A Neoliberal Grammar of Schooling? How a Progressive Charter School Moved toward Market Values

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Although initially ideologically diverse, the charter school movement has become increasingly aligned with neoliberal ideology, which assumes that public services, including education, are improved through market forces, such as accountability, competition, efficiency, and managerialism. Yet little is known about how leaders of ideologically progressive charter schools sustain their founding pedagogical and political missions amid widespread market values. This qualitative case study of one progressive charter school in New York City investigates this phenomenon. Findings demonstrate that the school's enrollment, instructional, school governance, and community engagement practices moved toward market values as school leaders and board trustees prioritized attaining favorable test outcomes, garnering resources, and ensuring the renewal of the school's charter. Findings illustrate a neoliberal grammar of schooling, or powerful forces that led school leaders to move their practices toward market values, in turn constraining the realization of the school's founding progressive mission.

Empire Charter School coleader Shellie Peek was torn.[1] The school's original enrollment policy aimed to foster equitable access through backfilling, or offering available seats to students at any point in the year. Indeed, Empire's original charter from the mid-2010s states, "As a public school, we feel it is our duty to offer these vacant seats to applicants in all grades." However, in a June 2018 conversation, Shellie explained a recent decision to end backfilling:

> [Backfilling] is a huge risk for us, and that's why our test scores are what they are. We're basically taking kids up through fourth grade, and we have to stop doing that because we can't turn it around, they're so far below

> grade level. And even though I morally believe we should be taking kids at all grade levels because we are a public school, if test scores are what are going [to] let us keep being [a] school, and we get kids in fourth grade that are 3 years below grade level, and they actually take a test before the end of the school year, how are we going to do that?

One board trustee echoed Shellie's misgivings about putting an end to back-filling, noting, "This feels wrong."

In addition, Empire's leaders and board made changes to the school's instructional approach. The school's original charter states that Empire will "provide a progressive, inquiry-based education model" through a curriculum wherein "students at all grade levels engage in meaningful inquiry-based interdisciplinary projects." Moreover, the charter notes Empire's commitment to employing "multi-faceted assessment practices [to] gauge academic achievement and growth." In a September 2017 conversation, Shellie's coleader, Hans Barrios, gave an example of Empire's founding pedagogical model by describing his ideal math lesson. He explained that students learn multiplication most effectively not by memorizing multiplication tables, but by "playing with 5 bowls of 5 marbles . . . experiencing 5 plus 5 is 10, 10 plus 5 is 15, seeing the components of 25, learning the multiples of 5 without ever hearing the word multiplication." Yet in a subsequent conversation in April 2018, Hans expressed frustration that such learning experiences did not translate to success on the state standardized tests "because of how poorly we've exposed them to testing, how poorly we've prepared them to just understand their basic math facts." Indeed, beginning in late 2017, Empire's leaders had begun incorporating into the curriculum explicit instructional units on test preparation, as well as after-school test-preparation tutoring, which one board trustee described as "a necessary evil."

At its founding in the mid-2010s, Empire Charter School's mission centered on a dual definition of progressive education, as described in its charter: learning through an "inquiry-based educational model" and meeting "the needs of a diverse group of learners reflective of the community," including "historically disadvantaged populations." The emphasis on inquiry-based learning reflects

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the pedagogical goals of progressive education dating to the early twentieth century (Dewey 1900; Forman 2005; Perlstein 2002; Semel 1999). For example, Dewey called for experiential, inquiry-based pedagogy, wherein students engage in hands-on activities that would both contribute to the school community and serve as a gateway to meaningful engagement with academic subjects. Notably, Dewey was silent on the notions of racial equity and inclusion, and indeed, the earliest progressive schools were private schools that almost exclusively served affluent and white students (Semel 1999). Yet in later decades, progressive educators extended the inquiry-based learning model to public school settings and communities comprising poor students and students of color, often with aims of leveraging experiential learning to foster students' self-determination and empowerment (Forman 2005; Perlstein 2002). In this way, progressive education came to take on political aims in addition to pedagogical ones. Schools exemplifying both pedagogical and political progressivism included the Free Schools and Freedom Schools of the 1960s and 1970s (Forman 2005; Perlstein 2002) and progressive educator Deborah Meier's Central Park East and Mission Hill Schools, which predominantly serve poor students and students of color and institute inquiry-based learning as a means to developing students' democratic "habits of mind" (Duckor and Perlstein 2014).

However, as the previous examples illustrate, Empire's coleaders and board of trustees perceived the school's progressive pedagogical and political mission to be in tension with an accountability environment wherein learning outcomes— notably, test scores—matter more than the learning process. In this qualitative study, I draw on the case of Empire Charter School, an elementary charter school in New York City, to examine the possibilities for, and constraints to, sustaining a progressive charter school model in the context of widespread neoliberalism, which assumes that market forces such as accountability, competition, efficiency, and managerialism will improve school quality and student achievement (Chubb and Moe 1990; Harvey 2005). Empire represents a unique case (Yin 2009), as its founders leveraged the charter model to establish a school oriented around progressive values amid a charter movement that has become increasingly shaped by market ideology (Knight Abowitz and Karaba 2010; Wells et al. 2002). I asked the following research questions:

1. In what ways did the leaders and trustees of Empire Charter School endeavor to sustain their school's progressive mission?
2. What were the perceptions among Empire's leaders and trustees about how the market-oriented educational context affected their efforts to sustain their school's progressive mission?
3. As school leaders and board trustees endeavored to sustain Empire's progressive mission, what was the impact on equity?

Findings demonstrate that Empire's enrollment, instructional, school governance, and community engagement practices moved toward market values as school leaders and board trustees prioritized attaining favorable test outcomes, garnering resources, and ensuring the renewal of the school's charter. I argue that findings extend Tyack and Cuban's (1995) conceptualization of the "grammar of schooling," or the "taken for granted" organizational routines that constitute a legitimate school. Indeed, findings suggest the presence of a neoliberal grammar of schooling, where the market values of accountability, competition, efficiency, and managerialism inform schools' structures and routines. Findings demonstrate that market values increasingly influenced Empire's approaches to enrollment, instruction, school governance, and community engagement, in turn constraining the realization of its founding progressive mission.

Charter Schools' Ideological Underpinnings: Neoliberalism and Progressivism

To conceptually frame this study, I draw on historical and empirical scholarship demonstrating the ideological underpinnings of the charter school movement. Since its inception in 1988, the charter school movement "has always been an ideologically big tent," incorporating schools framed by both market and progressive democratic tenets (Knight Abowitz and Karaba 2010, 539). Publicly funded but privately operated, some charter schools align more with the market values of accountability, choice, competition, efficiency, managerialism, and privatization, whereas others are more situated within progressive political movements to broaden racial, social, and economic justice for poor communities and communities of color (Wells et al. 1999). Moreover, research demonstrates how some charter schools reflect dual ideological commitments as they negotiate the tension between neoliberal and progressive ideologies (Huerta and d'Entremont 2010; Wells et al. 2002). Hence, to frame this study, I argue that the ideological underpinnings of the charter school movement are situated along a spectrum, with some charters more closely aligned with either neoliberal or progressive tenets, whereas others lie somewhere in between these two poles (fig. 1).

