

Intractable Conflict, Adaptable Teams

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)

Capstone

Submitted by

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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education Leadership.

May 2020

To Joyce for the wisdom you passed on to each generation.

To Chelsey for the love you model and that I learn from daily.

To Nathan and Nicky for the future you represent and make real.

*“Gratitude turns what we have into enough.”*  
*-Unknown*

Organizations are rightfully skeptical of outside ethnographers who intend to write about what they observe. The kindness and openness with which Chancellor Richard Carranza provided access to the New York City Department of Education and his own leadership perspectives was both invaluable and generous.

The Chancellor’s team- Chantell, Juan, Liz, Mary, Nancy, and Xavier - were gracious thought partners, teachers, and the most helpful and welcoming team one could be fortunate enough to join.

Dia and Stefan- I would not have learned half as much or had nearly as much fun if we didn’t take this journey together. Thank you for all things left unsaid on the following pages.

The leaders across New York from the classroom down to Tweed Courthouse provided so much insight into the organization and guidance as I approached the work. While not comprehensive, I want to recognize just some of those who shaped my thinking. Thank you Ailish, Bob, Christina, Corinne, Gabrielle, Jaime, Jessica, John, Judy, Katie, Kimberly, Maryann, Rebecca, and Sandy.

Cohort 8, as in all things, you exceed expectations.

Colleen, Ellen, and my NTC friends- you made it possible for me to say “yes.”

Andrés, David, and Kathy- thank you for sharing your uncredited expertise.

The crew at the Drunken Munkey who let me read and write into the late hours of the night.

And to anyone I missed, please know I hold you in just as high regard. As my capstone advisor says, *charge it to my head and not my heart.*

This work is what it is because of the brain trust that formed my committee. Edie, if every public servant had your work ethic, your integrity, and your insight, we wouldn’t need doctoral programs in leadership. Jen, your probing questions and willingness to share stories of your experience are what pushed aspects of this work that were good (or more likely mediocre) and made them excellent.

Deborah, you have inspired me and sustained me for more than a decade. To try and capture in writing the impact you have had on me and will continue to have on me would only cheapen it. Sometimes simpler is better- I love you!

Chelsey, you didn’t sign up for this when you said “I do” fifteen years ago and you sacrificed a whole lot more than you got these past three years. Thank you. I love you. I will make you proud.

Nathan, and Nicky- I promise. Daddy’s home.

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## **Abstract**

### Intractable Conflict, Adaptable Teams

For more than ten years, officials from the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) remained locked in a stalemate over what services were required for students with disabilities preparing for the high school equivalency exam through the NYCDOE Pathways to Graduation program. Finally, in 2020, the two agencies partnered together to reach an amicable agreement within a matter of months. In this paper, I analyze the sea change by which two bureaucracies progressed from conflict to resolved partnership.

Drawing from knowledge in the fields of peace studies, mediation, behavioral science, and organizational decision making, this paper both assesses the conditions under which cross-functional teams can drive systemic change and asserts the important roles of executive leadership, mid-level managers, and local actors in driving such change. It also surfaces and analyzes tensions between positional and relational influence and transparency and vulnerability. Additionally, I explain a practice I call “designing from the margins”—meaning developing policy based upon the needs of individuals not typically considered by policymakers. Focusing on learners in the margins, like the students with disabilities in the Pathways to Graduation Program, creates the environment in which more effective policies can be implemented for *all* students. Throughout this capstone, I argue that both hope and conflict—though they are seemingly divergent qualities—are necessary in efforts to improve organizations and to best utilize cross-functional teams.

*The Dawn! The Dawn! The crimson-tinted, comes  
Out of the low still skies, over the hills,  
Manhattan's roofs and spires and cheerless domes!  
The Dawn! My spirit to its spirit thrills.  
Almost the mighty city is asleep,  
No pushing crowd, no tramping, tramping feet.  
But here and there a few cars groaning creep  
Along, above, and underneath the street,  
Bearing their strangely-ghostly burdens by,  
The women and the men of garish nights,  
Their eyes wine-weakened and their clothes awry,  
Grotesques beneath the strong electric lights.  
The shadows wane. The Dawn comes to New York.  
And I go darkly-rebel to my work.  
-Claude McKay, "Dawn in New York"*

On the first day of the 2019-2020 school year, the news site *74 Million's* coverage of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) began with the headline, "From Threats to Gifted & Talented Programs to a State Audit of Special Ed: NYC Headlines Worth Watching as 2019-20 Begins" (Swaak, 2019). The state audit referenced in the headline and released in May 2019 "noted that the city had been violating federal law governing students with disabilities for the past 13 years and that previous efforts to reform the system hadn't resulted in the systemic change necessary" (Zimmerman, 2019). This new pressure from the state, coupled with public prioritization of the issue from the recently appointed Chancellor of New York City, breathed new energy into efforts to address systemic challenges in the provision of services for students with disabilities.

Mayor Bill De Blasio selected Richard Carranza to be Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education 18 months before, in March 2018. Chancellor Carranza began his tenure seeking to engage the system in four priorities: accelerate learning and instruction, partner with communities, develop people, and advance equity now. Carranza had previously served as the superintendent of the Houston Independent School District and the superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District. In his first year in New

York City, he prioritized efforts to desegregate schools, change selective high school admissions processes, and ensure that equity drove decision making toward excellence in student learning. While the Chancellor's unapologetic advocacy for students received national news coverage and some local accusations of discrimination, the support for his agenda from leaders, teachers, and parents remained strong as that school year began (Manskar, 2019).

Under Chancellor Carranza's leadership and with guidance and support from his Chief of Staffs, I entered the New York City Department of Education as a one-year resident in July 2019. I was charged with supporting the special education task force responsible for addressing the systemic challenges preventing all students with disabilities from receiving access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE) as required by law.

The origin of this project was the issuance of a Compliance Assurance Plan (CAP) in February 2019 (prior to my arrival at NYCDOE) by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) outlining a systemic failure to provide a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities through special education services. This action was taken after multiple years where data showed that approximately 25-40% of the students with disabilities had not received all of the services to which they were entitled.

To respond to this need, the Chancellor's office implemented a weekly war room process beginning in March 2019. He called all stakeholders to the table to leverage the state plan as a mechanism for improving outcomes for students with disabilities across the organization. The name "war room" was given to this team early on in the process as it was one frequently used by the mayor for groups with a focused mission attending to policy and strategy within a rapid response environment. The purpose of the group was to expedite response time and provide stronger policy responses by engaging all key stakeholders. This

war room met from March until June to develop root cause analysis reports for each finding in the CAP and to draft action plans under the leadership of the Deputy Chief of Staff. During this planning stage, several challenges surfaced in the provision of services to students pursuing a high school equivalency exam through the program known as Pathways to Graduation.

### The Pathways to Graduation Program

Within the school age corrective action plan, one issue surfaced as particularly complicated and intractable. Like many large districts, NYCDOE offered high school equivalency test preparation support for students who left school before completing degree requirements. In the NYCDOE, these programs were administered through District 79, the Alternative Schools District supporting alternative learning centers for students on suspension. The program, Pathways to Graduation (P2G), prepared students between the ages of 17 and 21 to take and pass the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC), which is the New York State version of the GED. P2G enrolled about 8,000 students annually and approximately 2,000 of these students had an IEP, either current or out-of-date, on file with NYCDOE. Despite their documented special needs, these students were not offered special education services through P2G and were asked to sign a waiver acknowledging that they would not have access to special education services while taking part in the program. NYSED took significant issue with this NYCDOE practice and strenuously reinforced an expectation that P2G students needed access to special education services.

The debate between NYSED and NYCDOE over what students within the P2G program required to be successful and what they were legally entitled to under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was a point of contention for a decade. NYSED officials sent an inquiry to the United States Department of Education Office of



Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to seek guidance on whether they were required to offer traditional special education services to students in GED programs. The Office responded in a May 14, 2010 letter that, an “LEA is not required to provide students who have left traditional secondary education programs and entered a GED test preparation program with special education services in the GED test preparation program unless the State considers the GED test preparation program to be a part of an appropriate secondary education” (Posny, 2010). Interpreting this guidance, NYSED then declared that the P2G program *was a part* of an appropriate secondary education program. While the issue and appropriate response was clear to NYSED from this moment forward, the status of the P2G program and NYSED’s analysis was much more complicated from NYCDOE’s perspective. The NYCDOE and NYSED remained at a stalemate regarding special education services from the issuance of this letter until the summer of 2019 when the two parties came to a resolution over the course of a couple of months. After a significant time with no action, the speed at which this change happened was astonishing. Understanding the catalyst of this change and the implications it could have for other conflicts within large bureaucracies is the focus of this paper.

### Roadmap to this Capstone

This paper pinpoints one initiative supporting students with disabilities that was part of the work of the NYCDOE special education war room. It describes how, over the course of the 2019-2020 school year, the NYCDOE and NYSED resolved a longstanding conflict and created new opportunities to better serve students with disabilities engaging with alternative pathways to graduation.

In the Review of Knowledge for Action, I will describe four bodies of knowledge that are useful for understanding the context within which this change effort occurred and

the leadership actions that facilitated the outcomes. These include: intractable conflict resolution, cross-functional teaming, organizational & individual decision making, and behavioral science.

After summarizing both the research and the key events of this change effort, this paper will assess both the efficacy of the effort and my leadership within the effort by analyzing the degree to which the strategies and tactics surfaced by this literature played a role in both enhancing and limiting a sustained successful outcome. This analysis will include the other frameworks and bodies of knowledge that supported my nascent and retrospective sense making of why things happened in the way they did as well as the degree to which my initial academic frames held within the crucible of practice.

