on VP Lang when she found it impossible to keep kids in the room. Fieldnotes from one of my sessions assisting Daniels illustrate her formal method of sending students out:

Daniels was doing guided review problems followed by a quiz today... In the afternoon class, this lesson did not go very well because there was basically an all-out war between boys at two different tables. I noticed that Cameron had been [permanently] moved to a table closer to the front, but he was still not doing anything (in part because he doesn't know how and in part because he's purposely being defiant, I think). He was constantly looking at the boys at his former table, which enraged them. You really forget how mad kids can get about a peer staring at them or copying them! I was sitting with [a student] and helping him with multiplication near all this, while Daniels was helping students on the other side of the room. I started to get really irritated because I could hear Cameron and [another student] next to me goofing around and antagonizing the other table, and the boys at the other table would say, "Come over here then! What are you gonna do?!" I shot them a look and said, "You should not be talking if you're not done, and I *know* you're not done."

After a few more minutes of the same, I felt like I was going to blow up. Daniels clearly did too because she started rattling off formal warnings to students. She told me yesterday that the first warning is a ClassMonitor point deduction, and a second warning is a note home. I think she keeps track of it on the clipboard that she carries around, but I know I couldn't keep up with how quickly things move in that class.

Daniels used two formal AAG strategies in an attempt to manage students' behavior.

ClassMonitor is an online behavior management "app" that teachers can use to allocate and deduct points to students, according to their actions and achievements. The app allows

students to create virtual, cartoon representations of themselves and see in real time how many points they have accumulated compared to classmates. An AAG administrator introduced ClassMonitor at a recent professional development meeting, and Daniels embraced it as a transparent, positive way to guide student behavior. Her second consequence, sending a note home, was listed in AAG's behavior management guide as an essential tool for communicating with parents. Although they were by-the-book, Daniels' consequences had little effect on student behavior. Of those most absorbed in the argument, one student withdrew for a few minutes before reentering the squabble, two (including Amari) protested that they were the true victims and should not be punished, and two (including Cameron) ignored the consequences completely.

Daniels' attempts failed not because the management strategies were inherently flawed, but because she and I had already lost control over the class. A number of students were engaged in an argument before she ever began issuing consequences. While it is easy to see this as a novice mistake, it is not simply that Daniels is a poor classroom manager. By her own accounts, she was able to successfully manage student behavior that she characterized as "much worse" at her previous job. Importantly, Daniels believed Eclipse to be a unique environment, and that belief informed her approach to teaching. While Neal arranged her room in a strategic way that she learned would curve misbehavior, Daniels resisted a similar choice because she trusted that Eclipse students would engage responsibly in collaborative work. Further, Daniels might have emphasized student behavior elsewhere, but she made an intentional decision to instead carry out a more prominent feature of the AAG blueprint—

providing individualized instruction and assistance in order to facilitate results. However, Daniels and I both quickly found these tasks to be at odds with managing behavior.

As Daniels' warnings did little to quell the chaos, the episode continued:

I turned around and snapped at Cameron and the kid sitting next to him, then looked at Amari (much further away), whom I'd already talked to about having self-control, and told him that he was also getting an official warning because he needs to display self-control. He immediately started to talk back, so I cut him off and told him to meet me in the hallway.

As I followed Amari into the hallway, I could immediately see tears welling up in his eyes. I shut the door, since Daniels was still in the room. I explained to Amari that I understand his frustration, and I'm trying to deal with Cameron, and I'll give Cameron the consequences they've agreed upon as a class. But, he can't react and make threats because then *he* will get in trouble. "You can never control somebody else's behavior, but only the way you react to it," I said. He tried to interrupt a few times at first, but he stopped when I told him, "Right now, I'm talking, and you're listening." I asked him how he felt when I was done with the spiel. He grumbled, "I have anger problems, and I can't have self-control when Cameron is always bothering me!" I told him that the only appropriate response is to raise his hand immediately.

Frustrated with Daniels' failed attempts to regain control over the class, I called a "hallway conference" with a student whom I perceived as testing my authority. Because he refused to comply with my directions and began to argue, I called the conference as a last-ditch effort to maintain an air of firmness. Even if Daniels' class would remain a chaotic environment, I understood it as vital for my broader management efforts that I not allow such a direct challenge to my authority go unchecked. Amari was visibly upset by the incident itself, as well as by the hallway conference. Our conversation, however, did not spark a change in his behavior. Although I learned the technique from Neal, my attempt at a hallway conference was less successful than hers. This owes to my relative lack of power—I did not have the

status of a teacher, and students knew it. Unlike Neal, I could not issue a send-out or dock a grade.

The incident culminated in a formal send-out by Daniels:

When Amari and I came back into the classroom, the overall situation had only gotten worse. Cameron and two other students were yelling across the room at each other—yelling because they were arguing, but also because the whole class was so loud that they had to yell to be heard. Daniels threatened Cameron, “Do I need to send you to Mr. Lang?” Cameron replied, “No, no, no! I’ll be good! I’ll be good!” But the same thing continued, and, five minutes later, Daniels wrote him a pass for Lang’s office. Cameron begged and promised again, this time to no avail. He grabbed the pass as Daniels tore it off the pad and balled it up in his hand as he walked out.