Charter Schools as a Neoliberal Reform

Many scholars argue that the contemporary charter school movement is disproportionately aligned with market values, crowding out its ideologically progressive aims (Scott and Holme 2016). Scholars explain the rapid proliferation of market-oriented charters by demonstrating the political and policy-making influence of free market advocates (DeBray et al. 2014; Reckhow 2013; Scott
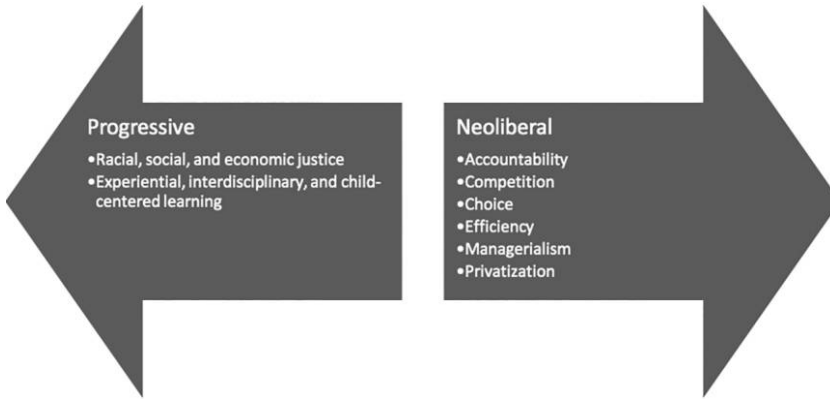
Fig. 1.—Spectrum of charter school's ideological underpinnings

2009; Wells 2002). These advocates advance a policy narrative rooted in neoliberal ideology, which assumes that the public sector is inherently inefficient and that public services will be improved through competitive market effects (Harvey 2005).

Scholars trace the institutionalization of neoliberal ideology to the 1970s (Harvey 2005). Against the backdrop of an economic recession and high unemployment, conservative and libertarian ideologues critiqued state spending on social welfare for stifling economic growth (Kantor and Lowe 2013). They called for a limited state role in education, citing libertarian economist Milton Friedman's (1962) argument that the government should not fund schools directly, but rather, support a free market educational system through the provision of state-funded vouchers, which would enable families to exercise school choice. By the 1980s, the dominant political discourse centered on neoliberal ideology. Accordingly, at the local, state, and federal levels, governments instituted policies that deregulated the economy, further dismantled the welfare state, and turned numerous public services, including education, over to the market (Harvey 2005). The neoliberal policy agenda also heightened the link between schooling and human capital development, gaining prominence with the 1983 publication of the federally commissioned report, *A Nation at Risk*, which blamed America's economic woes on the state of public education (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983).

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the political arena of education policy making has expanded with the entry of new actors, such as business elites, intermediary organizations, and philanthropists, animated by the neoliberal

rationale for reforming public schools (DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn 2009; Mehta 2013). Through their lobbying, advocacy, philanthropic, and research dissemination activities, neoliberal advocates have fostered an education policy agenda oriented around market-based initiatives that facilitate accountability, efficiency, competition, school choice, and privatization (Anderson and Donchik 2016; DeBray et al. 2014). As Engel (2000, 3) argues, "Current-day discussions about the future of education are conducted almost entirely in the language of the free market: individual achievement, competition, choice, economic growth, and national security."

Reformers animated by neoliberal ideology often invoke the market logic of economists such as Chubb and Moe (1990) in advancing the potential for charters to foster a deregulated, free market education system. For example, the conservative think tank Center for Education Reform advocates for deregulatory charter school laws that allow for unlimited numbers of charters, thus maximizing the size and scope of the charter market (Wells 2002). Such advocates also view charters as a means of improving school quality and efficiency through infusing "market-based hallmarks such as competition, standardization, and high-stakes accountability" (Scott 2009, 107) into the educational "sector."

By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the arena of advocacy organizations and philanthropists promoting market-oriented charter schooling had expanded greatly, often operating in coordinated networks (DeBray et al. 2014). Many such advocates call for policies that would facilitate the expansion of nonprofit charter management organizations (CMOs). CMOs operate networks of charter schools as a means of scaling up the charter sector efficiently and rapidly, in turn achieving economies of scale (Farrell et al. 2012; Lake et al. 2010; Quinn et al. 2016). In theory, rapid expansion enables CMOs to capture a large share of the public school market and, in turn, exert competitive pressures on public school systems to improve (Quinn et al. 2016; Reckhow 2013; Scott 2009). Politically powerful advocacy coalitions work in tandem to promote not only CMO expansion but also a policy agenda that would facilitate unfettered charter expansion through the CMO model (DeBray et al. 2014). As evidence of the power of CMO advocacy coalitions, from 2005 to 2015, the number of CMOs in the United States more than doubled, from 674 to 1,882 (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools 2015).

The Progressive Possibilities for Charter Schools

Disproportionate political support for charter schools as a market-based reform initiative has distanced the charter movement from its progressive ideological underpinnings to advance educational opportunities and access for poor

communities and communities of color underserved by the traditional public school system (Wells et al. 1999). Indeed, as Scott and Holme (2016) argue, market-based reforms, including some charter schools, have reinforced racial segregation and inequitable educational access, particularly in urban areas characterized by growing racial and economic stratification. Similar research demonstrates that a competitive market incentivizes charter schools to engage in practices that deepen racial and socioeconomic inequities, such as selectively enrolling high-performing students and "skimming" low-performing ones (Jabbar 2015; Welner 2013), strategically locating in areas serving fewer poor students and students of color (Lubienski, Gulosino, and Weitzel 2009), and marketing the school to "desirable" families (DiMartino and Jessen 2018). Finally, scholars find that a high-stakes accountability context has informed the widespread practice of "no-excuses" pedagogy across charter schools, particularly those serving students of color in urban areas. This pedagogical approach maintains that a highly regulated, compliance-oriented environment minimizes distractions from learning and develops in students the discipline needed to attain academic success. However, scholars have demonstrated how no-excuses charter schools fall short of addressing students' civic, social, or emotional learning (Golann 2015; Goodman 2013) and often reinforce racist stereotypes about children of color (Lopez et al. 2018).