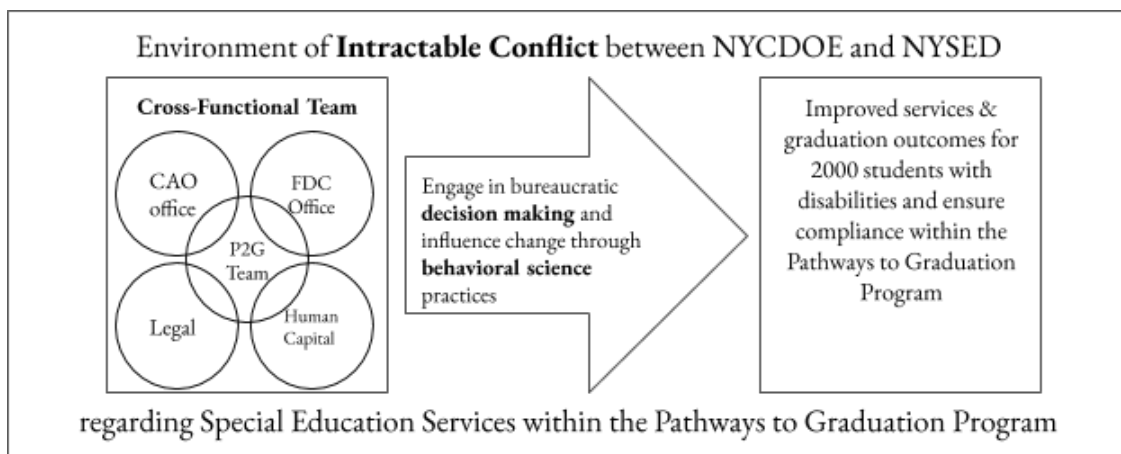
In the closing section, this paper will describe recommendations for leadership within the convening role of special assistant to the Chancellor. My hope is that these insights will be applicable to others who find themselves in positions, such as Chiefs of Staff or Chief Academic Officers, with limited “chain-of-command” positional authority but great opportunity for influence. It will then outline lessons learned from this example of a cross-functional team and suggest ways in which the NYCDOE can enhance cross-functional work across the organization. Finally, it will end with recommendations for how the sector can improve by attending to “outlier” experiences, such as those of Pathways to Graduation students, when designing policy at scale.

#### Review of Knowledge for Action

*Brownstones, water towers, trees, skyscrapers  
Writers, prize fighters and Wall Street traders  
We come together on the subway cars  
Diversity unified, whoever you are  
- Beastie Boys, “An Open Letter to NYC”*

This Review of Knowledge for Action seeks to support addressing my problem of practice facilitating the leadership team responsible for responding to the compliance assurance plan (CAP) issued by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) regarding services for students with disabilities. My initial understanding and framing of the problem facing the NYCDOE Pathways to Graduation program took advantage of four specific bodies of knowledge including: intractable conflict resolution, cross-functional teaming, organizational & individual decision making, and behavioral science. The relationship between these four areas are mapped in Figure One below. It is through this lens and the bodies of knowledge that support each element, that I designed my strategic approach to this change effort.

**Figure One: Diagram of Relationships Amongst Bodies of Knowledge Informing Project**



After 10 years of disagreement and inertia from parties on either side, the absence of special education services within the Pathways to Graduation program can be described as an intractable conflict between NYSED and NYCDOE. This paper summarizes the research on how change happens within complex systems where the issues are seemingly unsolvable over long periods of time. Much of this research comes from the fields of peace studies and mediation as there is much to learn from successes in humanity's most

complicated conflicts including Northern Ireland during the troubles, Palestine and Israel, or the Rwandan civil war.

In addition to the length of time and historic disagreement over the issue, part of what made resolution so challenging was that it required coordination of multiple internal stakeholders including the Special Education Office within the Chief Academic Office, the First Deputy Chancellor's Office, the Legal Department, the Finance Department, the Department of Human Capital, and the District 79 leadership responsible for the Pathways to Graduation program. Even if scale were not a factor, the diversity of stakeholders needed for satisfactory resolution necessitated a cross-functional approach to the work. For purposes of this capstone, I use Glenn Parker's definition of a cross-functional team as "a group of people with a clear purpose representing a variety of functions or disciplines in the organization whose combined efforts are necessary for achieving the team's purpose" (2003, p. 6). The use of cross-functional teams can add value when speed, adaptability, and responding to "customer" needs are the priority in a context where the organization must creatively address complex problems (Parker, 2003). I include some of the major findings for how best to structure and support cross-functional teams that informed my approach.

Finally, the cross-functional team charged with this work exists within a large, complex, and siloed bureaucracy. Educating youth since 1805, NYCDOE has historic and entrenched ways of doing things rooted in positional and relational power and patterns. This context must inform how change agents approach the work. Circumspect about how often change fails in large "organized anarchies" as John Kingdon describes political bureaucracies such as the NYCDOE, this paper draws upon research on bureaucratic decision making and behavioral economics to better understand how change happens within these typically change-resistant cultures.

Together these four bodies of knowledge can be a helpful tool for understanding how I thought about my efforts at improving the Pathways to Graduation program that was central to my residency at the NYCDOE.

### *Understanding Unresolved Conflict in Organizations*

Conflict is a fundamental part of organizations. Under the best of conditions, conflict can motivate and lead “to deeper understanding, better relationships, greater creativity, and a more just world” (Coleman, 2011, p. 16). However, in some cases, conflict becomes intractable, entrenched, and seemingly insurmountable. This sort of conflict takes resources, time, and human talent and puts it toward a futile endeavor (Coleman, 2011). Jodi Hoffer Gittel (2016, p. 70), in her study of relational coordination, notes that “researchers have found that conflicts actually improve performance when they occur in a context that values task-related conflict; however, unresolved conflicts undermine relationships and hinder performance over time.” Peter Coleman (2011) states that experts estimate that 5% of the conflicts in the world are intractable and not likely to be solved through traditional strategies such as negotiation, mediation, group problem solving, consensus building, or policy change. This happens when “the many different components of a conflict collapse together into one mass, into one very simple ‘us versus them’ story that effectively resists change” (p. 9). David Allen finds a similar 5% of projects might need the deliberate application of strategy in order to successfully get them unstuck (Allen, 2015). While perhaps not always due to conflict, the field of project management finds a similar percentage of the work to require an approach beyond the traditional strategies. This body of research provides a rule of thumb that for about 1 in 20 situations, the logical or traditional approaches to improvement will not be successful.

These conflicts share many overlapping characteristics including, but not limited to, the following: a deep desire for power and control of others, a history of inequity, structural victimization of low power groups, accumulation of indignities, periods of rapid social change and instability, tainted infrastructure, ambiguity of power, underlying issues with consequential tradeoffs, complex connections among issues, issues that revolve around important and basic beliefs, inescapable relationships, relationships damaged beyond repair, frozen identities, internal group divisions, and can be further characterized as high complexity, multilevel, multiparty, chaotic, and mercurial (Coleman, 2011).

Part of what makes these conflicts so difficult is that, despite the complexity of causes listed above, those most closely involved have simplified the narrative to be about who is with us (good) and who is against us (enemy). This happens, according to Peter Coleman, because of the human need to engage in sensemaking, or coherence, when faced with abstraction or ill-defined things. This quest for coherence causes the nuances and contradictions to become invisible. Those who seek to address conflict then must build complexity in order to simplify. This starts by ignoring things (ideas, positions, etc.) and focusing on “the relations between things—the social bonds between people, competing goals in groups, <and> communication links” (2011, p. 62). In *Managing Power*, Jeffrey Pfeffer refers to this as diagnosing “the political landscape and <figuring> out what the relevant interests are, and what important political subdivisions characterize the organization” (1993, p. 340).

In order to describe and address impossible conflicts, Coleman developed the Attractor-Landscape Model. This model describes how—when conditions favor a certain type of coherence—the forces that attract toward continued conflict are easier and there are three general approaches grounded in the basic contradictions of conflict to disrupting

intractable conflict. Table Two summarizes the strategies for breaking through conflict using Coleman’s Attractor-Landscape Model.

**Table Two: Coleman Attractor-Landscape Model Intractable Conflict Contradictions**

<b>Contradiction</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
Complicate to Simplify	Break through patterns that push coherence and oversimplification and identify hubs, gateways, and patterns otherwise hidden by the complexity of the conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict Mapping</li> <li>• Identify local actionables</li> <li>• Locate what is already working</li> <li>• Identify those who embody multiple perspectives/ identities within the conflict</li> <li>• Visualize the attractor landscape</li> </ul>
Build Up and Tear Down	Create conditions for hope and possibility while deconstructing the patterns that trap people in cycles of enmity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect people to superordinate goals and identities</li> <li>• Find places of self-organizing</li> <li>• Start Bottom Up</li> <li>• Address false connections between conflicts</li> <li>• Facilitate travel and movement</li> </ul>
Change to Stabilize	Leverage adaptation and change in service of stability and sustainability by attending to long-term dynamics and the non-linear nature of systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage instability</li> <li>• Ride shock waves</li> <li>• Grow Ripeness</li> <li>• Work the edge of chaos</li> <li>• Identify small things that can change everything</li> </ul>

For leaders looking to impact intractable conflict, designing opportunities to enact the strategies outlined above can be invaluable. It is by attending to these three counterintuitive approaches that leaders can make change happen.

When addressing ongoing conflict in complex systems, there are several actions that can make these strategies more effective. Through computer-based simulations, Diedrich

Dörner found that effective systems managers made more decisions, tested hypotheses more frequently, asked more *why* versus *what* questions, and stayed focused on real problems instead of changing the subject or shifting blame when addressing complex conflict and problems (Dörner, 1996). He argues that leaders must state goals clearly, compromise between goals, establish priorities that they are willing to change when context changes, create models, and analyze errors in order to draw conclusions from them if they are to be successful in complex environments. If this is the context in which large entrenched systems exist, change leaders focused on resolving intractable conflict must approach decision making in less traditional ways.

#### *Making Decisions and 'Satisficing' in Organized Anarchies*

“Accomplishing innovation and change in organizations requires more than the ability to solve technical or analytic problems. Innovation almost invariably threatens the status quo, and consequently, innovation is an inherently political activity” (Pfeffer, 1993 p. 7). As such, at least according to Pfeffer, decision making in organizations is politics. John Kingdon (2011) describes large political bureaucracies as “organized anarchies” if they have problematic preferences, unclear technology, and fluid participation. This means the organization functions as a loose collection of ideas instead of a coherent structure and it “discovers preferences through action more than it acts on the basis of preferences” (p. 84). Additionally, members of the organization, despite knowing their own jobs and the organization well, have limited understanding of why they do what they do and how it fits into a broader approach for the organization. Therefore, people tend to engage in sensemaking by trial and error, learning from experience, and pragmatic invention in crises. Finally, members of these organized anarchies come and go in decision making with time and effort shifting among many priorities. The impact on the organization is that who



shows up for or is invited to any given meeting of consequence has significant influence. In this context, decisions are more likely to happen than to be made (Pfeffer, 1993).

In this environment where decisions may not be conscious choices, their origin is not from strategy or goal but reaction to environmental pressure. Decisions happen when a particular problem is recognized and becomes salient enough to demand a response, any response. The problem is then paired with some policy proposal that is tangentially relevant, or at least framed in a way that connects it, within a choice opportunity or policy window where there is the political will and resources to do something (Kingdon, 2011). This may be a rather cynical way to explain the decision-making process of governmental organizations. There are other relevant ways to consider how decisions are made.