After exhausting her consequence structure and leveling an informal threat at Cameron, an exasperated Daniels sent Cameron to VP Lang’s office. The send-out removed a student whom Daniels (and other teachers) perceived as the cause of a larger, problematic behavior pattern. The class remained loud, and Daniels’ efforts at decreasing the volume and keeping students seated were less successful than Neal’s. Still, the absence of explicit arguing, which might escalate into a fight, rendered the remaining transgressions more tolerable for both of us.

I do not know what followed when Cameron arrived at VP Lang’s office, but this was an interaction that I had seen before and would see again. Lang usually sat Cameron down in front of his desk gave him a firm talking to, later following him outside to speak directly with his grandmother, who picked him up after school. When Daniels sent students out, each send-out was not only visible to Lang, but also became a matter that Lang was forced to handle. Daniels perceived Lang as a mentor and confidant who would help when she exhausted her resources, and this perception aligned with AAG’s framing of school

administrators. However, Lang had a demanding job of his own, and having to deal with a student who had been sent out of class was an additional stressor that demanded his time and energy. Informally, Lang vented to Neal (following the preface, “It’s after-hours, right?”) that Neal was the only seventh-grade teacher who had it together and was “holding down” the entire grade level as a result. More formally, Lang gave reminders in staff meetings and via email that teachers need to keep kids in the room.

Following Lang’s formal, generalized reprimands, Daniels began complying with the formal policy to keep kids in the room. She told me that this was particularly burdensome for Cameron’s class, since that group of students continued to argue with one another daily, creating near chaos in the classroom. By winter break, Daniels’ tone visibly changed. Whereas she was enthusiastic and bubbly during her first days on the job (to the skepticism of more seasoned colleagues), she resigned herself to just surviving each period with Cameron’s class after a few months passed. Although her displays of care remained high, complying with the keeping kids in the room policy made exerting authority all the more difficult.

Noncompliance: Flynn Sending Students out—to the Hallway

Flynn, the most veteran teacher in the middle school hallway, was the sole staff member who blatantly refused to comply with the keeping kids in the room mandate. After eight years of teaching at Eclipse, Flynn was an expert on the AAG blueprint. However, his veteran status was relatively damning to his standing among colleagues and supervisors. Since AAG conceptualizes teaching as a short-term career stepping stone, administrators and colleagues expect staff to move up through the network’s internal labor market—or to move

out of the organization altogether (see *Chapter 4*). That Flynn had not moved up, despite multiple attempts to do so, was cause for concern. His stagnation was especially suspect due to his status as a middle-aged white male; white men in female-dominated occupations (Williams 1993)—including education (Pounder 1998; Simpson 2004)—typically move up quickly.

Given the importance of managing behavior on Eclipse’s backstage, Flynn’s style set him apart from other teachers. He fell in *Quadrant 2*, wielding remarkable authority but displaying care unconvincingly. Fieldnotes from a period that I spent assisting Flynn highlight his stern tone:

Mr. Flynn seemed like he was another level of irritated and frustrated during the last period today. The kids entered in the typical way, relatively quiet but not quite perfect in terms of their noise and uniforms. I’m not sure what set him off, or if he’s just experiencing a build-up of everything, but he gave a long lecture to the class in a raised voice. It was much more than the typical comment about kids not following uniform code. Some comments suggested he was getting frustrated that they weren’t improving: “You get out what you put in, guys,” and “I’m not sure if you’re not capable of the work, or if you’re just not trying.” Other comments were about behavior: “Don’t come in my room with gum, with your shirt not tucked in, with your bookbag on; BE RESPECTFUL.”

The hairs on the back of my neck were standing up by the last comment. It felt so serious, and, maybe because I was sitting down like a student [helping a particular student to whom I was assigned], I felt like I was on the receiving end of these comments. I felt afraid of Mr. Flynn, like I was afraid of [my sixth grade teacher] when I was in middle school. I couldn’t predict his next move, and I worried that he might throw a chair or something. Nothing like this actually happened, of course.

As this excerpt demonstrates, Flynn was a strict authoritarian who demanded total obedience from students. His formal, no-excuses approach stood in stark contrast to strategies that others used to connect with students—strategies such as using slang (however clumsily) or asking students about extracurricular activities.

I learned of no instances when Flynn sent students to an administrator's office in response to misbehavior. However, he frequently sent students out in a different way, by expelling them to the hallway for an indefinite period of time—typically the remainder of the period. I saw his students banished to the hallway at least weekly, and I sometimes stopped to talk with them. For instance, I once saw a seventh grader sitting on the ground against a row of lockers, just outside Flynn's door. When I asked what he was doing outside, he replied, "I got kicked out. But I didn't even do nothin'!" As this response suggests, Flynn's send-outs drew substantial anger from students. The students banished from Flynn's room were more indignant than those sent out of Daniels' classroom, despite the fact that her send-outs meant a trip to VP Lang's office. Students were incensed with Flynn—even collectively booing when he was given an award at a schoolwide assembly—because he failed to display care convincingly. Overall, Flynn's send-outs reinforced his authority but further sabotaged his displays of care.