Yet amid the increasing marketization of charter schools, ideologically progressive educators and communities continue to leverage the flexibility and autonomy afforded by the charter model to serve poor students and students of color in light of "persistent failures of public schools to provide equitable, meaningful education" for these communities (Lipman 2011, 121). These include charters independent of any management organization and oriented around ethnocentrism (Wells et al. 1999; Wilson 2016), racial diversity (Jabbar and Wilson 2018; Kahlenberg and Potter 2014; Potter and Quick 2018), at-risk populations (Welner 2013), and other local needs, sometimes in partnership with community-based organizations (Huerta and d'Entremont 2010; Rofes and Stulberg 2004; White 2018). As Forman (2005) argues, many progressive charters share the political commitments of the free schools movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which educated black students through curricula emphasizing racial justice and empowerment.

To date, a limited body of research examines the impact of market forces on progressive charter schooling. This work primarily focuses on how accountability and competitive pressures compel community-based charters to adjust their innovative (though not necessarily inquiry-based) curricula to maintain legitimacy and acquire resources (Brown 2016; Huerta and d'Entremont 2010; White 2018). Another line of research investigates the challenges and tensions inherent in achieving racial diversity and equity in charter schools, a reform mechanism that is competitive by design and hence inevitably produces "winners" and "losers" (Jabbar and Wilson 2018).

However, little research examines charters that espouse both progressive political and pedagogical missions, or how market forces affect such schools and where they sit on the ideological spectrum. This study extends the extant scholarship by illuminating the behaviors and perceptions of Empire Charter School's leaders and board trustees as they endeavored to sustain their founding progressive mission against the backdrop of widespread market values in the charter school landscape.

Research Design and Methodology

For this study, I employed a case study design (Yin 2009) to investigate how Empire Charter School's leaders and board trustees sustained their school's progressive mission. Chartered to serve grades K–5, Empire is a unique case (Yin 2009) given its explicit founding orientation around progressive education against the backdrop of a charter school movement steeped in neoliberal ideology (Scott and Holme 2016) and a broader educational "audit culture" wherein quantitative measures of effectiveness crowd out more holistic approaches to evaluating student learning and success (Apple 2005). In examining the case of Empire Charter School, this study elaborates and extends theory about the progressive possibilities of charter schooling in a market context (Eisenhardt 1989).

Data Sources and Analysis

I first became aware of Empire Charter School when it opened in a New York City neighborhood where I once lived. As a researcher focusing on school choice and other market-based reforms, and as a former teacher at one of New York City's largest CMOs, well-known for its no-excuses pedagogical approach (Golann 2015), I became interested in better understanding Empire's progressive mission amid the rapid expansion of CMOs, such as my former employer. In the spring of 2017, I sent an email inviting the coleaders of Empire Charter School to participate in interviews for a pilot research project. Empire coleader Shellie Peek agreed to participate. In the summer of 2017, I asked Shellie if she and her colleagues would consent to my studying Empire Charter School over the course of the 2017–18 school year, and she agreed. During the period of data collection, Shellie facilitated my access to interview participants and observation opportunities by sharing contact information of key informants, such as board trustees, and details regarding board meetings and other school events.

Data sources included interviews, observations, and documents, collected over 14 months, from August 2017 to October 2018. I conducted semistructured interviews (Patton 2001) ($n = 16$) with a range of Empire constituents. I

interviewed two school leaders, five board trustees, and three parent leaders to understand their efforts and perceptions about sustaining the school's mission. Interview participants also included six charter school advocates and consultants whom school leaders and board trustees identified as supporting Empire organizationally. I interviewed both coleaders, one board member (who served as board secretary), and one advocate twice, once in fall 2017 and again in spring 2018. I elected to interview the coleaders and board member a second time because they each held leadership roles in attending to Empire's mission, so I was interested in capturing how their efforts evolved over the school year. I chose to interview the charter school advocate a second time to gather additional information on how his organization supports charters such as Empire that have a progressive mission and are unaffiliated with a management organization. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour, and with participants' consent, all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

I supplemented interviews with approximately 15 hours of observations of Empire's board trustee meetings and community and advocacy events to capture school leaders' and trustees' conversations and activities related to sustaining the founding mission. During observations, I took ethnographic field notes (Emerson et al. 1995). Finally, I collected 70 documents produced during the period of data collection, including board meeting agendas and minutes, 990 IRS tax forms, and internally produced financial reports. Additional documents collected included the school's original charter application and renewal documents as evidence of the coleaders' evolving progressive visions for the school (Bowen 2009). The majority of these documents were publicly available; others I requested and received from Shellie Peek.

Data were qualitatively coded using the NVivo qualitative software package (Miles et al. 2014). I engaged in two rounds of coding. First, I developed an initial list of codes deductively, grounded in key concepts from this study's conceptual framework regarding charters' ideological underpinnings. Next, to supplement the list of deductive codes, I generated inductive codes, which were empirically grounded in the data. These codes emerged as I read through interview transcripts, field notes, and documents and identified themes and concepts not captured by my conceptual approach, such as ideological contradictions in interviewees' remarks. As I recognized patterns while coding, I wrote analytic memos to capture emerging themes (Miles et al. 2014). I engaged in memo writing in several ways. First, when preparing field notes, I both expanded my jottings into complete narratives and wrote analytic reflections on my field experiences. Second, I read through each interview transcript at least twice and wrote memos on themes that emerged across the collection. Third, for the duration of data collection, I wrote memos to document themes, questions, and puzzles that arose in the field. In addition to writing analytic memos, I created data displays and matrices to visualize themes and patterns in the data (Miles

et al. 2014). Finally, I triangulated my findings by drawing on additional data sources, including neighborhood and district demographic data (Miles et al. 2014). For example, when interviewees described how Empire's student population neglected to reflect that of the broader district, I compared their remarks to publicly available data obtained from the websites of the New York City Department of Education, New York State Education Department, and New York University's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy.

Researcher Positionality and Limitations

Over the course of data collection, many informants became familiar with me over time when we saw one another at monthly board trustee meetings and other school events. Their familiarity with me likely helped me to gain their trust and encouraged them to speak candidly during interviews. At the same time, a limitation to data collection was that this study captures only 14 months of Empire's efforts. A study conducted over multiple school years would yield a fuller picture of how Empire's leaders and board trustees instituted the school's progressive mission and how their efforts evolved in response to market pressures. In addition, evidence of Empire's pedagogical approach did not include long-term classroom observations. I observed classrooms for one afternoon, as well as multiple school events, such as school assemblies, that showcased student learning. However, the majority of evidence regarding Empire's pedagogy emerged from interviews and documents. An ethnographic study incorporating longer periods of classroom observation would yield a broader body of evidence regarding the school's pedagogical practices.