In their analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow use three models in order to better understand governmental decision making. The first is the Rational Actor Model (1999). This model sees organizations as unitary entities with interests that act upon those interests using logic. While useful, Allison and Zelikow see limitations in this model's ability to describe complex decisions. The second model is the Organizational Behavior Model, which views the organization as the unit of analysis and looks at its structures, culture, capabilities, and standard operating procedures. Lastly, the Governmental Politics Model is predicated on the theory that there are multiple stakeholders involved with varying skills, personal and organizational goals, and power. These "players" are focused on many diverse issues and make decisions not based upon one choice, but upon ongoing and repeated interactions and negotiations. Decisions emerge through the blend of each player's "bargaining advantages, skill and will in using bargaining advantages, and other player's perception of the first two" (Allison, 1999, p. 300). Using these three models in concert can

be a helpful lens through which to understand decision making within organizations such as the NYCDOE.

One final consideration for large public institutions is the degree to which these decisions are made within the public eye. From my experience as a leader within districts, balancing what is perceived to be the right thing to do and how detractors or media will message the decision can limit the effectiveness of any decision. Organizations need to account both for the impact of the decision but also the perception of that impact. Andrés Alonso recommends that organizations always operate as though any decision or action will be made public and to consider how it will be perceived (2020). This criteria for decision making becomes more and more salient as the potential audience grows larger.

#### *Individual Decision Making in Organizations*

The decision-making research thus far attempts to describe how governmental organizations make decisions. Organizations are, at their core, a group of individual people who choose to define themselves as connected. It is therefore just as important to understand how individuals make decisions as each team member acts as a member of a group or groups and as an individual. Leading complex change across organizational divisions requires analysis of how groups of actors and individual actors make sense of their context and respond to it.

One of the more helpful models of individual administrator decision making is Wayne Hoy and C. John Tarter's concept of "satisficing" (1995). This model rejects the premise that most people seek to optimize decisions by identifying the problem, diagnosing the problem, listing all alternatives in order to develop solutions, considering the consequences of each solution, evaluating each solution, and selecting and implementing the one that best maximizes the individual's goals and objectives. Like most models that have at

their foundation that people act rationally, this optimization process is limited in utility as human tendencies and the impact of finite time coupled with infinite decisions inform how people tend to act. Instead, leaders who attempt to satisfice make decisions by exploring options until one is found that gets the job done well enough to solve the problem in a way consistent with the goals, objectives and information available within the timeframe of the decision. The job of the decision maker is not to find the optimal decision but to define the criteria by which any decision can be evaluated and determined acceptable. Because humans “do not have the knowledge, ability, or capacity to maximize,” leaders of organizations can enhance individual decision making within a system by attending to what is known through behavioral economics and science.

#### *Leveraging Human Nature in Decision Making*

In his book, *How Change Happens*, Cass Sunstein describes the way in which small design decisions can lead to significant changes at scale through the process colloquially known as “nudging” (2019). Sunstein summarizes ten of the most common ways change architects can influence decision making. These include:

1. Default rules that define what happens when a person takes no action.
2. Simplification of processes and procedures.
3. Sharing information on social norms to encourage people to make the decision most people make.
4. Make things easy and convenient, and perhaps fun, to help people overcome the barriers of inertia.
5. Disclosing information so that people have data that is normally obscure.
6. Provide warnings and actions that describe replacement behaviors.

7. Provide opportunities for people to share their intentions and connect to an identity that engages in the desired behavior.
8. Create the conditions for people to pre-commit to a specific action at a precise future moment with a plan for execution.
9. Give reminders in a time period when people can act immediately.
10. Remind people of the consequences of their own past choices.

This list provides an effective playbook for designing decision making in roles and contexts where leaders operate through influence more than formal authority. What all these decision-influencing strategies do is make it easier for individuals to do what the rational part of their mind purportedly wants to do.

Dan and Chip Heath (2010) utilize many of these principles in their approach to change explored in *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*. They use the analogy of a small rational rider on an emotional elephant to explain how people make decisions. In order for people to change their behavior and act differently, three things need to happen. First, the rider must be directed by making success stories *salient*—by providing specific actions and by linking those actions to a big picture purpose. Second, the emotional aspects of a decision must be addressed by connecting data or information to *feelings*—by breaking the change down to a doable size, and by cultivating a common identity. Finally, independent decisions can happen at scale by adjusting the *environment*—building habits, and getting like-minded folks together for support in separate spaces. Combined, these tools and approaches are a way leaders can guide decision making in lower power, high influence roles. They are also an approach to leadership that honors the agency, the expertise, and ultimately the dignity of the person closest to the decision. For change management in large bureaucracies where there is limited oversight and multiple organizational layers between

senior leadership and direct service employees, the strategies of behavioral science are an invaluable toolset for designing actions for influence.

Change in practice and decision making happens most permanently when many people are involved. As is likely readily apparent, change involving multiple stakeholders requires a collaborative team approach to hold over time. There is a large body of research on what makes for effective cross-functional teaming and team leadership.

#### *Designing Teams to Maximize Outcomes*

Defaulting to teams is a common practice that is usually taken without much critical consideration of the purpose of the team or how a team approach is intended to enhance outcomes. This happens despite the fact that teaming is difficult to do well. Jody Hoffer Gittel's research explains that "in organizations with traditional bureaucratic structures, relationships tend to be strong *within* functions and weak *between* functions, resulting in fragmentation and poor handoffs between workers in distinct functions whose tasks are highly interdependent" (2016, p. 60). The issues teams face in general become exponentially more complex when applied to cross-functional divisions.

There are three common approaches to creating a cross-functional team. Oftentimes, individuals leverage their relationships to build informal networks over time in order to achieve their outcomes. Some organizations change structures organized by program or product silos to structures that are organized by customer need. Finally, organizations can maintain their current structure but layer boundary-spanning roles or units over that structure and charge those boundary spanners with connecting disparate activities to customer needs (Gulati, 2007).

Regardless of approach, there are common tasks that must be addressed in order for the team to function effectively in service of its purpose. In his study of General Electric,

Harvard Business School professor Ranjay Gulati (2007), identified four core activities that successful organizations do well. These include:

- **Coordination:** Establishing processes that allow employees to improve their focus on the customer by harmonizing information and activities across units
- **Cooperation:** Using cultural means, incentives, and power allocation, encourage people across the org to work together in the interest of customer needs
- **Capability Development:** Ensuring enough people in the organization have skills needed to deliver customer-focused solutions
- **Connection:** Developing relationships with external partners and customers to increase the value of solutions in a cost-effective way

The purpose of each of these tasks individually and all of them collectively is to orient the team toward their larger shared purpose of achieving some outcome that they cannot achieve on their own. With this brief summary of the conditions in which cross-functional teams are effective and what tasks they must do, it may be helpful to consider the lifecycle of these teams and best practices for each stage.

The following chart, summarizing the work of Glenn Parker (2003), notes the key actions that occur within each phase of the cross-functional lifecycle and pitfalls that may impede the success of the team.

**Table Three: Cross-Functional Team Developmental Stages and Threats**

Cross-Functional Team Developmental Stages and Threats				
Creation	Formation/ Design	Launch	Development	Initial Success & the Zone
<p>Sponsor has idea and co-creates overarching goals with team lead.</p> <p>Sponsor hands problem to team lead for plan development linked to overarching goals</p>	<p>Team lead, a person with the necessary technical and interpersonal skills, selects team members with sponsor as advisor</p>	<p>Team lead hosts meeting to present management expectations, overarching goal, and limitations on work of team</p> <p>Highlight core capabilities each member brings</p> <p>Team members ask questions/ present concerns about team and role</p> <p>Post meeting create performance objectives, milestones, and project plan</p>	<p>Create a sense of shared identity</p> <p>Team building and training to create norms for: communicating, decision making, solving problems, resolving conflicts, and managing meetings.</p> <p>ID resources team will need and develop approach to acquire them</p>	<p>Team gets early wins (new process, policy change)</p> <p>Member accountability to tasks soars after initial dip</p>
<p>Pitfalls: Sponsor provides too much or too little direction</p> <p>Team sees goal as pleasing sponsor</p> <p>Lack of team accountability</p>	<p>Pitfalls: Team members selected for wrong reasons (available, new to org, best people busy)</p> <p>Team is too large</p>	<p>Pitfalls: Member concerns &amp; questions not addressed</p> <p>Lack of clear objectives or milestones</p> <p>Lack of empowerment</p>	<p>Pitfalls: No training</p> <p>Team building comes after problems experienced</p> <p>Fault lines develop based upon diverse identity characteristics</p>	<p>Pitfalls: Overemphasis on short term tasks</p> <p>Obsession with quick fixes</p> <p>Management is still command-and-control</p> <p>Lack of recognition of efforts</p> <p>Focus too internal</p>

As is evident from the chart above, there are many points throughout the process where the team leader can influence the outcome of the team’s work. Some key ideas surface in the chart. Setting clear goals and purpose for the team is a critical leadership move. Additionally,

a leader's most important roles once the team is selected are to ensure there is clear communication, to develop a shared identity, and to build momentum through early wins. The next section will summarize the skills and actions that leaders of teams can take in order to increase the likelihood of team success.

#### *Defining the Role of the Leader in a Cross-Functional Team*

First, team leaders support the team by setting the tone through the encouragement of risk-taking and empowering team members. They also demonstrate support with tangible resources and ensuring the necessary mix of people are on the team (Parker, 2011). Additional condition-setting work of the leader includes insisting on a clear team goal, developing a plan to achieve it, and gaining commitment to the team goal from team members and other stakeholders. Throughout the team engagement, the leader can create policies and procedures that support team-based environment and emphasize the collaborative efforts through team rewards and celebration of the informational diversity that comes from the group. The leader can also provide training on how to work in a diverse group with particular attention to necessary skills such as conflict resolution, consensus building, and meeting management (Parker, 2003). Finally, the leader must be ready to intervene throughout the process with real-time coaching along with motivational, consultative, and education interventions with particular attention to the beginning, midpoint, and the ending of a project (Bernstein, 2016).

Too often teams meet without providing a rationale for meeting. In *The Art of Gathering*, Priya Parker (2018) cautions: “when we gather, we often make the mistake of conflating category with purpose. We outsource our decisions and our assumptions about our gatherings to people, formats, and contexts that are not our own. We get lulled into the false belief that knowing the category of the gathering— the board meeting, workshop,



birthday party, town hall— will be instructive to designing it. But we often choose the template— and the activities and structure that go along with it— before we’re clear on our purpose” (p.4).

Time and invitation lists supplant truly understanding why this group matters. An effective cross-functional leader answers the question, *what is it that this group is uniquely situated to do in this moment?* Leaders do this by offering a clear, challenging, and consequential team purpose that orients, energizes, and engages the group. The chart below summarizes these key aspects of setting a purpose and the benefits teams receive when implemented well including alignment, motivation, and maximizing the gifts of all team members.