Flynn's technique for sending students out visibly defied formal AAG policy. In sending students into the hallway, he risked that an administrator would walk by and notice, then punish him for the transgression. Flynn understood this risk because, along with other middle school teachers, he heard and read the VPs' reprimands for sending students out too frequently. Although Daniels responded to such reprimands by resigning herself to compliance, Flynn continued to resist. Neal filled me in on one morning's happenings, when Flynn sent Cameron to the hallway. I recorded:

Flynn sent a student out in the hallway, and Neal sent him a note. She pulled it out of the trash to show me. It said, “Do you want me to bring Cameron in my room? We’re not supposed to have kids in the hallway.” He had written back, “He’s not in the hallway. He’s outside my door.” [In her recounting of the story to me,] Neal raised her eyebrows, cocked her head, and made the, “Ope!” noise with that high voice she always uses to indicate that a major social transgression has occurred. She said, “Giiiiirl, he is in some kinda mood today!”

Flynn’s response to Neal’s offer was a sarcastic one, communicating that he did not care about the policy and did not want a colleague’s help to comply creatively.

Flynn’s visible, behavior-centered technique for sending students out defied formal AAG policy and *could* have landed him in trouble, but it never did. At least one administrator—VP Lang, who was frequently present in the middle school—was aware of what Flynn was doing. Although sending students into the hallway violates network policy, it is a form of disobedience that demands no immediate attention from administrators. If it were implemented too broadly, it would become problematic because visitors would see exiled students lining the hallways. But because only Flynn was bold enough to use this technique consistently, it was not worth Lang’s time to address the transgression when he occasionally saw Flynn’s students in the hallway.

That Flynn’s noncompliance went unaddressed reveals the primary importance of authority on Eclipse’s backstage. Teachers who could not keep their classrooms under control and keep kids in the room were frequently reprimanded, sometimes fired, and often pushed out (see *Chapter 4*). However, administrators allowed Flynn’s noncompliance to go uncorrected because of his exceptional ability to control students’ behavior. Although Flynn expelled students to the hallway, he maintained more order in his classroom than any other middle school teacher. Students’ uniforms were pristine, and no one dared speak or get out of

their seat without first getting permission (those who did were sent out). In addition, school leaders did not have to worry that banished students would wander once sent to the hallway, since students held an unmistakable fear of Flynn. In short, administrators were willing to sacrifice consistent enforcement of a policy and an expectation for a teacher with exceptional control. Still, Flynn's noncompliance was risky and contested because it eliminated potential allies (e.g., Neal, who offered help) and contributed to ongoing administrative scrutiny. Noncompliance set the stage for him getting in serious trouble later, in situations from which respected, well-connected teachers were shielded.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Successfully managing student behavior is a difficult task for all teachers of middle-school students. As a result, classroom management is among the most thoroughly researched topics in educational scholarship (cf. Grossman 1995; Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering 2003). The difficulties that staff face are heightened at Eclipse, where managing student behavior is a central—but somewhat hidden—measure of success. Teachers are charged with carrying out AAG's bold promises, one of which ensures students will be cared for and educated, rather than subjected to exclusionary discipline practices. This task, however, is fraught with challenges. AAG issues contradictory mandates, for example framing suspensions as unacceptable yet urging network schools to issue them.

My analyses show that Eclipse teachers take a variety of approaches when navigating a network policy central to managing student behavior, that of "keeping kids in the room." Their approaches are not just idiosyncratic but closely related to their ability to access behind-the-scenes information and resources at Eclipse. Successful teachers first deciphered

that managing behavior was important, given a litany of blueprint directives. Then, these teachers complied creatively with AAG's behavior management policies, which can be difficult to implement. No one accomplished this alone. Complying creatively hinged on information gleaned from key organizational actors, as well as cooperation from colleagues. For instance, Matthews used a pullout strategy for creative compliance, mobilizing TA support to arrange frequent pullouts for the students most likely to misbehave. Because she presented these decisions as achievement-driven and used a relatively invisible form of student removal, Matthews' strategy was relatively invisible. However, it left more well-behaving students without the instructional support that they likely needed. Similarly, Neal complied creatively by sending students to other classrooms in response to misbehavior. Although this strategy enjoyed relative invisibility, it remained vulnerable to challenge. Without an administrative ally in VP Lang, Neal's behavior-centered reasoning might have been contested.

Some teachers were stopped short of complying creatively because they failed to decipher the importance of behavior management. Aligned with AAG's marketing campaign, many staff members initially perceived Eclipse as a unique school, whose structure and approach empowered staff to teach, *rather* than discipline. Both Daniels and Crosby found it difficult to "keep kids in the room" not because they were bad teachers, but because they operated on the basis of AAG's frontstage presentation. They displayed high care and low authority during the first months of school. When she had trouble corralling student behavior, Daniels responded based on her understanding of AAG's public face, trusting that VP Lang would support her. Instead, she and other teachers found him frustrated with their inability to

control students' behavior. Ironically, the teachers who initially subscribed so enthusiastically to AAG's blueprint had the most trouble carrying out its policy and thereby establishing themselves as effective managers of student behavior. Subscribing to the network's public face left these teachers ill-equipped to cope with everyday realities on the ground.