Case Description

In the early 2000s, Shellie Peek and Hans Barrios, who were colleagues at a progressive elementary charter school, began discussing a project to travel around the United States to study effective educational practices. After raising more than $80,000 on Kickstarter to fund their travels, they quit their teaching jobs and spent 1 year visiting more than 40 traditional public and charter schools. Shellie explained, "During that year, we started really developing the concept" of Empire, which centered on "really respecting the kids as the protagonists of their own learning." Moreover, although they perceived a need for progressive education to be more accessible to poor families, the coleaders committed to enrolling a racially and socioeconomically diverse student body to "create a little bit more of a microcosm of the world," Shellie noted.

Shellie and Hans developed the idea of Empire as the charter school movement in New York City and State grew increasingly aligned with market tenets. To illustrate, when Mayor Michael Bloomberg assumed office in 2002, he encouraged for-profit education management organizations and nonprofit CMOs to open charters as part of a broader educational privatization agenda (Lewis 2013). In subsequent years, the New York State Legislature also fostered CMO growth by passing amendments in 2007, 2010, and 2015 raising the statutory limit on the number of charters. On the heels of the Great Recession, the state legislature froze charter funding in 2009 (New York City Independent Budget Office 2017), further encouraging charter leaders to pursue financial efficiency through CMO affiliation (Reckhow 2013; Scott 2009).

Against this backdrop, Empire opened in the mid-2010s in one of New York City's most racially diverse community school districts (CSDs): In 2014–15, nearly half of CSD students were black or African American, 20% were Asian, around 15% were white, and around 15% were Hispanic or Latino.[2] In addition, nearly 70% of CSD students were "economically disadvantaged," or hailing from families who qualified for economic assistance programs. Empire's coleaders hoped that situating the school in this CSD would facilitate a racially and socioeconomically diverse student body. In its first year, Empire operated two classes each of kindergarten and first grade and enrolled a somewhat racially diverse population: around one-third of enrolled students were white, slightly less than one-third were black or African American, and around 10% each were Hispanic or Latino and Asian. Empire was less economically diverse relative to the CSD: only one-third of students were economically disadvantaged.

However, in subsequent years, Empire's student body has become less diverse. By 2017, almost half of Empire's students were white, whereas only one-quarter were black and one-quarter were economically disadvantaged. These demographic shifts suggest that, over time, Empire drew more students from its immediate neighborhood relative to the broader CSD. Indeed, the neighborhood in which Empire is located has been experiencing rapid racial and socioeconomic change, making it far less diverse than the CSD as a whole. In 2000, the share of black or African American residents was 40% and the share of white residents was 30%. Comparatively, by 2017, nearly half of all residents in Empire's neighborhood were white, whereas one-quarter were black or African American, about 10% were Asian, and 10% were Hispanic or Latino. In addition, between 2000 and 2016, median income in this neighborhood rose from $60,000 to nearly $90,000 (New York University Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy 2018).

Notably, despite falling short of its race and class diversity goals, Empire has met its aim of enrolling students with diverse learning needs: in 2017–18, Empire enrolled a higher share of students with individualized education plans

(IEPs) relative to charter elementary schools across the CSD and city. About 20% of Empire students had an IEP, compared with slightly more than 10% each across the CSD and city (Domanico 2015). Empire's practice of staffing each classroom with two teachers, including one with special education certification, likely attracted families whose children have special learning needs.

Empire presents a unique case (Yin 2009) in that, at its inception, it aimed to leverage the charter school model to realize a progressive educational vision as the charter school movement became increasingly aligned ideologically with neoliberal tenets. It is also unique in prioritizing racial and socioeconomic diversity when the growth of charters, particularly CMOs, in New York City and other urban districts was driven by education reformers' aim to serve predominantly poor students and students of color (White 2018). In the following section, I discuss how Empire's coleaders and board endeavored to sustain the school's founding progressive pedagogical and political mission against the backdrop of widespread market values.

Findings: Enrollment, Instructional, Governance, and Community Engagement Practices Incorporate Market Values

Enrollment Policies: Contradictory Efforts to Achieve Diversity and High Test Scores

Recognizing that the student population skewed white and affluent, Empire's coleaders and board took several measures to facilitate greater diversity. First, they added a lottery preference for students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and set aside 40% of kindergarten seats for economically disadvantaged students. Further, coleaders Hans and Shellie hired additional outreach staff to help recruit higher numbers of poor students. Finally, the school leaders successfully lobbied the school's charter authorizer to allow Empire to recruit and enroll students not only within its CSD but also across New York City, hoping that this change would draw higher numbers of poor students and students of color.

Arguably, however, these efforts to achieve diversity were undermined by another change to Empire's admissions policy, instituted in spring 2018, wherein the school no longer backfills available seats in grades 3 and up, as described before. This shift illustrates the leaders' response to accountability pressures from the charter authorizer, which pays attention to standardized test scores in deciding whether or not to renew Empire's charter. When I asked Shellie if she and her colleagues had ever asked the authorizer to design accountability benchmarks more closely aligned with Empire's progressive pedagogy, she replied that they had not, "because we never want to seem like we're trying to opt out or cop

out or something." Here, Shellie's comments that an alternative to test-based accountability would be a "cop out" suggests her acceptance of a market-based educational system that defines student' test scores as a valid measure of student learning and school quality (Apple 2005; Engel 2000).

In addition, interviewees explained that improving Empire's test scores through practices such as ending backfilling might improve attrition in the younger grades. For example, parent leader Celena Harwell explained her perception that many parents "are halfway out the door" given Empire's lackluster test scores, even if they initially chose Empire for its progressive curriculum. She continued, "There's this idea that if you're focusing on how to learn rather than learning and ingesting facts and being able to score well on standardized tests, there is going to be some deficit . . . and I think parents are very uncomfortable with that." Here, Celena's comments illustrate how parents initially attracted to Empire's progressive curriculum nevertheless defined student success, and, in turn, school quality, in terms of test scores. Similarly, at Empire's January 2018 board meeting, coleader Shellie hypothesized that families are increasingly pulling their children out of Empire and choosing other CSD elementary schools because "our test scores suck." She and Hans expressed concern that ongoing underenrollment caused by attrition and competition from higher-performing schools would negatively affect Empire's budget by limiting its public per pupil revenue.

Although ending backfilling likely could have the intended effects of improving test scores, reducing attrition, and ensuring public revenue, this selective enrollment practice contradicted Empire's founding commitment to diversity by limiting opportunities for students, particularly low-performing ones, to access an Empire education. Arguably, low-performing students may especially benefit from a progressive education that engages them through inquiry-based and experiential approaches in place of "ingesting facts." Since instituting the policy to end backfilling in spring 2018, Empire's student demographics have remained relatively unchanged. However, in the long term, this barrier to access may contribute to public perceptions of Empire as a "prestige charter school," which Brown and Makris (2018) define as enjoying a reputation similar to that of an elite and selective private school. Brown and Makris argue that prestige charters often reinforce segregation, as their reputations disproportionately attract white and affluent families and signal to poor families and families of color that they are not welcome.