**Table Four: Key Aspects and Benefits of Team Purpose**

Attribute	Question to Answer	Function	Benefit
Clear	Where are we going (and how will we know when we get there)?	Orients	Alignment
Challenging	What is challenging about this task?	Energizes	Motivation
Consequential	Why is it important that we achieve this goal?	Engages	Full utilization of knowledge and skills

A team typically has one of three types of purpose: 1.) A team can be oriented towards action to effectively coordinate efforts in order to execute an initiative; 2.) can be formed for diverse expertise to converge on an optimal answer within a useful time frame in order to diagnose or make a decision; or 3.) can be charged with learning and to surface all ideas connected to a concept with none unexplored or unsaid in order to creatively build new ideas (Bernstein, 2013). With a clear purpose, a team leader must be just as intentional about team composition.

Priya Parker reminds us of the close connection between purpose and team composition when she writes, “you will have begun to gather with purpose when you learn to exclude with purpose. When you learn to close doors” (2018, p. 35). While group size is largely a function of purpose, J.R. Hackman’s research into teams found that productivity was maximized between 4-6 team members (2002). Jeff Bezos uses a “two-pizza rule” at Amazon where no team should be larger than what two pizzas can feed (Bernstein, 2016). What likely matters more than team size are the attributes and skills of the selected members.

Ethan Bernstein (2016) suggests three lenses when selecting team members. Team members should reflect a diversity of perspectives across several domains including knowledge, identity, and experiences. Team members who exhibit social sensitivity, or the ability to read and connect to others’ emotional states, tend to help build team cohesion and work effectively through conflict. Finally, Bernstein recommends considering past relationships. Team members who are familiar with each other and have practice working well together get even better over time. Leaders can ask themselves several questions to develop a list of likely team members.

From a political frame, one might ask, “whose cooperation will I need to accomplish what I am attempting; whose support will be necessary in order to get the appropriate decisions made and implemented? Whose opposition could delay or derail what I am trying to do? Who will be affected by what I am trying to accomplish, in a.) their power or status, b.) how they are evaluated or rewarded, or c.) in how they do their job? Who are the friends and allies of the people I have identified as influential?” (Pfeffer, 1993, p.67). Priya Parker similarly asks, “who not only fits but also helps fulfill the gathering’s purpose? Who threatens the purpose? Who, despite being irrelevant to the purpose, do you feel obliged to

invite?” (2018, p.42). Regardless of who is on the team, be clear about whether each person should represent one’s self, one’s unit, or the perspective of the entire organization (Bernstein, 2016).

With this sense of the role of a cross-functional team leader and the composition of the team, the team leader must also be clear about the roles of all team members. Rotating roles can build common understanding of team tasks, increase each member’s capability and knowledge, and help keep the team motivated. Greg Oldham and J.R. Hackman recommend attending to the following elements of role design when creating jobs within teams.

**Table Five: Elements of Team Role Design and Impact**

<b>Element of Role Design</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Skill Variety	The degree to which the job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work; uses a number of different skills and talents of the person	Degree to which individuals experience meaningfulness in the work
Task Identity	The degree to which the job requires doing a whole and identifiable piece of work from beginning to end	
Task Significance	The degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives of other people (internal or external to org)	
Autonomy	The degree to which the job provides independence and discretion to the individual in scheduling work and determining procedures used to carry it out	Degree to which individuals feel responsibility for the work
Job-based feedback	The degree to which doing the work provides the individual with direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance	Degree to which individuals have knowledge of actual results of efforts

Teams members are most likely to thrive when they can use many skills to engage with a meaningful aspect of the project from beginning to end in order to feel a sense of accomplishment. It is also helpful to provide both space for autonomy and clear feedback on impact (Pink, 2011).

With the team in place and purpose and roles clearly defined, the leader has the responsibility of tending to the team throughout the duration of the collaboration. This includes monitoring and adjusting between when the team is focused on process and when it should prioritize outcomes. The leader must know when to provide autonomy and when to provide direction. The team also requires opportunities for exploration of new ideas and execution of current priorities. Throughout it all the leader attends to internal dynamics and external forces (Bernstein, 2013).

Just as significant attention must be given to how a team launches, a team's ending must have similar care. It should be an intentional design choice whether a team is to exist for a specific period of time or purpose or if it has an undefined or unlimited lifespan. In addition to creating it for the team itself, transition must be designed for team members as they enter and exit the team.

Despite the work involved in effective cross-functional teaming, it is a necessary approach to solving adaptive challenges. This benefit can be lost if certain factors are not considered. First, overzealous teams can reach beyond their scope of authority and create problems elsewhere in the organization. Second, empowering teams can lead to a perceived loss of status for middle managers if they take on responsibilities and tasks that previously were the sole discretion of the manager. Finally, in hierarchical organizations where non-collaboration is the norm, cross-functional teams can be a disruptive and destructive force

(Pearce, 2000). These threats should be top of mind for the leader utilizing cross-functional teams.

The Johari Window is a 2x2 thinking frame for what is known and not known by us and by others. The goal of teams is to live in the space where everyone shares what is not known by others. As Max Bazerman notes, “sharing unique information is a critical source of group potential, both in an absolute sense and in comparison to individual decision-making. Yet Stasser and his colleagues (Stasser, 1988; Stasser & Stewart, 1992; Stasser & Titus, 1985), as well as others (e.g., Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams, & Neale, 1996), show a consistent tendency of groups to focus more on shared information (information that group members already have) than on unique or unshared information (information known by only one group member)” (Bazerman, 2012, p.70) In other words, a team is only as good as how much they focus on what makes them different and not what they have in common, and a leader’s role is to ensure the team spends most of their time in space of the unknown.

This section summarizes some of what is known about governmental bureaucracies engaged in longstanding conflict. It shares practices and frames for organizational and leadership decision making and how behavioral science informs these practices. Finally, it provides a comprehensive assessment of the conditions necessary for cross-functional teams to successfully navigate and solve conflict. Although they are voluminous, these strands from the research were needed to chart a plan of action for such an unfamiliar, multi-faceted and intractable public policy question, the repercussions of which had affected and were continuing to affect thousands. Additionally, school districts, especially our nation’s largest urban ones, face problems of similar complexity the answers to which lie in heretofore uncharted terrain. The research covered in my RKA offered me a potential roadmap to start the journey from impasse to resolution.

From these bodies of knowledge, several key ideas surfaced as most relevant to moving the organization toward more effective supports for students with disabilities within the Pathways to Graduation program. These include:

- A place to begin efforts at unsticking intractable conflict is to examine the underlying conflict in order to understand the relationships between people, goals of groups, and communication links.
- Purpose, group size, and communication are all important when designing teams.
- It is necessary to attend to alignment of values, motivation, and individual talents and expertise when designing teams.
- That without thoughtful intervention and design, decisions just happen in bureaucracies and those decisions are often reactionary.
- Large-scale change can often best be achieved through small shifts in default rules, simplification of processes, and providing information on social norms.

Together, these principles informed my Theory of Action for improving the capacity of the cross-functional team charged with meeting the needs of students with disabilities through the NYSED Compliance Assurance Plan process.

#### Theory of Action

If I create intuitive, simple, and quick-to-use tools, structures, and processes for decision making and approach conflict that makes collaboration and its purpose transparent,

And if I ground these tools in what we know about cross-functional teaming and behavioral insights/economics,

And if I build relationships with those responsible for the work in order to understand their pain points and the jobs to be done within their work anchored in empathy for each stakeholder's perspective on an intractable conflict,

And if I communicate by framing tasks in ways aligned to individuals' needs, by emphasizing and celebrating individual and collective success, and by connecting to work that people are already doing or understand,

And if I hold people accountable to their own goals, desires, and commitments by acting as a mirror,

Then I will help to create a leadership culture where cross-functional teaming is the norm and engaged in by divisions independent of the Chancellor's office as the way to actualize on aspirations that require the talent, expertise, and resources held across internal and external organizational boundaries.

Then I will perhaps lay the groundwork for similar ways of work to develop in the divisions led by these individuals, in positions of formal authority, in order to spread across the organization.

### Origins of the Strategic Project

*I've a cozy little flat in what is known as old Manhattan  
We'll settle down right here in town...  
The city's glamor can never spoil the dreams of a boy and girl  
We'll turn Manhattan into an isle of joy  
- Ella Fitzgerald, "Manhattan"*

The primary focus of this strategic project was facilitating the leadership team responsible for responding to the compliance assurance plan (CAP) issued by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) regarding services for students with disabilities. The project included coordinating teams across divisions to ensure compliance, improve student learning outcomes, and successfully close the compliance assurance plan in spring of 2020. The cross-functional team represented multiple levels of central office leadership and served as a field test and potential model for interdivisional work in other subjects and scopes. My initial responsibilities were defined as the following:

- develop project plans,
- plan and facilitate agendas for key stakeholder groups (division chiefs, chiefs of staff, special education war room, etc.),
- update Chancellor and craft necessary decision memos,
- engage with school and district-level stakeholders to monitor and adjust implementation,

- prepare for meetings with NYSED and serve as Chancellor’s representative as needed,
- recommend, design, and test structures and tools to improve and sustain cross-divisional collaboration beyond the duration of the residency, and
- coordinate communication and build relationships with and among stakeholders with an emphasis on recognizing strengths and celebrating success.

In July of 2019, as I onboarded with the NYCDOE as a special assistant to the Chancellor, NYSED provided a review of the CAP documents along with specific feedback on changes NYSED required in order to accept NYCDOE’s action plans. The three high-level areas of focus for the CAPs were: Preschool (CAP1), School Age (CAP2), and Due Process (CAP3).

**Table 1: Summary of Compliance Assurance Plan Parts**

CAP Part	Brief Overview of Issues
One: Preschool	Four areas of required corrective action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure evaluation happens in a timely manner;</li> <li>• Provide support as students transition from early childhood to Kindergarten;</li> <li>• Provide needed programs and services;</li> <li>• Increase access to least restrictive environment in all settings, both district and private provider</li> </ul>
Two: School Age	Four areas of required corrective action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure evaluation happens in a timely manner;</li> <li>• Provide needed programs and services;</li> <li>• <b>Provide services to District 79 Pathways to Graduation Students;</b></li> <li>• Ensure charter school compliance</li> </ul>
Three: Due Process	Three areas of required corrective action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address due process issues and timely review in Impartial Hearing Office;</li> <li>• Increase use and access to mediation;</li> <li>• Amend prior written notice policies and procedures</li> </ul>



At this time, both NYSED and NYCDOE received a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request. NYSED released the NYCDOE root cause analysis and action plans in response to this FOIL request. The local media immediately published several stories summarizing many of the key challenges surfaced in the CAPs. In this environment of heightened scrutiny, the war room continued to meet and revise the action plans with an attempt to balance the complex realities of 1,800 schools, the tradeoffs of resource allocation with other priorities, the desire to serve all students well (with particular attention to students with disabilities), the requirements of legal compliance, and the perspectives of NYSED on what would be acceptable outcomes.