Other teachers perceived that behavior management was important but failed to comply creatively with AAG policy. This occurred not simply because of individual deficiencies, but because the information and resources necessary for success are in limited supply. Given AAG's structuring of work as a competitive endeavor (see *Chapter 4*), staff members offer information and extend help carefully and strategically. For instance, Crosby attempted creative compliance once she began to see that behavior management was key at Eclipse, but her plan backfired. While she sought to deploy a pullout strategy similar to Matthews', she failed to draw from AAG's results-oriented discourse. Instead, she was honest about the behavior-centered motivation behind her group assignments. This sabotaged the invisibility of her strategy by undermining her ability to enlist support. Crosby's narrative posed inherent risk to potential allies, since her ploy to offload misbehaving students explicitly defied AAG's image. However, Crosby was unable to mobilize the support that Neal enjoyed with a similar narrative. Whereas Neal offered help to allies (also supervising *their* students in *her* room), Crosby created an additional burden for subordinates. She attempted to send misbehaving students away daily, often upsetting them with her framing of pullouts before instructing them to leave. This made it more difficult for TAs to manage behavior, which was an equally important measure of success in their jobs.

I have used the term *creative compliance* to describe employees' tactics for adhering to formal policies in strategic ways, which allow them to bend the rules and cope with job-related challenges yet adhere to workplace policy. When it came to keeping kids in the room, creative compliance required relative invisibility in combination with a convincing narrative. This took substantial work on the part of staff members. They expended substantial time and energy on figuring out how to successfully navigate AAG policies and cultivate reputations as performers. This was not an unconstrained choice but a requirement for survival as an Eclipse employee. As demonstrated in *Chapter 4*, staff must compete on AAG's internal labor market in order to survive. The process of competing involves sharing information, offering help, and bending policy strategically, but time spent strategizing likely steals time from the important work of educating.

The concept of creative compliance builds on sociologists' understanding of how employees exert control over the labor process using the resources and strategies available to them. Workers attempt to carve out autonomy, use expertise, and find dignity amidst employers' attempts to control the labor process more tightly. Creative compliance is a critical strategy that workers use to navigate performance metrics, whose prominence is increasing in a number of workplaces. This strategy likely results in unintended consequences, as well. Eclipse staff expended substantial time and energy navigating complex organizational policies. An emphasis on uncovering and navigating the backstage may impede students' learning, for instance if it monopolizes teachers' time. A focus on savvy game-play in the workplace is all the more concerning given informal career tracking, which incites competition (see *Chapter 4*).

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation by describing prevailing rhetoric regarding a perceived crisis in public education and popular market-centered reforms put forward as a solution. Proponents claim that market-centered reforms improve the quality of schooling and teaching by creating a deregulated education marketplace. According to this logic, the market's invisible hand (Smith 1904) facilitates efficient, quality education when schools compete for student customers and teachers compete for jobs (Dee and Wychkoff 2015; Hanushek 2007; Hoxby 2002; Kopp 2003; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004). Infusing the public school sector with competition involves deregulation, as well as accountability (Archbald 2004; Fabricant and Fine 2015; Renzulli and Roscigno 2007). School leaders can choose how to operate and who to hire, but both schools and teachers must show results.

Education management organizations, which I call networks, open and manage a number of charter schools as a single corporate entity. Beyond emerging as a result of the education marketplace, networks embrace market-centered reform by fundamentally shifting teachers' employment terms and work structures. These organizations limit unionization and collective bargaining, hire and fire with extraordinary flexibility, and replace seniority protections with bonus pay and promotion structures (Malloy and Wohlstetter 2003; Miron 2007). Although their staff turnover rates are high (Intersoll 2001; Malloy and Wohlstetter 2003), many scholars and policymakers exalt networks as uniquely capable of facilitating excellent teaching and thereby closing long-standing achievement gaps (Almond 2012; Dee and Wychkoff 2015; Hanushek 2007; Hoxby 2002; Kopp 2003; Rhee 2013; Thernstrom and

Thernstrom 2004). This dissertation adds to a growing literature examining how market-centered reforms play out in schools and workplaces (Bancroft 2008; Buras 2014; Golann 2015).

Chapters 2 and 3 outline my method and the setting. I conducted covert ethnographic research at a network charter school I call Eclipse.³⁵ I worked as a teacher's assistant (TA) for 33 weeks, over the course of two academic years. Eclipse is managed by a for-profit network I call the Academic Achievement Group (AAG). This corporation epitomizes market-centered education reform. AAG expends extraordinary capital and labor power on branding its services, as well as recruiting and retaining its customers. According to AAG's public persona, the organization achieves results among underserved student populations by holding schools and staff accountable for performance. This accountability results from workplace policies uncommon among conventional public school districts. For instance, similar to other networks (Malloy and Wohlstetter 2003; Miron 2007), AAG has the autonomy to hire nontraditionally trained teachers at low-starting salaries and on short-term contracts. In addition, the organization closely monitors teachers' work, using weekly evaluations and student test scores to shape staff members' pay and job security. Still, many beginning Eclipse teachers report excitement about the AAG mission and approach, and some express aspirations for upward mobility on the corporation's career ladder. What can one network school tell us about the policies and practices designed to introduce competition

³⁵ As described in *Chapter 2*, information that could be used to identify this study's setting or participants, including names, descriptors, and internally or externally published material, has been disguised to protect anonymity.

into public education? This dissertation demonstrates how, and with what consequences, market-centered policies and practices unfold on the ground.