Pedagogical Practices: Test Preparation Crowds Out "Authentic Engagement"

Empire's founding educational philosophy is described as follows in its original charter: "Children are innately curious and seek to understand the world

around them through authentic engagement with their environment and the people in their community." In turn, Empire's progressive pedagogical approach emphasized facilitating students' "authentic engagement" through interdisciplinary, hands-on learning experiences. For example, students applied their math skills at the school's student-run farm stand, where they inventoried and priced items, and they practiced sight words and spelling through interactive games. In addition, teachers incorporated the arts into traditional academic subjects. For example, at a school assembly, one class performed the African American spiritual, "Wade in the Water," which they had learned in studying the history of enslavement in the United States. In fact, Empire's focus on the arts was evident in each of the five weekly school assemblies I observed: each assembly included shared singing, often led by older students, as when 12 students comprising the school's "ukulele band" led the Empire community in a call-and-response song. Moreover, illustrating their commitment to progressive education, coleaders Hans and Shellie prioritized hiring teachers whose educational philosophies, graduate training, and prior teaching experiences aligned with Empire's progressive mission. Shellie explained that, in hiring new teachers, she and Hans "listen for assumptions for what they may think progressive education is," and "we ask them very specifically about how race and class factor into their work." Many Empire teachers held degrees from Bank Street College of Education, a private graduate program oriented around progressive philosophies, or had prior teaching experience at other progressive schools.

However, as trustee Otto Meeks explained, despite Empire's pedagogical focus on the learning process and experience, "We're being in a lot of ways judged on the results. . . . It's almost like we're being judged on a game that we're not playing, so how do you play both games?" To "play both games," coleaders and trustees perceived a need to incorporate explicit test preparation activities into Empire's progressive curriculum. This pattern mirrors research demonstrating that charter leaders respond to accountability pressures by instituting curricular and pedagogical changes intended to improve students' test performance (Huerta and d'Entremont 2010; Jabbar 2015; White 2018). To illustrate, Empire's teachers added instructional units on test preparation, provided afterschool tutoring, assigned practice test questions for homework, and administered practice tests. At a March 2018 board meeting, one teacher explained to the board that, on practice tests, virtually all students were successfully applying a "formula" to their written responses: restating the question and then providing several pieces of evidence. This teacher also explained how she and other teachers had been speaking individually with low-performing students about test-taking strategies, such as listing evidence in bullet points instead of writing nothing at all, so that they can earn at least some points.

Increasing instructional time for test preparation, including learning strategies and formulas for test taking, necessarily cut into the inquiry-based, project-oriented

learning model described in Empire's charter: "Students at all grade levels will engage in meaningful inquiry-based interdisciplinary projects." In addition, as scholars have found, instruction that revolves around test preparation does little to nurture students' curiosities (Golann 2015; Goodman 2013; Vasquez Heilig et al. 2011). However, interviewees expressed a willingness to put some of the school's founding progressive pedagogical mission aside for the "pragmatic" purpose of achieving higher test scores. As coleader Shellie remarked, "I think I'm pretty pragmatic in those moments. Yeah, I would love for our kids to be outside in nature 90% of the time. [But] at the end of the day . . . they need to learn X, Y, and Z. It's our job to do that." Similarly, board trustee Shelton Newsome explained, "I think [test prep] is a necessary evil. It's awful. I wish we had a better metric. But . . . to just allow ourselves to continue to have a school, we need to do really well on these tests." Coleader Hans had a slightly different perspective, explaining that explicit test preparation did not necessarily contradict Empire's progressive mission, because "I don't believe there's anything not progressive about doing what it takes to keep the school open in order to do all the other progressive things that you want to do."

Finally, accountability pressures compelled Empire's coleaders to discourage participation in the growing movement to "opt out" of standardized testing. As Shellie explained, "We've said to [parents], 'We need [your child] to take the test.' . . . It impacts us. It impacts whether we're here. . . . I would literally go to someone's house and knock on their door if they were trying to get everyone to opt out. Like, 'No, you don't understand the consequences. That could be really detrimental.'" Shellie's comments illustrate how accountability pressures compelled her to limit the forms of civic engagement encouraged among students and families. Reflecting Dewey's (1900) argument that progressive pedagogy develops students' citizenship and civic competencies, Empire's pedagogical approach incorporated some activism and social justice learning, as evidenced by students' participation in the national March for Our Lives. Following the march, students' handmade colorful protest signs decorated the school hallways, bearing messages of gun safety and peace, including, "No more wars, more s'mores." Yet Empire's coleaders discouraged activism around the opt-out movement, perceiving the stakes to be too high.

School Board Governance: Affluent, Managerial, and Data Driven

Although coleader Shellie explained that, from its inception, Empire's board was intended to represent a range of expertise and stakeholder perspectives, in practice, the board valued high-level donors. Empire's charter application describes a commitment to adding parent representatives to the board: "Once the school opens the Board will seek to elect two parents/guardians who reside in

[the CSD] and whose child attends or has attended Empire." However, to date, no parent representatives have served. At the time of data collection in 2017–18, two board members, both black men, resided in the local community, but the remaining nine board members did not. Moreover, efforts I observed to recruit new trustees emphasized candidates' connections to affluent networks rather than their community ties. For example, in discussing what one trustee dubbed the "value add" of a possible recruit with little experience in education or non-profit governance, trustee Shelton Newsome remarked, "If we bring someone like that, he needs to write us a big check." In prioritizing board trustees' ability to contribute financially, Empire reflected research demonstrating that charters fill their boards with affluent and high-status people as a way to acquire re-sources in a competitive market and, hence, attain an advantage over other schools (Quinn et al. 2016; Scott and Holme 2002).

In addition to prioritizing board candidates' affluence, Empire's board en-deavored to hone its managerial and professional skills. This pattern mirrors scholarship demonstrating how traditional public and charter schools alike in-creasingly prioritize managerial qualities over educational experience among their leaders, as such traits are deemed necessary for advancing efficiency and producing results (Scott 2008). To hone their collective managerial capacities and ability to hold the school leaders accountable for results, Empire's board hired a consultant, Laurine Diggs. Laurine explained that she helps charter school boards to "set up structures and systems so that they can really be efficient and uphold the letter of the laws as far as their duties of governance bodies." She described her 5 years of experience as a charter school consultant: "The boards will be super passionate about education or super passionate about their com-munity. They really want to see children succeed. I have never met a school leader or board member who wasn't passionate about seeing children succeed. But some boards and some school leaders just lack knowledge of what is exactly in the [charter] law, like, what is the authorizer looking for, what are the require-ments we need to meet to stay open or expand?"