One aspect of NYCDOE's response to the CAP was repeatedly featured by the media. In response to the CAP requirement to provide special education services within the P2G program, the NYCDOE summarized their concerns with NYSED's position in lieu of submitting a plan to address those concerns. This summary noted many discrepancies in how NYSED treated the P2G program, particularly around resource support, that contradicted NYSED's claim that the P2G was part of the secondary education program as stated in the 2010 guidance. In the initial draft Root Cause Analysis on P2G submitted to NYSED in spring of 2019, the NYCDOE noted: "Title I funds are not made available for these programs, successful completion of the TASC does not factor into Adequate Year Progress graduation data and the students are defined as dropouts, students are only required to receive 12 hours of instruction a week and not the 30 hours required of traditional secondary programs, teachers do not require the same subject specific licensure, and other comparable high school equivalency preparation programs approved by the state have no requirements for supporting students with disabilities" (NYCDOE, 2019).

In addition to noting this disparate treatment of P2G programming by NYSED, NYCDOE was also proud of the impact P2G had for the at-risk students, including those with disabilities, for whom the traditional school model had not been successful. Students with disabilities remained in the P2G program for the same amount of time as typically developing students and were just as likely to complete the TASC exam. The pass rate of students with disabilities (35%) on the TASC was close to that of typically developing students (41%) and the achievement gap between the two populations was much smaller than is seen between students in traditional public schools. Many of those responsible for the P2G program felt that making the changes required by NYSED would actually create access barriers for students with disabilities and reduce the program's efficacy with this population.

Skepticism toward these changes and frustration with the perceived mixed messages from NYSED, led to NYCDOE initially submitted a root cause analysis for the D79 P2G program that, to summarize, shared this position and stated that no changes would be forthcoming. It should be no surprise that NYSED rejected this interpretation and declared the document non-responsive in their response to the root cause analysis in the summer of 2019. The disagreement was even more entrenched as the war room grappled with how to respond to both NYSED and the increased public scrutiny.

### A Shift in Strategy

*Like a death of the heart*

*Jesus, where do I start?*

*- LCD Soundsystem, "New York, I Love You But You're Bringing Me Down"*

Regardless of accuracy and the actual complexity of the issues involved, the media message NYCDOE *callously ignores the needs of students with special needs* is inherently sticky. It reinforces the negative perceptions and stereotypes many people default to when it comes to

large bureaucracy and the NYCDOE in particular. Chancellor Richard Carranza made two moves in the summer of 2019 to both address the equity issue at stake for students and the public relations challenge. First, he announced publicly that waivers of special education services would no longer be required of students within the P2G program. Second, he communicated internally that a new approach would be needed for how students with disabilities within P2G were supported. This approach would need to pass muster with NYSED.

For the Chancellor, this was a calculated decision. He was aware of the longstanding history where the NYCDOE used its relative power as a “club” over NYSED. The outcome was almost always a stalemate, wasted resources and time, and poor relationships. He believed that a collaborative and constructivist approach would be in the best interest of children because NYCDOE and NYSED have interconnected and not competing values and goals. In short, “if we do well, they do well” (Carranza, 2020). While there were obvious political pressures involved in making this decision, the driving motivator was a desire to improve outcomes for this vulnerable population who had been failed by traditional efforts to meet their needs. Two thirds of students with disabilities who took the TASC did not pass. Chancellor Carranza made clear that “business as usual” would not *satisfice*.

With this call to action, our war room team had the formal authority to consider new ways of approaching special education services for students within the P2G program. What became clear almost immediately was that, while external stakeholder interests and perceptions of the right course of action varied among authorizing agents like NYSED, external advocates like Advocates for Children, and the NYCDOE, the views within the DOE were just as diverse, if not more complicated. Shifting from considering whether to

make changes to how to make changes to what changes to make surfaced this internal disagreement.

After acknowledging these differences of opinion, my next move was to get proximate to the work in order to better understand the experience of students and educators. In the beginning weeks of October, I arranged to participate in several site visits to D79 program locations in order to see the work and better understand how it fit into the larger system. These visits included opportunities to hear from students, teachers, and leaders about their hopes and lived experiences within the program. With the D79 Superintendent coordinating and leading the visits, he and I discussed program policy and the lived experience in schools and considered ways to bridge the gap while remaining true to the integrity of the program. These conversations were critical to the formation of my perspective on how best to create the container within which the various internal stakeholder groups could engage in conflict in order to come to a solution that *satisfied* the major interests of each party. In this instance, I believed that an outcome that *satisfied* all internal stakeholders would attend to improved learning outcomes for students, political realities, legal requirements, and system process improvements.

### Narrowing the Team

*It's you against me most days  
It's me against you,  
Ah, the snow's comin' down  
On the cars in midtown  
- Ryan Adams, "My Blue Manhattan"*

Meanwhile a pattern developed regarding the war room team's attempts to finalize an approach to addressing the needs of students with disabilities within P2G. The team of 8-12 people would come to some agreement for a plan only to check in later to have adjusted their thinking. Part of the challenge was that NYSED had informally spoken with

D79 leadership and suggested an approach that other parts of the NYCDOE felt were either against current NYCDOE policy or that would require more resources and time than NYSED was assuming. One of the most difficult parts of addressing IEPs for P2G students is that the students typically register for the program without a parent present. As most students are over the age of 18, many do not live with their parents and some are estranged from their families. Much of the conflict centered on how best to address IEP needs and whether strategies such as parent proxies or IEP changes without holding a meeting would be possible. The team kept oscillating along the continuum from the NYSED recommendation to a policy similar to how students with disabilities who transfer from out-of-state are supported. In strategy conversations with the NYC Deputy Chief of Staff, we determined that we had to disrupt this dynamic if we were to move forward with a recommendation.

We pulled together a smaller subsection of the team to figure out the various perspectives. This team included a member of the First Deputy Chancellor's team responsible for supervising D79 and its implementation, a member of the legal department with expertise in IDEA, and a member of the Special Education Office responsible for special education policy within the Chief Academic Officer's division. These team members were all two to three levels from cabinet-level leadership, so they had a depth of knowledge to the level of detail and specificity necessary for policy while still maintaining significant organizational authority with which to make decisions. This smaller working group was able to work through several complicated issues and draft a recommendation memo for the Chancellor that had the support of all divisions and the leadership of D79. The core elements of this recommendation and how the team achieved agreement is explored in depth within the analysis section of this paper.

## Consensus Building

*Autumn in New York is often mingled with pain.  
Dreamers with empty hands may sigh for exotic lands;  
- Billie Holiday, "Autumn in New York"*

With a draft that met enough of the needs of internal stakeholders, the work shifted to generating commitments from external stakeholders. At the end of October, the war room team presented the draft policy proposal to NYSED. With some procedural and clarification feedback, they received tentative assurance that the NYCDOE approach to serving students with disabilities within the P2G setting would meet the needs of the state. The team then worked to finalize the approach and secure physical signatures from all cabinet members responsible for implementing the policy. Conversations with a member of the Chancellor's support team surfaced how this practice of gathering signatures helped with ensuring things actually happen as each cabinet member made a public commitment to the policy. It was a structure that created favorable conditions through behavioral science principles. Leaders made their intentions public and committed to a specified action with clear steps to follow on a specific date. These steps—which Sunstein (2019) might call structural nudges—ensured that those responsible were primed to enact the policy.

The NYCDOE submitted a formal policy and action plan to NYSED in mid-November. This action formalized a new approach and commitment to serving students with disabilities within the P2G program after a ten-year stalemate. Two months later, NYSED officials provided feedback; they suggested some language changes and accepted the overall policy approach. NYCDOE then submitted a revised and final version of the policy the final week of January 2020. Despite how difficult it had been to get to that stage, the work of operationalizing the policy so that it would have a net positive impact on student learning had not yet begun. The lesson to be learned was that the challenge of policy

development is exceeded only by the difficulties inherent in enacting the policy. This would be the challenge moving forward.

### Making Policy Real

*Slow down, you move too fast  
You got to make the morning last  
Just kicking down the cobblestones  
Looking for fun and feelin' groovy  
- Simon and Garfunkel, "59th Street Bridge Song"*

A policy without resources is just an idea. Although both agencies saw a need to fulfill legal and perhaps moral obligations, there was uncertainty over funding. An additional \$2 million was needed to enact the policy during a time when the city was making budget cuts and the state still owed NYCDOE almost \$1 billion dollars in foundation aid (Spector, 2019). This policy sat in a new space for NYCDOE policy changes. Policies usually cannot be approved unless there is a funding source identified to support the policy. However in this instance, legal obligation drove the need for action, and financial realities and expectations of home rule limited the quantity and speed with which the city could make the resources available. The D79 P2G Chancellor recommendation was one of the first approved under a new process whereby a policy could be accepted if it was responsive to legal mandates but could, at the same time, be stalled if full implementation was resource-dependent. This new practice allowed the leadership team to move necessary work forward and gain commitment from all divisions even when financial implications were known to be complex and to require a longer lead time. The D79 P2G team was directed to meet the timeline and implement the field test to the extent resources became available. With that directive, the D79 superintendent launched a pilot program at a Brooklyn site. It helped that the principal of the pilot site was a former special education teacher and an advocate for this new approach to providing services.

Two issues surfaced immediately at the pilot site. First - how to get D79 sites added to the software platform that tracks IEPs and, second, how to respond when parents did not return the letter approving amendments to IEPs despite agreeing to changes over the phone. Both were at first believed to be simple technical problems but ended up being much more complex as the human aspects of change became more salient. The site-based team and war room officials were in the midst of addressing these issues when the COVID19 pandemic arrived in New York City.

On March 15, 2020, the NYCDOE closed schools as a safety measure in response to COVID19 (Zimmerman, 2020). Along with closing schools and pivoting to remote learning, the state response to COVID included cancelling the TASC exams. Absent a clear timeframe for when they could complete their high school equivalency, many students stopped attending programming. Much of the site-based team's capacity shifted for the short term to finding ways to motivate student attendance when the natural incentive was not available. At the conclusion of my residency, the war room continued to address the logistical hurdles of implementing the policy, albeit for a smaller pilot, with much more uncertainty for not only when D79 would launch practices at-scale but when school would return and what it would look like for all students.