In *Chapter 4*, I explained AAG's expectations for teachers and examined how the organization ensures staff comply with its directives. I also identified organizational mechanisms for eliminating those staff who fail to comply. Informal career tracks—promotion, plateau, and turnover—emerged as a way to motivate some staff and to drive out those deemed nonperformers. Administrators communicated tracks to teachers and their peers via formal and informal methods. Although some staff resisted track membership, many employees became invested in tracks and policed their boundaries. Akin to academic tracks among students (Carbonaro 2005; Friedkin and Thomas 1997; Gamoran and Mare 1989), career tracks shaped teachers' chances to achieve success at Eclipse, influencing their access to autonomy and information. AAG's implementation of structures emphasizing upward movement and organizational culture resonate with control structures found in both manufacturing and the professions (Burawoy 1979; Courpasson 2000; Kunda 1992, 2006). The network's use of job insecurity as a control mechanism mirrors practices in both sectors (Fullerton and Wallace 2007; Glavin 2013; Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012).

In *Chapter 5*, I contrasted definitions of high-quality teaching on AAG's frontstage and Eclipse's backstage. AAG's frontstage centers on staff accountability, urging teachers to follow a detailed network "blueprint" in order to achieve measurable results and facilitate customer satisfaction. On Eclipse's backstage, administrators emphasized controlling student behavior as a central measure of teaching effectiveness. Despite AAG's achievement-centered rhetoric and elaborate evaluation structures, staff members' first—and sometimes

only—task was to manage student behavior with steadfast authority. The emphasis on compelling obedience from low-income students of color parallels practices at other no-excuses charter schools (Carter 2000; Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Lack 2009; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004) and in public schools generally (Au 2010; Bowles and Gintis 1976).

In *Chapter 6*, I examined one policy in particular—keeping students in the classroom—where organizational marketing, customer satisfaction, and behavior management intersect. “Keeping students in the classroom” is a policy designed to reduce send-outs, suspensions, and expulsions, which have contributed to educational inequity at traditional public schools (Cuellar and Markowitz 2015; Gregory, Skiba and Noguera 2010; Noltemeyer, Ward, and Mcloughlin 2015; Pane 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson 2002). I found, however, that students were still routinely sent out of the classroom, whether overtly or covertly. Well-networked teachers worked together to remove students from the classroom without attracting the attention of supervisors or parents. Teachers who utilized a strategy I call *creative compliance* maintained upward career trajectories by deviating from the policy in relatively invisible ways. The most successful among them utilized a results-oriented narrative that resonated with the network’s frontstage. I also demonstrated that creative compliance required mobilizing information and resources, which were unequally available to staff. Below, I discuss the implications of these findings and suggest avenues for future research.

IMPLICATIONS

What do these findings suggest about the future of teaching and schooling, as policymakers continue to move toward market-based solutions to the purported crisis in

education? I address implications for the work of teaching, as well as the business of schooling. I argue that charter networks, as well as others who deploy market-centered logic, re-conceptualize the teaching profession. They advance new ideas about teachers' employment terms, everyday work, and career trajectories, replacing autonomy and intrinsic rewards with competition and extrinsic rewards. My analyses suggest that teachers who work in market-centered environments respond in ways similar to those displayed by workers in other contexts. In short, they *compete*, performing over the short term, sharing information strategically, and offering assistance selectively. It is critically important that scholars, legislators, and school leaders explore these outcomes, as an increasing number of traditional public schools contend with pressure to adopt the market-centered policies prevalent among charter networks (Goodman 2013; Miron 2007; Renzulli and Roscigno 2007). I end by discussing how my findings connect to the literature on students' schooling, recommending areas for future research.

Re-Conceptualizing the Teaching Profession

AAG re-conceptualizes teaching by urging staff to envision careers in education, rather than careers in teaching. This suggests that teachers are not professionals to be developed, but good or bad workers to be efficiently measured and sorted into tracks. AAG's approach is increasingly common among charter networks and nontraditional teacher preparation programs, such as Teach For America (cf. Kopp 2003). Pulling from the logic of market-centered reform, these organizations characterize teachers as entrepreneurs, who should be free to pursue a variety of training paths and garner promotions and pay based on performance (Hanushek 2007; Hoxby 1996, 2002). This outlook does not stem from a

sudden public empathy for teachers but instead derives from a larger war on public-sector unions (Freeman and Han 2012).

AAG eliminates collective bargaining and atomizes teachers' work as part of a broader profit-maximizing strategy. Eclipse teachers make substantially less than their counterparts in comparable public schools. However, AAG's mission, along with its promises of upward mobility, appear to convince a segment of Eclipse employees to work at a burnout pace, for a low-wage. Although not everyone can achieve upward mobility, career tracking and job insecurity shape all employees' experiences within the organization. Promotion-track teachers seem to perceive their jobs as temporary—as initiation rituals that will garner long-term rewards. As they become invested in performing on Eclipse's backstage, they construct and reinforce track boundaries.

AAG's informal career tracking reflects a sophisticated system of workplace control that infuses a classic internal labor market with neo-Taylorist managerial principles. Historically, employers used internal labor markets to steer workers' decision making and lateralize conflict. But because elaborate career ladders emerged as part of collective bargaining agreements, employers faced difficulty ridding their organizations of nonperformers and vocal resisters (Gordon, Edwards, and Reich 1982). AAG's revamped internal labor market addresses this weakness. Given the relative absence of unions and collective bargaining among network charter schools, AAG enjoys substantial hiring and firing flexibility compared to the corporations where internal labor markets first emerged. Absent bargaining agreements and other forms of collective resistance, AAG can easily push out or fire those who resist the labor process or challenge company interests. As a result,

AAG uses promotions, in combination with firing flexibility, to compel staff to comply with organizational directives (Gordon, Edwards, and Reich 1982).