To assist Empire in preparing for charter renewal and, in turn, "stay open," Laurine developed tools for the board to use to document and evaluate aca-demic, demographic, and financial data. Board trustee Shelton Newsome ex-plained that Laurine's "data dashboards" increased the board's capacity to oversee the school more directly and hold its coleaders accountable. These dashboards consisted of tables that summarized monthly practice test results, as well as a narrative analysis of the results. In addition, the dashboard template included space for school leaders to insert their predictions for "overall passing scores" and the predicted passing rates for students with disabilities, students who qualified for free and reduced-price lunch, and English-language learners, based on data from students' practice tests. Shelton noted that these dashboards rendered board meetings more efficient and productive, in contrast to the

board's long-standing "reactive" stance: "We would literally spend the [meeting] hour just letting [the coleaders] talk and be a sounding board for the different things they're dealing with." To illustrate how the board used data in conversation with the coleaders, at the board's March 2018 meeting, 1 month before the April state tests, one board trustee asked the coleaders about the timing of an upcoming practice test, and whether it would be scored in time to implement instructional changes based on the test data. The coleaders assured this trustee that the practice test would be scored in the same week.

The previous examples demonstrate how added managerial expertise and professionalism improved the board's efficiency, particularly as it prepared for charter renewal. However, in prioritizing affluence and managerial capacity over diverse community ties, Empire missed an opportunity to put into practice, in the context of school governance, its progressive political commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion of underrepresented communities. Empire recruited two additional trustees in 2018, both of whom were finance professionals; one of these individuals had prior professional experience at a CMO. Yet neither of the new trustees resided in the local community. Relatedly, it is important to consider the implications of Empire's participation in the charter consultant market. According to the board's financial documents, Empire paid Laurine $20,000 in 2017–18. However, as DiMartino and Jessen (2018) illustrate, consultant and contractor fees are funds that could otherwise support teaching and learning. Hence, hiring Laurine demonstrates how Empire's coleaders and board prioritized building their managerial capacities over enhancing students' progressive educational experiences.

Community Engagement: Privileging Those Who Enhanced Empire's Competitive Edge

As noted before, scholars have demonstrated that, given competition for scarce resources, charters schools seek to gain a competitive advantage in the market by cultivating broad ties to affluent networks (Quinn et al. 2016; Scott and Holme 2002). Enmeshed in such a competitive market context, Empire accrued private funding not only via the board of trustees but also through its community of affluent and professional parents. According to the board of trustees' 2018 financial report, each year of the school's existence to date had generated slightly more than $100,000 in donations and fundraising, demonstrating the collective capacity of the board and parents to support the school financially.

However, parent-organized fundraising events appeared to privilege affluent and white parents while excluding those who were poor and of color. To illustrate, Empire's parent volunteer organization, whose leadership committee was nearly entirely white, organized an annual ticketed, adults-only evening party

featuring music, DJs, and a raffle. Each year, this event "attracted more of the wealthier families," explained Moises Stark, a white parent and copresident of the parent organization. Moises noted how parent leaders endeavored to make this and other fundraising events more inclusive, such as by lowering ticket prices and hosting events at alternate spaces, but he also acknowledged that fostering inclusion remained challenging. For example, an additional fundraising event, held at a nearby Chuck E. Cheese pizza restaurant, attracted critiques from white families. Moises explained, "You get these tickets to win these really crappy plastic prizes, [and] a lot of parents that I know were like, oh my gosh, I can't be there." Yet Moises also acknowledged that this event "was able to attract a lot of different families that might not come to a parent mixer that we throw at a bar." The challenges inherent in organizing events that achieve the dual goals of fundraising and facilitating inclusion mirrors research demonstrating how middle-class and affluent parents' volunteerism can simultaneously benefit the school while exacerbating inequity (Posey-Maddox 2014).

Moreover, Empire's efforts to foster a diverse and inclusive community conflicted with one of coleader Hans Barrios's fundraising strategies in the competitive donor environment. As Hans explained, demand from white families for an Empire education increased the school's legitimacy in the eyes of wealthy and white funders, effectively giving Empire a competitive fundraising edge. He noted, "Every time someone drops private school to come to us, I make a big deal about it. . . . When people say, 'I'm coming to Empire instead, and I've already paid the deposit to [the private] Baxter Collegiate,' I'm like, 'Yes, that is as big of a compliment as you can possibly get from that community.'" He continued, "The person, potential funder, I want them to think about where they chose to send their kids and the fact that the kids in the projects never have that option. . . . True equity will be achieved when kids in the projects are taught to think as critically as the white kids." Yet, somewhat paradoxically, Hans's approach to raising money to provide a progressive Empire education to "kids in the projects" involved maintaining demand from white and affluent families and "making a big deal" of this demand. Hans's fundraising approach potentially signals, to donors and others, that Empire's affluent and white families are more valued than poor families and families of color.

Importantly, interviewees reflected on how strong support from white and affluent community members benefited Empire financially and politically in a competitive environment where resources are scarce, although also undermined the school's mission to foster equity and inclusion. Shellie explained, "I feel like we're very clicked into the demographic that's already clicked into us, which is not necessarily white, but usually white. Families that don't qualify for free and reduced lunch, and that live right around here," rather than across the racially and socioeconomically stratified CSD. Board trustee Stanton Herrmann similarly acknowledged the challenge of achieving diversity and inclusion as

Empire's immediate neighborhood becomes increasingly white and affluent: "So the original mission of making sure that [Empire] was designed for, would reach a lot of kids who typically would not get this type of education, that's harder and harder when you've got a neighborhood that's going through such changes." Some evidence suggests less enthusiasm for Empire among local families of color, as board trustee Sanford Stovall, a black man who grew up in the neighborhood, noted, "I'm only telling you what people saying, but it's like, 'All these white people are here,' and I'm like, 'What do you mean?' and they're like, 'Yeah, they're just taking over everything,' and that's how people feel." Sanford's comments reflect Brown and Makris's (2018) findings that gentrification facilitates the popularity of some charter schools among white and affluent families, lending such schools a veneer of prestige that reinforces perceptions that poor students and students of color do not belong.

Important to note is that Empire endeavored to facilitate meaningful community engagement among students through various curricular and extracurricular activities. For instance, as noted before, students operated a neighborhood farm stand, donating leftover produce to a local soup kitchen; and a "Community Cupboard," providing household items for families in need. In addition, at one of Empire's weekly school assemblies, 17 seventh-grade students from the public middle school that shared Empire's building were in attendance and performed a song, a notable attempt at community building, given that relationships among "colocated" public schools in New York City are often politically fraught (Research Alliance for New York City Schools 2016). However, these efforts to nurture students' communitarian capacities contrasted with how Empire's leaders and board trustees struggled to meaningfully engage and include all community members, unintentionally privileging individuals whose political and financial capital enhanced the school's competitive edge in the educational market.