#### Evidence to Date

*You don't know what you'll do until you're put under pressure*  
- Bobby Womack, "Across 110th Street"

The efficacy of the P2G program can be assessed at four levels when viewed through the theory of action and objectives of the project. The first, and most perfunctory, is whether or not it happened. The second, and most important, is the impact this change had on increasing HSE pass rates and program retention rates for students with disabilities within the P2G program. The third is the degree to which the structures and teams put in



place as part of this strategy increased the number of students with appropriate IEPs and services in compliance with state and federal law. Finally, it is useful to consider the degree to which the collaborative structures utilized as part of the special education war room are adopted within the NYCDOE in order to address other challenges where positive change requires cross-functional collaboration.

At the most technical level, this policy change in how the NYCDOE Pathways to Graduation program approached supporting students with disabilities was successful. In the summer of 2019, there were no mechanisms for reviewing, revising, and implementing IEPs. Students also signed waivers acknowledging that they would not receive official special education services. By January of 2020, NYCDOE had a policy approved by both NYSED and senior leadership, and the waiver process had ended. A pilot in one site began implementing the policy and determining what the impact would be in regards to time, resources, and success rates of students. Using the criteria of “did we do what we said we were going to do” this initiative was a success. Too often, this is where analysis of work begins and ends. The larger criteria of whether this work caused the conditions to achieve our objectives is left unanswered, both because the answers usually require a long time to gather enough data and because they are difficult to measure.

This new policy is only worth the energy that was put into it if it can be determined that 1.) there is an increase in the number of students with disabilities who access the P2G program *and* 2.) there is an increase in the percentage of students who pass the High School Equivalency exam. It is currently too soon to know. Tracking the total cost of this policy change, its impact on exam pass rates, and its demand on scarce resources based upon the return on investment is critical work for the coming years. A first step would be to set clear

target criteria, e.g. what number would indicate success so that the outcomes from doing it outweigh the opportunity costs of enacting it.

In addition to impact on student outcomes, there is value in meeting the legal obligations of the system as it comes to supporting students with disabilities. The criteria by which we assess this goal is the increase in students with disabilities whose IEPs are implemented. With the compliance rate before this policy at 0% for IEP implementation, there was nowhere to go but up. Since my work with NYCDOE concluded at a time the program was still being piloted at one site for 19 students with disabilities during a pandemic, the compliance rate is still low. There is, however, anecdotal evidence that this is a promising practice. The site-based leaders of the pilot had expressed excitement in this change and stated that they felt it was the right direction for serving this student population (Zweig, R., Personal Communication, January 15, 2020). An award-winning teacher from the P2G program shared in a meeting with the Chancellor how the increased time on assessments as required by IEPs benefited a student with whom she had worked (De La Garza, E., Personal Communication, January 22, 2020). As this is a technical change and an adoption of a process similar to one used everywhere else within the NYCDOE, I am optimistic that the P2G program will see significant increases in IEP implementation compliance over the coming school year and that this rate will correlate with resource allocation.

Part of the intent of this work was to use this process to inform how other cross-functional teams operate within the NYCDOE. In tackling this project, my hope was to improve cross-divisional communication to break down silos and infuse some principles of collaborative design into how teams formed and functioned so that engagement and shared ownership happened earlier in the process. This goal also showed mixed results. The special

education war room structure was mobilized as one of the models the desegregation task force used to design its structures. Other groups, like the Leadership Lattice working group changed their group membership and meeting length in order to become more responsive to member needs. Still others are making headway in organizing meetings around clearer and more measurable outcomes. However, these changes happened more informally and tended to be most likely to occur based upon my participation in the design or my relationship with the owner of the meeting. My team management practices remained idiosyncratic and not fully adopted by the culture of the organization. For the lessons learned from the special education war room and P2G working group to be more accessible and used more universally, it would be critical to provide the space for the team to reflect on practice and capture the principles of teaming learned in a more formal manner that is shared among leaders. So far, this has not yet occurred and it limits the degree to which the model can influence collaborative practice more broadly.

Beyond the scope of the project, some final assessment of the efficacy of the theory of action that drove my leadership is helpful in understanding what happened. To ground this analysis, it is helpful to review the theory of action that guided this work.

Theory of Action

If I create intuitive, simple, and quick-to-use tools, structures, and processes for decision making and approach conflict that makes collaboration and its purpose transparent,

And if I ground these tools in what we know about cross-functional teaming and behavioral insights/economics,

And if I build relationships with those responsible for the work in order to understand their pain points and the jobs to be done within their work anchored in empathy for each stakeholder's perspective on an intractable conflict,

And if I communicate by framing tasks in ways aligned to individuals' needs, by emphasizing and celebrating individual and collective success, and by connecting to work that people are already doing or understand,

And if I hold people accountable to their own goals, desires, and commitments by acting as a mirror,

Then I will help to create a leadership culture where cross-functional teaming is the norm and engaged in by divisions independent of the Chancellor's office as the way to actualize on aspirations that require the talent, expertise, and resources held across internal and external organizational boundaries.

Then I will perhaps lay the groundwork for similar ways of work to develop in the divisions led by these individuals, in positions of formal authority, in order to spread across the organization.

Several tools and structures utilized within the special education team helped make it more effective. Joint agenda creation with clear outcomes assigned to owners ensured that participants came with materials (Parker, 2011). Decision points were framed and options were communicated in advance of meetings (Parker, 2003). When these tasks were executed well, the team moved quickly through many items within 30-minute meetings. My efforts to ground the meetings in a clear purpose were less effective. The purpose was not collectively generated but shared and quickly became more window dressing (Parker, 2018). For example, I included the purpose, *To improve learning outcomes and school experiences for students with disabilities and their families by collaborating effectively and efficiently across divisions. To fully integrate all people within a given community*, on the war room meeting agenda but did not take the time to discuss how that frame impacts our collective work. There is no evidence this low effort purpose addition improved either the ways in which the team worked or their motivation.

Other aspects of the theory of action had more significant impact on the outcomes. Reducing team size to 4-6 as suggested by the research was critical to resolving the most thorny policy issues where there was internal deadlock (Bernstein, 2013). Behavioral economic strategies such as simplifying processes to reduce friction, making public who already approved the policy in order to create social pressure, using pre-commitments each week for actions, and providing just-in-time reminders all helped to overcome human

tendencies towards inertia (Sunstein, 2017). As should be no surprise, the relational aspects of the theory of action were most important.

Time spent in entry interviews and informal conversations helped me to understand and consider individual motivations and values for the work. Time spent on site visits and talking to students and teachers communicated the importance of both this project and the people involved. Several times it was noted how rare it was for “people from Tweed” or Central Office to make trips to schools outside of formal visitation days. Other strategies seemed to help over time, but they were so countercultural that the room for misinterpretation was high. For example, acknowledging specific work of individuals publicly or as part of “appreciations” in meeting minutes were just as likely to hinder as they were to help connect folks. This ran counter to my expectations and experience in previous roles. After acknowledging everyone on the team at least once for their contributions in the first couple of months, I abandoned the practice after some feedback that people appreciated where it came from but would prefer to just dig into the work. A switch to more general appreciation about specific aspects of the work or victories without attaching names fit the organization better (even if celebration itself was still not habitual).

There is still work to do in order to know the impact of the special education war room and the changes to the Pathways to Graduation program. The infrastructure is successfully in place. Time will tell if IEP compliance and student pass rates increase. There are lessons learned regarding what aspects of cross-functional teams are needed under what conditions, but this knowledge is individualized, experiential, and ad hoc. There is work to continue if these lessons are to become protocol and inform the default culture of how the organization operates. The following section will take this evaluation of the project and consider why it happened in the way that it did.

## Breaking it Down: Why Did this Change Happen?

*We can try to understand  
The New York Times' effect on man  
- Bee Gees, "Stayin' Alive"*

This analysis describing why this change occurred as it did explores three aspects of the change process: timing, content, and implementation. First, it attempts to explain why change happened in this moment. For years there was seemingly no movement in this conflict, but in a span of three months the entire approach shifted. Second, this section assesses the policy that was written and seeks to explain why this particular policy and the choices made within were the ones that happened in a universe of infinite options. Finally, I break down why the policy was implemented to the degree it was and in the way that it was. Throughout the analysis, I describe how my actions facilitated and limited the efficacy of the change effort. The goal is to fully explore the moment of change, the specifics of the change, the implementation of the change, and the role of my leadership within this effort.

### Why did this change become salient?

This section seeks to explain why, after ten years at loggerheads, NYCDOE shifted and built institutional momentum toward changing how the organization approached providing services to students with disabilities within the Pathways to Graduation process. Peter Coleman's model for how change happens within intractable conflict environments is a useful tool for understanding this shift. Two of Coleman's three change types are relevant here—developmental and radical. Developmental changes are those that progress in a somewhat linear fashion and work to build momentum for the change. Radical changes are a sharp shift from previous practice and are much more disruptive. These change initiatives often occur simultaneously and can enhance the change effort when they act in concert toward similar goals. Within each category he identifies conditions and actions

that can create change from the bottom-up, the middle-out and the top-down. These actions are summarized within the following chart:

**Table Six: Systemic Change Initiatives** (Coleman, 2011 p.177)

	Episodic	Developmental	Radical
Top-down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peacekeeping</li> <li>• Legal proceedings</li> <li>• intelligence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy changes</li> <li>• Control the ecology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Frame Breaking outsiders</b></li> <li>• <b>Issue framing</b></li> </ul>
Middle-out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community leader crisis support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mid-level influentials</b></li> <li>• <b>Procedural changes</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic initiatives</li> <li>• Ashoka initiatives</li> </ul>
Bottom-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct humanitarian aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching</li> <li>• Socializing</li> <li>• Treatment for trauma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adjust local rules, timing, location</b></li> </ul>

Whereas Table Two in the RKA summarized *what* to do when using Coleman’s Attractor-Landscape model to address intractable conflict, Table Six describes *how* change happens at a system level once successfully enacted. Mapping Coleman’s model onto actions taken by actors within the DOE, including me, tells a story of why this situation went from intractable conflict to resolution within a short time period. The actions most salient to this particular change process are bolded and shaded in grey. From this high-level visual analysis, I argue that actions that support radical change pushed on the system from the top-down and the bottom-up creating pressure for this more radical change to be sustained through developmental change emanating from the middle-out. While the Attractor-Landscape model is helpful in understanding this change at the NYCDOE, my experiences with the war room suggest there are some limitations. First I will share how the model aligns with what actually occurred. Then I will close in sharing some of the limitations of the model.