Consequences

My analyses suggest three overarching consequences of career tracking at AAG, which may materialize in similar workplaces that embrace market-centered policy. First, informal career tracking is a competitive endeavor, which encourages workers to prioritize short-term performance over long-term excellence. For instance, some Eclipse teachers protected their promotion-track status by creatively sending students out. Although send-outs can hurt students in the long run (Cuellar and Markowitz 2015; Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera 2010; Morris 2007; Noltemeyer, Ward, and Mcloughlin 2015; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson 2002), teachers engaged in this practice to maintain authority in the short-run. Examples from the literature suggest that adverse consequences often emerge when workplaces reward short-term performance because this approach incentivizes doing what is necessary to get ahead (Jackall 2009; Sennett 1998). A focus on savvy game-play is extraordinarily concerning in schools, where the result of work is not a material good but a child's education. For instance, a high-stakes emphasis on improving teacher and school performance can spark teaching to the test (Menken 2006) or even systematic cheating (Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner, and Rideau 2010).

Second, tracking teachers shapes career aspirations and performance akin to how tracking students shapes *academic* aspirations and performance (Carbonaro 2005; Gamoran 1986, 1987; Gamoran, Adam, and Mare 1989). Eclipse teachers experience differing levels of scrutiny, as well as unequal access to the information and resources necessary for success,

depending on their track membership. Scholars have documented how similar processes in other organizations are major contributors to inequality (Castilla 2008; Granovetter 1995; Kanter 1977; Marsden, Kalleberg, and Cook 1993; Williams 1992). For example, Kanter's (1977) study of a large corporate bureaucracy demonstrated that workers' structural positions shape their opportunities, giving some employees more opportunities to demonstrate competence. Given the simple, binary solutions implicit in market-centered reform, it is tempting to perceive Eclipse teachers as differentially skilled, rather than unequally equipped. However, my analyses suggest that tracks shape staff members' abilities and ambitions. On one hand, the promotion track seems to improve self-efficacy among its members, as administrators extend autonomy, lend support, and express confidence in promotion-track teachers. On the other hand, tracking can undermine efficacy and impede performance for those who occupy plateau or turnover tracks. These teachers face increased scrutiny and far less support. This often translates into higher workloads. Specifically, many lower-track staff attempt to implement AAG's blueprint more thoroughly than promotion-track staff, who instead find ways to comply creatively. Most lower-track staff also contend with punitive "Improvement Plans," which put them in a formal position of proving themselves as effective employees.

Third, career tracking leaves little foundation for collective worker resistance. By design, internal labor markets lateralize conflict. This was clearly on display at Eclipse, as staff vying for membership on the promotion track (and, to a lesser extent, the plateau track) attempted to distinguish themselves from turnover colleagues. An illuminating example occurred when a group of disgruntled students accused a turnover-track teacher of

misconduct. Promotion-track staff quickly distanced themselves and blamed the teacher for allowing “drama,” even though they had been the targets of similar accusations by students. In the context of widespread job insecurity, career tracking encourages employees to chase opportunities for achieving a leg up on their coworkers and to distance themselves from struggling colleagues. This not only undermines interpersonal support in the workplace, but it also undermines worker consciousness that could catalyze collective organization. Staff compete with one another instead of organizing to challenge unfavorable policies or working conditions.

Understanding more about the conditions under which career tracking occurs is an important avenue for future research. Sociologists know that workers achieve success within organizations through a variety of informal mechanisms, including mentoring (McDonald 2011; McGuire 2002) and networking (Granovetter 1995; McDonald and Day 2010; Royster 2003). My analyses suggest that tracking is another important mechanism. Just as men have historically encountered glass escalators in female-dominated occupations (Williams 1993), while women have faced glass ceilings in male-dominated workplaces (Purcell, MacArthur, and Samblanet 2010), tracking processes likely benefit some groups at the expense of others. For instance, women who have substantial responsibilities to care for small children or elderly relatives (Gerstel 2000) may be unable to engage in the extra (sometimes unpaid) work necessary to establish oneself as a performer. This undermines their ability to position themselves for upward mobility on the promotion track or relative stability on the plateau track.

Organizational Instability

My analyses suggest that re-conceptualizing teaching as a short-term endeavor, rather than a long-term career, has important consequences for the quality of schooling that networks can provide. First, Eclipse maintains high turnover rates (approximately 50% annually) owing to AAG's emphasis on career movement. Some staff moved up through promotions. More, however, were eliminated. Many staff quit, and some were terminated or informally pushed out. Organizations with high turnover experience instability—sometimes crippling instability—because they retain few seasoned employees to keep the organization running and socialize new staff (Allen and Shanock 2013). AAG identifies good teachers in order to promote them out of the classroom. This is problematic because teachers develop expertise (with respect to their craft, as well as a particular work environment) over time (Darling-Hammond 2000; Rice 2003).³⁶ Veteran teachers are also crucial for training and mentoring new teachers (Smith and Ingersoll 2004). While Eclipse veterans share information and resources with new staff, they do so selectively in order to protect their membership on the promotion track. In a competitive, pressure-laden workplace where new employees regularly flow in and out, mentoring staff is a substantial and risky investment. Given widespread job insecurity and high administrative scrutiny, promotion-track teachers carefully ally with, and distance themselves from, colleagues. An enormous body of research documents the importance of collaboration to quality teaching and schooling (Darling-

³⁶ Recall that Eclipse was exceptional among charters (and perhaps somewhat unique even within the AAG network) in that it hired mostly veteran teachers. Many promotion-track teachers developed expertise while working in traditional public schools. However, backstage information and resources were critical for activating this expertise. As discussed in *Chapters 5 and 6*, some experienced teachers modified their teaching in response to AAG's blueprint.