Discussion: A Neoliberal Grammar of Schooling

Against the backdrop of widespread market forces, Empire's leaders exhibited numerous efforts to sustain the school's founding progressive pedagogical and political mission. For example, as discussed before, they changed the school's lottery process to facilitate diversity, incorporated some experiential and arts-based learning experiences, and continually discussed how to make low-income families feel welcome and included at school events. However, school leaders simultaneously incorporated market values into their enrollment, instructional, school governance, and community engagement practices, illustrating the power of market forces in the public education landscape. By integrating market-driven practices, Empire's leaders often undermined their efforts to sustain the school's founding progressive mission. In turn, on the ideological spectrum, Empire

moved toward neoliberal values. In the following text, I discuss how Empire's move toward neoliberal ideology suggests a neoliberal grammar of schooling, or structures and practices informed by market tenets and "taken for granted as just the way schools are" (Tyack and Cuban 1995, 85).

Pedagogy in the Neoliberal Grammar of Schooling

Evidence from Empire illuminates that teaching and learning within a school's walls cannot be separated from the broader political and policy context of public education. Despite its early commitment to progressive pedagogy, since its inception, Empire has existed within a political and policy environment steeped in market values. In turn, the realities of a market-driven educational landscape increasingly informed Empire's approach to teaching and learning, narrowing the school's emphasis on the learning process to a priority on quantitative learning outcomes. For example, as discussed before, accountability pressures—primarily from the state charter authorizer, but also from parents dissatisfied with the school's "results"—increasingly structured Empire's pedagogical approach, informing school leaders' decisions to incorporate explicit standardized test preparation activities and crowding out opportunities for students to engage in experiential, inquiry-based, and interdisciplinary learning.

These patterns at Empire mirror research demonstrating how a market-driven definition of quality and success compels schools to abandon innovative pedagogical approaches for more traditional ones that prepare students to perform well on standardized tests (Huerta and d'Entremont 2010; Lubienski 2008). Along with this body of scholarship, evidence from Empire highlights the need for progressive educators to pay attention to the wider political and policy landscape in which their schools are situated. Progressive educators do not teach isolated from market forces. Hence, they must consider how, if at all, pedagogical techniques such as experiential and interdisciplinary learning can coexist with the neoliberal grammar of schooling.

Enrollment in the Neoliberal Grammar of Schooling

Similarly, evidence from Empire demonstrates how a school's enrollment policy cannot be divorced from the wider market-based educational landscape wherein "success" is defined by standardized test score data. As scholars have demonstrated, the market context incentivizes schools to selectively enroll students who score highly on such tests (Jabbar 2015; Welner 2013). The market context does not incentivize racial and socioeconomic integration or diversity (Jabbar and Wilson 2018). Hence, charter school leaders committed to diversity,

such as those at Empire, must continually acknowledge how market forces affect their efforts. Indeed, as researchers have argued, in responding to external market pressures, charter schools, including those explicitly oriented around diversity, are often complicit in reproducing segregation and inequity (Brown and Makris 2018; Jabbar and Wilson 2018; Scott and Holme 2016).

Extant research also highlights the need for policies and other structural changes to support school leaders' efforts to achieve diversity, such as diversity requirements from charter school authorizers and transportation options across racially and socioeconomically stratified communities (Brown and Makris 2018; Jabbar and Wilson 2018). Charter school leaders must acknowledge and attend to the structural changes needed beyond their school walls to facilitate diversity. Burgeoning movements to advance charter school integration and diversity, such as the Diverse Charter Schools Coalition (DCSC), are well positioned to advocate for such changes, and indeed, DCSC's mission includes engaging in the policy and advocacy arenas to support diverse charters. Empire is a member of DCSC, an indication of its willingness to engage in broader dialogue and advocacy. However, findings reveal that this willingness continues to be in tension with school leaders' desire to achieve success as defined by the neoliberal grammar of schooling.

School Board Governance and Community Engagement in the Neoliberal Grammar of Schooling

Market values also deeply influenced school board governance and community engagement at Empire. The school's coleaders, who also cofounded the school, initially committed to cultivating a roster of board trustees that reflected a range of expertise and community perspectives. Yet findings illustrate that market pressures led Empire's board away from these initial priorities, highlighting that school board governance and community engagement, like pedagogy and enrollment, do not exist in isolation from the broader market-driven political and policy context. Indeed, in practice, Empire recruited board trustees with an eye toward their managerial acumen and hired a consultant to further hone the board's efficiency and ability to hold school leaders accountable.

In prioritizing data, efficiency, and managerialism, Empire's governing board constrained the potential for board governance to operate as a space for meaningful engagement and representation among diverse community stakeholders. Indeed, at Empire, recruiting mostly business and finance professionals to the board did not coincide with efforts also to recruit community members such as parents and local residents. In this way, findings from Empire reflect a growing body of research demonstrating how charter school boards often neglect to fully engage all constituents or facilitate democratic representation and collective

decision making (Lay and Bauman 2019; Nelson 2015; Squire and Davis 2014). Hence, not only did Empire fall short of fostering diversity among its student body, but it also missed opportunities to incorporate diverse perspectives on its governing board. Instead, Empire recruited board members whose areas of expertise aligned with the neoliberal grammar of schooling.

Relatedly, Empire's approaches to community engagement centered on leveraging the financial, social, and political capital among primarily white and affluent families in ways that benefited the school. This pattern reflects the influence of market competition on Empire's community engagement practices: in a context where schools must compete for scarce resources (Huerta and d'Entremont 2010; Jabbar 2015), Empire's affluent parent community helped the school to attain a competitive advantage. Moreover, as discussed before, coleader Hans Barrios perceived Empire's legitimacy among prospective donors as tied to the school's support from affluent and white families. Hence, maintaining demand from such families advantaged Empire as it competed for attention and contributions from donors. In this way, evidence from Empire mirrors not only the power of market forces on the school's community engagement approaches but also progressive education's early roots as a largely white and affluent educational movement, belying Empire's diversity goals (Semel 1999).

Challenging the Neoliberal Grammar: Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

Writing about charter schools in the early years of the movement, Wells (2002, 180) claims, "The only remaining hope for charter school reform to have any lasting positive impact on the public educational system would be for more progressive members of this diverse and complex movement to recapture the language and symbols of what constitutes a good charter school law." However, as the case of Empire Charter School demonstrates, school leaders animated by progressive pedagogical and political values are enmeshed in a landscape steeped in market values. In turn, Empire's efforts to advance progressive education in the context of the charter school model were constrained by a system that defines success in terms of narrow quantitative outcomes, prioritizes managerialism and efficiency, and incentivizes competitive, self-interested behavior—a system that I argue reflects a neoliberal grammar of schooling. Therefore, although this study focuses only on one school, the case of Empire reveals broader, powerful forces that led a group of individuals committed to progressive education to incorporate market values into various aspects of their school, often while recognizing how doing so contradicted the school's mission and undermined equity.