The importance of frame-breaking leadership, i.e. leadership that changes how an issue is defined or perceived, cannot be overstated in its ability to create the conditions for radical change. In this case, the issuance of the Compliance Assurance Plan created a new

relationship between NYSED and NYCDOE that was more urgent when compared to the previous improvement planning processes. Additionally, the appointment of an outsider Chancellor who did not have a history with the issue or relationships allowed for a significant change in practice as he did not have investment in the historical conflict; his experience outside of the NYCDOE allowed him to see, and therefore frame, the issue differently. That the Chancellor reframed the issue as one of “Equity & Excellence” and therefore central to the work of his administration was critical to mobilizing those with influence to act differently. It was no longer framed as an “us versus them” conflict on who knew what was best for students, but an opportunity to build new ways of working between NYCDOE and NYSED. He made this case frequently, publicly, and in both group and one-on-one meetings with those responsible for the work. These top-down shifts created a catalyst for unleashing bottom-up radical change.

Within this new environment, front-line leaders and actors were initially concerned about the implications the changes to programming would have on students with special needs. They shared fears that requiring the procedures of IEPs would reduce participation by students with disabilities and lead to lower completion rates. However, there were pockets of leaders within the P2G program who wanted this work to happen. Many of these leaders held multiple identities involved within the conflict. For example, early support came from school leaders who had previously served as special education teachers. These leaders were able to break through patterns because they straddled both worlds and knew enough about the rules governing each environment to be able to adjust them. Using these experiences, these folks were best equipped to tear down the old way of doing things and build a new approach. Many of the strategies Coleman (2011) recommends that allow one to complicate in order to simplify as part of the Attractor Landscape model of addressing



intractable change were enacted. Local actionables who identified with multiple perspectives within the conflict, like the leaders who had previously taught special education, were the first on-the-ground leaders. Frame-breaking leadership from the Chancellor linked people to shared goals and values. These conditions put pressure on mid-level bureaucrats to respond to these demands for new policy in more authentic and meaningful ways.

Energy from top-level leadership and the commitment of folks closest to the work, gave mid-level stakeholders (including myself) the authority to craft policy. The Attractor Landscape model demonstrates that policy change is all about changing the procedures, or rules, regulations, and systems, through which people interact. There was also a shift in mid-level influentials. The deputy chief for special education was set to retire at the beginning of 2020. These transitions in leadership, when known, can provide a forcing mechanism for seeking resolution. Additionally, my addition to the war room team created a new dynamic within this level of the organization. Facilitating the special education war room on behalf of the Chancellor's office was my first assignment, which meant that early in my time it received the lion's share of my attention and energy. The increased prioritization likely had little to do with any particular talent of mine, but the fact that I had the bandwidth and direction to shepherd the process. Capacity and focus are key factors in determining what gets done.

In addition to leadership in transition and new membership, the broader team itself was primed to act in order to create procedural changes. The cross-functional special education war room team was comprised of individuals with deep experience with and commitment to students with disabilities. Several previously worked in NYCDOE's specialized schools where many of the students with the greatest needs are served. Their ability to work at the edges of the system and their knowledge of the spectrum of options

made these people particularly suited to pursuing a more intentional support structure for students with disabilities once the broader climate signaled receptivity to a new approach. The alignment of forthcoming leadership transition, new actors, and a highly-skilled team allowed for mid-level leadership within the bureaucracy to act when the pressure and authority for change came from top-level and grass-roots actors.

Together these three forces: top-down radical change, grass roots level pressure for radical change, and developmental middle-out support for sustaining change led to a moment when a new way of supporting students with disabilities within the P2G program was not only possible, but a priority. The coalition was successful in part because their efforts reflected the strategies that can “unstick” intractable conflict. These included: *complicating to simplify*, as when salient identities went from single role to considering multiple identities; *building up to tear down*, as when leadership connected stakeholders to higher level goals and values; and *changing to stabilize* by identifying small things like mutual interest from NYSED and NYCDOE given the timing of leadership entry and exits.

However, in assessing what happened at the NYCDOE, there are some limits to the utility of the model. The model suggests that change happens in radical, developmental, and episodic ways. The model tends to treat these approaches as separate, but my experiences demonstrate that the model may be more useful as a continuum that is inclusive of all approaches to change. Part of the effectiveness of this change process has been the integration of radical, developmental and episodic strategies. For example, it was the pairing of top-level episodic legal changes through the issuance of the CAP, coupled with radical frame-breaking leadership, and developmental policy shifts that created the condition for new ways of supporting students. The model may be more useful as a change management strategy if viewed as a comprehensive ecosystem where all parts—top-down, middle-out,

bottom-up and episodic, developmental, and radical approaches—are utilized collectively in order to design a strategy.

Taking advantage of a moment when change is possible is only useful to the degree that it is used to enact a policy that has the potential to be effective. The next section will explain why the particular policy was written.

#### Why was this particular policy written?

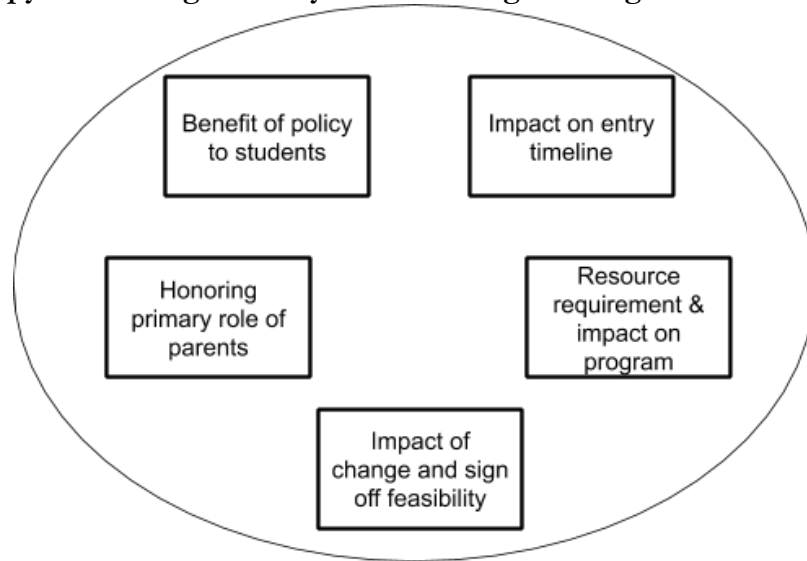
Many potential policy solutions regarding how Pathways to Graduation supported students with disabilities could have been written in response to the newly change-receptive environment. This section will examine why the policy was written in the way that it was and why it was authorized and enacted.

The critical moment for developing a policy proposal occurred when I chose a small subset of stakeholders from the war room to meet separately to explore issues with the policy in September 2019. This group included one member of each critical internal stakeholder group. During the policy discussion, I took the role of observer and focused on understanding and naming the interests surfaced by the participants.

At play in these perspectives was a deeper conflict about whether it was most important to address the letter of the law, the spirit of the law, or the legitimacy of the law. This was an issue Priya Parker (2018) would describe as having “heat,” which she defines as issues affecting or threatening people’s fears, needs, or sense of self when they poke at sources of power. My role in this gathering was to create the heat map as described above. This included asking myself the following questions recommended by Parker: *What are people avoiding that they don’t think they’re avoiding? What are the sacred cows here? What goes unsaid? What are we trying to protect? And why?* (p. 237). While listening, I mapped what seemed to be the

competing values and priorities regarding the policy. While somewhat less clear, Figure 2 represents my first breakthrough in understanding this aspect of the problem.

**Figure 2: Copy of Drawing from My Notes During Meeting**



What emerged was a set of competing values including: improving student learning, ensuring parents make decisions about their own children, enabling students to start services quickly, ensuring that the NYCDOE is a responsible steward of resources, and making decisions that are politically viable and realistic. The outstanding policy points impacted each of these values differently and oftentimes the recommendations one would logically come to by following a particular value would be in conflict with the other values. For example, the use of surrogate parents was desirable for those advocating from a perspective that prioritized state approval, but it was considered highly inappropriate to those who more highly valued student and parent agency. This attempt to map the various conflicts and visualize the landscape had the effect of briefly complicating the issue and then simplifying by allowing for patterns within positions to emerge. While I did not articulate it this clearly at the time, what surfaced through that analysis and then informed my course of action was an

understanding of four competing perspectives that would need to be addressed within any acceptable action. These perspectives—along with the recommended actions each suggested and the rationale for that action—are summarized in the table below:

**Table Seven: War Room Stakeholder Perspectives and Recommendations**

<b>Perspective</b>	<b>Recommended Action</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Economic	Don't enact IEPs. Keep defying NYSED	The opportunity cost is too high as the money and people would be more effectively allocated elsewhere.
Structural	Enact full IEPs	We will get information through progress monitoring on how effective P2G is for students with disabilities. This will force program improvement.
Legal	Enact IEPs in compliance with rules	These safeguards exist for a reason and making modifications here will open the door to others who may want modifications but use them poorly.
Bureaucratic/Political	Do the minimum to satisfy NYSED	This is not valuable work and it needs to be solved so that the team can focus on other problems.

When I shared this analysis with the team we were able to identify with shared superordinate goals and move beyond the stalemate caused at the issue-specific level. The process of crafting a policy looks much cleaner and clearer within an analytical retrospective. However, in the thick of it things sometimes felt uncertain and chaotic; similar arguments were rehashed repeatedly, and it was not apparent until we reached a conclusion that each round of discussion had served to inch us forward to a common place. I think this is likely how consensus is best built when addressing issues that impact core values and competing world views. Faster, less frustrating processes likely would not have lead to a shared commitment or promising solution.

My role within the development of a P2G program special education policy was a convening function. There was not a position on the policy I hoped to achieve nor any

particular aspect of the final policy that I can claim to have developed. Instead, my role was similar to how former National Teacher of the Year Shanna Peebles described her approach to teaching her students: “They didn't need me to tell them what to do, but they did need me to create the space for them and to facilitate the conversation” (2018, p. 35). This was a team of great expertise and commitment to the work. What I could add was to provide a container and a mirror for their conversation. The policy, which met the needs of all stakeholders by relying on a “protocol 1” and “protocol 2” split based upon parent engagement, is in Appendix B. With a policy written and approved by both NYCDOE and NYSED leadership, the hard and more complex work of implementation began.

#### Why was the policy enacted in the way it was?

Once a policy was agreed upon, the work of implementation began, albeit somewhat slowly. This section describes why the policy was enacted in the way that it was and why it had the level of impact it did. It begins by assessing the impact of how individuals talk about change. It then considers how power, identity, and accountability affect a team’s ability to collaborate. Finally, it names four practices that allowed this change effort to become practice with the potential to improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities seeking their high school equivalency.