Hammond 2013; Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran 2007; Jackson and Bruegmann 2009; Neal 2009; Ravitch 2010). My analyses suggest that networks' implementation of market-centered policies facilitates competition in ways that undermine collaboration.

Instability is especially concerning when the organization in question is a school. Research suggests that students benefit from structure and stability, for instance building relationships with school staff over the course of many years (Hamre and Pianta 2003). The educational and developmental benefits that students glean from relationships with teachers mirror the benefits of neighborhood social capital (Coleman 1988). At Eclipse, high turnover in some ways undermined a stable, nurturing environment for students. Some students expressed anxiety that their favorite teachers or TAs would soon leave. In addition, the constant coming and going of staff disrupted a flow of information and resources critical to instruction. For instance, a number of teachers and TAs did not learn of students' learning and behavioral disabilities in a timely manner. As a result, some staff did not know when, or how, to implement students' accommodations. Scholars know that teachers are best equipped to facilitate students' academic, social, and emotional development in environments where staff know a school's students and communicate with one another about students' progress and behavior (Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran 2007; Hamre and Pianta 2003).

The Quality of Schooling under Market-Centered Reform

Social Reproduction

Market-centered education reform presents competition and accountability—among both schools and teachers—as solutions to educational inequality. In their classic account of schooling, Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that schools *reproduce* existing race and class

hierarchies, rather than challenge them. According to what the authors call a “correspondence principle,” schools socialize students on a categorical basis, preparing them for particular positions in the labor market. A number of scholars have since elaborated this process, identifying how resources (Kozol 2005), curriculum and instruction (Golann 2015; MacLeod 2009), and social and cultural capital (Lareau 2003; Royster 2003) shape the nature of schooling. My findings add to this literature, as the management of student behavior was a central measure of high-quality teaching at Eclipse.

An emphasis on student behavior has emerged at other no-excuses charter schools (Carter 2000; Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Lack 2009; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004). This approach is concerning because, at the same time that charter networks purport to close achievement gaps, they adopt socialization practices that further entrench inequality. As teachers emphasize order and obedience, for example, students learn to monitor themselves, exhibit deference, and withhold opinions. This is a class-based repertoire of behaviors, which contrasts sharply with the hidden curriculum taught to middle- and upper-class students (Golann 2015; Kahn 2015). Yet, my analyses suggest that no-excuses charter schools contend with inequality in complex—and sometimes contradictory—ways. For instance, AAG’s mandate that teachers “keep kids in the room” appears to *challenge* inequality. After all, exclusionary discipline policies continue to hurt low-income students of color. Black students are disproportionately sent out, suspended, expelled, and criminalized (Ferguson 2001; Pane 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson 2002; Morris 2007). These punitive measures are stigmatizing, and they put students at greater risk for academic failure and

dropout (Cuellar and Markowitz 2015; Noltemeyer, Ward, and Mcloughlin 2015; Pane 2010).

At the same time that AAG directs teachers to keep kids in the room, the network structures Eclipse's workplace in ways that render it difficult for staff to comply with the policy. Although some Eclipse staff carved out spaces for creative compliance, no teacher kept students in the room as imagined in AAG's formal policy. Based on my fieldwork experiences, I interpret this finding as a reflection of something meaningful going on in the workplace, rather than as an indication of Eclipse teachers' low skills or particular bias. What made it difficult to keep kids in the room? Consider Crosby, an experienced teacher who arrived at Eclipse eager to improve students' math skills. She embraced AAG's social-justice rhetoric and followed the network's blueprint closely, but she found that AAG's approach overlooked other crucial components of learning. For instance, Crosby noted that Eclipse's elimination of unstructured playtime—a practice designed to allow more time for academic instruction—undermined student engagement and made it difficult for her to manage behavior. Other teachers (e.g., Neal, Matthews, Flynn) perceived the same challenge but coped by managing behavior with uncompromising authority. At least one defied the edict (e.g., Flynn); others used creative compliance to send out students who threatened that authority, and this was a key strategy that helped them build and maintain reputations as performers. Despite their differing responses to AAG's dual focus on results and behavior, Eclipse teachers did not keep students in the classroom in ways that would fundamentally challenge exclusionary school discipline patterns common in conventional public schools.