Hence, realizing charter schools' progressive potential requires broader, systemic changes beyond the efforts of individual school leaders or, as Wells (2002, 180), notes, "progressive members" of the charter school movement. It requires, as Tyack and Tobin (1994, 478) argue, "intense and continual public dialogue about the ends and means of schooling, including reexamination of cultural assumptions about what a 'real school' is and what sort of improved schooling could realize new aspirations." In other words, challenging the neoliberal grammar of schooling necessitates broader social and political shifts that challenge widespread regard for market tenets as common sense, as well as instituting policy changes that center equity and more holistic definitions of learning, success, and school quality.

First, progressive charter school policies must ensure equitable admissions to all schools. They must prevent selective enrollment practices, such as not back-filling available seats. Particularly in locales such as New York City, where CSDs cover relatively large geographic areas that are highly stratified by race and class, progressive charter policies should provide free transportation for students to facilitate inclusive and integrated schools. Burgeoning efforts in New York City to redesign attendance zones to facilitate diverse enrollment across traditional public schools are worthy efforts that can be applied to the charter school context (Shapiro 2018; Veiga 2017). As discussed before, the growing movement to advance "diverse-by-design" charter schools is a promising step toward achieving the progressive goal of racially and socioeconomically integrated charters. However, as Jabbar and Wilson (2018) argue, definitions of diversity differ across such charter schools, and growing gentrification and economic disparities complicate efforts to achieve diversity. Hence, policies that support diversity in the context of charter schools must coexist with social and economic policies, such as those fostering affordable housing and living wages, that facilitate diversity and integration in communities where charters are situated.

Policies must also distribute resources equitably, targeting resources to schools in poor communities, hence eliminating competition for scarce funds. In addition, a progressive charter school policy agenda would ensure transparency regarding how charter schools are evaluated for renewal, specifically, the extent to which charters are held accountable to test outcomes. As discussed before, charter leaders and board trustees perceived successful renewal to be contingent upon students' standardized test scores. Yet between 1999 and 2016, only 9 charter schools out of more than 200 in New York State have had their charters revoked or not renewed, suggesting that performance-based accountability pressures are not as strong as charter leaders perceived (New York City Charter School Center n.d.). Transparency regarding the extent to which test scores matter to charter schools' survival could potentially reduce the accountability pressures that compelled Empire's leaders to adjust their progressive curricula.

Relatedly, charter school authorizers should attend to multiple dimensions of a charter school when evaluating its renewal application. For example, authorizers should incorporate flexible measures of student performance into the charter renewal process, ensuring that the accountability system is fully aligned with the school's pedagogical approach. In addition, authorizers should assess charters' community engagement efforts, paying particular attention to the extent to which governing boards represent diverse community stakeholders. Finally, as Jabbar and Wilson (2018) argue, charter school authorizers should require charters to develop plans to recruit and retain a diverse population and evaluate charters' adherence to such plans when making charter renewal decisions.

For such policies to come to fruition, progressive charter school advocates must mobilize and counter the political power of market-oriented charter advocacy networks, in turn challenging the actors who uphold the neoliberal grammar of schooling (DeBray et al. 2014). Rejecting the self-interested behaviors encouraged by the market, progressive charter advocates must work in coalition, across differences of race, class, gender, and language, to advance progressive policies. Given that progressive education attends to nurturing students' civic engagement (Dewey 1900), coalitions should include student participation. In addition, a progressive charter school coalition should incorporate teachers' unions, as unions support many of the policy issues for which progressive charters also stand, such as equitable resource distribution, fair wages for teachers, and small class sizes (Young 2011). Finally, coalitions should bring together charter schools that prioritize diversity, inclusion, and teacher voice (e.g., Kahlenberg and Potter 2014).

Policy changes must coincide with cultural shifts around the meaning of a "good" school, expanding from a focus on quantitative measures such as test scores. As discussed before, movements such as those advancing charter school diversity and integration offer one example of how the discourse around school quality is beginning to shift. Similarly, Schneider (2017) argues that school quality should incorporate multiple dimensions, such as how effectively schools develop students' social-emotional and civic competencies; institute a broad curriculum that includes the arts; provide a safe, nurturing environment; and center learning around issues of equity and social justice. As a notable example of how stakeholders engage in dialogue about expanding the meaning of school quality, Schneider's research informs the work of the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (2019), a partnership among school districts and teachers' unions in Massachusetts. Within the educational market, shifting the discourse regarding what constitutes quality schooling could potentially increase parental "demand" for schools such as Empire that strive to center diversity, experiential learning, the arts, and community engagement in the curriculum.

This study also carries implications for research. Given how charter schools are often closed to qualitative researchers (DiMartino and Jessen 2018), this

study extends the limited qualitative research base on charter operations. Although I focused on how charter leaders and board trustees are enmeshed in a market system that structures their practices around the neoliberal grammar of schooling, an extension of this line of inquiry could investigate how the neoliberal grammar of schooling is supported or challenged by families, teachers, and other charter school stakeholders. In addition, future research can examine how political developments, such as increased teachers' union activism and the election of progressive candidates at the local, state, and federal levels, affect the neoliberal grammar of schooling and the implications for charter school policies. Finally, scholars of curriculum theory, particularly those studying progressive education, are well positioned to conduct further analyses of how market-based policies and the broader political-economic context affect progressive educational practices and equitable access to progressive schooling.

As the case of Empire illustrates, a neoliberal grammar of schooling led progressive educators to move toward market values on the ideological spectrum in ways that constrained the realization of their original pedagogical and political visions for the school. In turn, despite their professed commitments to advancing child-centered instruction, diversity, equitable access, and community responsibility, Empire furthered a marketized educational system that defines success narrowly in terms of test scores, advantages already privileged schools, values managerial expertise over community perspectives, and deepens racial and socioeconomic inequities. In short, this study demonstrates how a neoliberal grammar of schooling reinforces instructional, enrollment, school governance, and community engagement practices legitimated by the market. Only when educators, families, and advocates collectively challenge the neoliberal grammar of schooling and mobilize around a progressive public education policy agenda will the charter school movement achieve its progressive potential.

Notes

1. I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of the school and all interview informants. Also to protect the school's identity, I use approximations when discussing the year of the school's founding.

2. I use the demographic categories employed by the New York City Department of Education and New York State Education Department. I also use approximations when discussing demographic categories to protect the identity of the school and CSD.

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