Burgeoning theoretical and empirical evidence (Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Lack 2009) suggests that the nature of education offered in no-excuses charter schools is *not* one that fundamentally challenges inequality. Consider how adults mold student behavior at schools serving different populations, with drastically different aims. First, Golann (2015) describes the approach of a no-excuses charter school:

Teachers sweat the small stuff, using rewards and consequences to motivate behavior. For good behavior, students earn privileges, including seats, shirts, field trips, and immunity from group punishments. They also suffer consequences for infractions, like loss of behavioral points, detention, and bench—a form of in-school suspension in which students are identified by their yellow shirts. (106-7)

...On any given afternoon, the cafeteria is filled with students in detention who have violated one of the school's meticulous rules: refusing to lift a head off a desk, talking in the hallway, leaving a homework problem blank, chewing gum, getting out of their seat without permission, and the catchall, disrespecting a teacher. (109)

In contrast, Kahn (2011) describes how faculty mold behavior at a private boarding school:

Rather than be forced to learn formal rules of etiquette, students learn to be comfortable around such elite tastes and sensibilities and, more often than not, even be indifferent to them. The students at seated meal are not uncomfortable in their formal attire, nor are they anxious about eating dinner with faculty members. In fact, the event is a non-event to them. They could care less. And this ease—which, it turns out, is far more valuable than merely revering and producing expertise—is what students at St. Paul's learn at seated meal and everywhere else. (80)

Advocates argue that market-centered education reforms, including the creation and expansion of no-excuses charter schools, tackle educational inequity. However, the no-excuses brand of schooling that emerges from these reforms is a stark contrast from the nation's best schools (Kumashiro 2012). While the no-excuses model may improve students' test scores in select cases (e.g., Angrist et al. 2010; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004), additional scholarly attention is needed to examine other educational mechanisms central to

the reproduction of inequality. Student achievement is a concrete, accessible measure of learning, but it only begins to scratch the surface of how schooling reproduces inequality.

CONCLUSION

People with a variety of political orientations—including those who count themselves as progressive and express deep concerns about inequality—support market-centered education reforms (Dee and Wychkoff 2015; Hanushek 2007; Hoxby 2002; Kopp 2003; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004). For instance, Teach For America receives thousands of applications each year. This nonprofit organization recruits college graduates to teach in underprivileged schools, asserting that children's zip codes should not determine their educational opportunities (TFA 2015). Teach For America's astounding growth, in combination with the emergence of similar programs, suggests that a growing number of young people not only believe in equal opportunity, but also identify inequalities related to race, class, and geography that undermine it.

The wide appeal of market-centered education reform is somewhat surprising in light of critical scholarship that characterizes market-centered policies as harmful to children and communities (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Johnson and Landman 2000; Kumashiro 2012; Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, and Henig 2002; Ravitch 2010, 2013; Spence 2012). Building on the work of others who name schooling and school-based processes as central to the reproduction of inequality (Anyon 1980; Au 2010; Buras 2014; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Carbonaro 2005; Diamond 2007; Golann 2015; Gregory, Skiba and Noguera 2010; Lareau 2003; McLeod 2010; Morris 2007; Renzulli and Evans 2005), my analyses suggest that charter networks have adapted unequal schooling to a new cultural and political landscape.

Specifically, AAG's frontstage portrays the network as data-driven and results-oriented in pursuit of educational equity. This mission garners the organization legitimacy because it resonates with a host of teachers, administrators, and parents who care about long-standing race- and class-based achievement gaps. However, my analyses suggest that networks' public faces do not map neatly onto schools' backstages. When schools demand that teachers cultivate reputations as performers, they may encourage employees to focus on managing others' impressions by forging alliances, withholding help, and complying creatively. Convincing audiences of one's effectiveness is a complex social process, and the strategies essential to building a reputation as a performer may not align with those important for empowering historically underserved students and communities.

The dominant framing of market-centered education reform polarizes the interests of students and teachers. Then Chancellor of the Washington, D.C. Public School System, Michelle Rhee, deployed this framing as she justified drastic changes to teachers' employment terms and work structures. Rhee argued to staff and community members at a D.C. Council meeting:

I am convinced that we must not let the rights, privileges, and priorities of adults take precedence over what is in the best interests of students. We cannot allow children to languish while we try to remediate adults. We cannot forsake their futures for adult issues in the present" (Rhee 2013:136).

Rhee framed market-centered reforms as a long-overdue course of action that does what is best for students. Similarly, she characterized resistance to these reforms as selfish short-sightedness on the part of adults. This outlook is compelling, and even inspirational, in that it offers a clear way forward to solve long-standing problems related to educational inequity.

However, I will instead suggest, to conclude this dissertation, that the interests of students and adults are intimately connected. The teachers I worked with at Eclipse cared overwhelmingly about their students, but translating that care into effective education is a complex process. Increased scrutiny, pressure, and competition pose challenges as teachers attempt to develop and implement expertise, collaborate with colleagues, and build meaningful relationships with students. The collective protections that have historically safeguarded teacher autonomy are quickly eroding under market-centered education reform. My findings add to a body of literature that suggests scholars, legislators, and practitioners should exercise caution and skepticism as they seek to understand this reform (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Johnson and Landman 2000; Kumashiro 2012; Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, and Henig 2002; Ravitch 2010, 2013; Spence 2012), particularly given its connections to corporate interests (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Kretchmar, Sondell, and Ferrare 2014; Krop and Zimmer 2005; Ravitch 2013; Scott 2009). Still, the groundswell of support for charter schools provides reasons for optimism. An increasing number of families, teachers, reformers, and business leaders have turned their attention to educational inequity. While school choice and other market-centered reforms do not provide a silver bullet for addressing inequality, growing public concern over educational disparities may spark critical conversations about the purpose of public schooling in a democratic society.

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