The slow approval process and uncertainty on funding created a sense of skepticism that the policy was actually intended to be enacted. In November and December, it became clear that several actors were waiting to see what they would be expected to do and how fast they would be expected to go. Jamie and Maren Showkeir’s description of dysfunctional workplace conversations can help explain why there was a bias toward inaction. They describe three themes in which people tend to talk about new work:

- “Holding others accountable: ‘It is critical to roll out this new policy carefully so that people will get on board with it. We have to make sure they get it right and do it right.’
- Care taking: ‘Things look a little shaky right now, but just ignore the rumors and do the best job you can. Everything will be fine.’
- Coping with disappointment and colluding with cynicism: ‘Did you hear about the latest change they want to make? It will never work. When will they realize that no one ever takes this stuff seriously?’” (2009, p. 26).

All three of these perspectives surfaced at different times in the phase between policy approval and policy implementation. I was asked by two separate individuals on the team whether or not we were “actually going to implement this.” There were concerns that it would not work or that there would be a last-minute change and leadership priorities would shift. In conversations with the deputy chief of staff, I named this pattern of cynicism and she advised me to “bird-dog” the process and make sure folks were delivering on expectations. This involved ensuring D79 P2G implementation was on the war room agenda each week in order to communicate movement was expected even if other aspects of the process were still unknown. It also involved ongoing one-on-one conversations with key leadership members responsible for implementation where the objective of the conversation was to be clear that the pilot needed to launch in February regardless of whether or not the final NYSED approval for the policy and NYCDOE allocation of new resources had yet happened. The message was clear: if we could get just one more student access to the supports they needed by implementing their IEP in February, that was reason enough to move forward despite uncertainty. With this repeated and relentless follow up, a pilot launched in February at one site.

With a toolkit of agenda items, email reminders, and unannounced trips to people's desks, this approach to ensuring implementation felt like leadership by nagging. There is a fine line between keeping pressure on an issue and the people responsible for it and harassing and annoying folks. There were times I had images of myself as the boss from the film *Office Space* pestering his subordinates for their TPS reports. Yet there is a need for this sort of management, within reasonable boundaries, when stakeholders have multiple demands from multiple parts of the organization. First, it is important to make sure you do not do it so much that your reminders and practices become white noise that people ignore. Second, and more importantly, you need to be confident that the actions you are requesting are actually how people should be prioritizing their time. This requires talking to people about all of their work so that you understand all that is expected of them. It means you must have a sense where any particular task fits within their complete portfolio and what they value. When considering my efforts at this, key stakeholders remained responsive to my inquiries with timely follow up so I am confident I did not overuse this approach. However, I think there were opportunities to be more proactive in understanding the other demands on people. Too often I was following up after perceiving a sense of frustration or report of being overwhelmed. We might have been more successful navigating this phase of the process if my approach to understanding the larger picture was more proactive. There may have been important work that was pushed for some aspect of the P2G work that would be less impactful. With this "bird-dog" approach, a planning team of those closest to the work—teachers, counselors, and school leaders—met in January to create the actual practices and procedure that would make the policy real.

Jody Hoffer-Gittell notes that there are five obstacles organizations must face when engaged in collaborative work. These include:



1. “Workers who don’t engage in teamwork with their colleagues in other functions or with their customers because it threatens their power or sense of identity
2. Clients who don’t engage in teamwork with workers because it requires them to take greater accountability for outcomes, and to play a more active role
3. Leaders who don’t support teamwork among their workers and don’t collaborate with their workers because it threatens their power or sense of identity
4. Change agents who don’t engage in teamwork with each other because it threatens their power or sense of identity
5. Organizational structures that reinforce all of these silos” (2016, p. 11)

Power, identity, and accountability are crucial to understanding the strengths and limitations of this effort at improving learning outcomes for students with disabilities. As Gittel argues, the impact of these forces on workers, clients, leaders, change agents, and organizations all contributed to how well the team was able to collaborate. Getting people to play together in the sandbox when they aren’t incentivized to do so is tough. It becomes more difficult when there are incentives not to work together such as when there is power and influence in withholding information or certain authorizing agents encourage or require less collaboration. As in many organizations, assigning credit (and blame) and having control over written products was a significant factor in determining how things happened. This meant that the default way things happened was that one division would get a particular task to 90% done and then share it for feedback. The next division would point out things that did not work and rewrite something to be 90% done from their perspective. This would then be passed on to the next division. The impact was that things took much longer than they would if divisions collaborated at the design phase. The needs of workers, change agents, and particularly leaders for power and to have the identity as creator or to avoid the

identities of accountable and responsible drove inefficient and less than transparent structures. The organizational structures and sign off processes supported and reinforced this dynamic as well. Initially this was true for the P2G team as well. However, the P2G team, and the larger special education war room, was able to shift this dynamic.

Gittell's 5 P's tool was helpful in my work supporting the team in making this shift. This tool asks: "What is the purpose of the microsystem? Who are the patients or the customers, and what are their characteristics? Who are the professionals or workers, and what are their distinct roles? What are the processes through which work is carried out? And what are the patterns of interrelating through which these processes are carried out?" (2016, p.225). These questions allowed us to name the group dynamics and the ways in which we prevented the transparency we both desired and needed in order to be successful. Once named, the larger group was then able to find ways to increase transparency and collaboration at the nascent stages of the work. For example, one subgroup of the war room team took on the priority of reducing overreliance on special education referrals through a root cause analysis. This team created stakeholder maps as a first step and engaged all parties in the development of a first draft. The resulting product was perceived to be of higher quality and was ready for implementation more quickly. When a team can align on what is actually happening on the team and make sense of the multiple perspectives, they are then able to address those dynamics and shift them to a more desirable state aligned to their values and objectives. The war room meetings, and its subgroup meetings, served as "cultural islands, relational spaces, safe containers, or holding environments in which participants can develop new ways of connecting with one another, aided by skilled coaching, role modeling, and facilitated dialogue" (Gittell, 2016, p.200). This space allowed

for the team to work and think differently as it launched the work of implementing the P2G special education policy.

### Putting it Together

From the vantage point of hindsight, I think this effort was largely successful because of four tools that informally anchored my work. These tools, adapted from Adrienne Maree Brown's approach to allowing strategy to develop organically, are: trust the *people, principles, protocols, and consensus* (Brown, 2017). My leadership role was to create the space to engage and hold these four things sacred for the group. My implementation of these tools wasn't perfect, but it was enough to sustain the work and the team. These were the right people for the job and where they landed on any particular aspect of policy or implementation would be the right decision. With this in mind I privileged paraphrasing, synthesizing, and questioning. The principles of the team were aligned. Student success and a commitment to equity centered the team's decision making. When it came to consensus, too often it was assumed if no one spoke up then everyone agreed. To ensure commitment and build investment through public declarations, I would name the decision to be an "emergency exit row" moment. This meant, like on an airplane when you sit in the exit row, everyone had to give verbal assent to the decision. We only did this a few times, such as when we landed a policy approach, but it helped to ensure consensus was raised both as a value and was defined. My most heavy-handed insertion of myself was in the use and maintenance of protocol. The design decisions I typically made included determining the attendees at a particular meeting, the time allocated for a particular topic, or the structure used for a particular conversation. This approach came from a belief that if a leader sets the conditions and direction well, the team will take care of the rest. In this case, that mostly held true. However, what remains to be seen is whether a similar approach will be taken at

the direct service level and whether it will have a similar effect. The answer to that question is what will matter most for the provision and quality of service that students with disabilities receive. At the time of this writing, I am optimistic.

### Implications for Self

*I am a teacher and others are kings  
If that's the title they earn, well it's well deserved, but  
Without a crown, see, I still burn  
- Boogie Down Productions, "South Bronx"*

My journal from over the course of this time at the NYCDOE was structured with a left-hand column that summarized my tasks from each day, a right-hand column for the key learnings from the day, and a block at the bottom reserved for an essential question. Early on in my residency I found myself repeating variations of the question “in this staff role, when do we provide input on policy and not just ensure excellence in implementation?” Acknowledging the danger of superhero metaphors in education, a leader I admire articulated this dilemma as whether you are Batman or Alfred, Captain Kirk or Spock. There are topics on which I have a bit of pride, and commensurate ego, that I have relevant expertise. I entered these situations frustrated that I was not the ultimate decision maker and felt underutilized.

There were times during my residency when I wondered whether sharing my perspective was appropriate from an organizational norms, an impact on outcomes, and/or a role legitimacy & sustainability perspective or whether I needed to focus on implementing what was decided by those authorized to make the decision. In my role within the Chancellor’s office, I was expected to support the implementation of others’ work and decisions. What I found, after some missteps, was that there is always room for authentic questioning and curiosity. We can change others when we lean into our own search to

understand. This is an approach to leadership that can change both ourselves and those we seek to influence. While referencing teachers, what my friend and colleague Shanna Peoples writes is just as true for authentic leadership. Shanna reflects that "the real teacher in me teaches out of my own humanity, when I am vulnerable enough to model...my own lack of certainty" and that this willingness to connect to people is what makes teaching, and I argue leading, something only humans can do (2018, p.39)

As a leader, especially one without positional authority, the most important tool is the authentic question. This tool becomes invaluable when its roots stem from our identity and core values in relationship with others. By focusing my efforts to impact policy on asking questions in order to understand the decision making and rationale of others, I found both a greater appreciation for their perspectives and greater acceptance of my attempts at influencing the final outcome. My desire to influence the content of policy in addition to its implementation came from a fierce desire for rapid change and my belief that it could be forced through with passion and persistence. I need to be reminded that in some instances "zeal for change came across as judgmental impatience" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p.177). This requires following Edgar Schein's recipe for humble inquiry by doing less telling, more asking, and much more listening and acknowledging (2013). Leadership benefits from inquiry not impetuosity.

In my experiences as a leader there are always relationships that are easier than others. The desire to bucket people and evaluate fixed utility is strong and natural and leads to avoiding those deemed ineffectual. In general, most people and organizations are more likely to develop workarounds in these instances instead of developing the people involved. When individuals aren't perceived as effective, the leader often assigns the task to multiple people or adds additional monitors to check and report. It is the organizational equivalent of

buying a vest to cover a hole in a shirt instead of sewing the shirt. It takes more time and resources than just fixing the immediate problem. My experience at the NYCDOE was no exception.

My default approach to ideas, work, or people is critical curiosity. I seek to learn by pushing as hard as I can on things disagreeing until I am persuaded. The utility of this approach is central to David Allen's getting things done model where he explains, "healthy skepticism is often the best way to glean the value of what's being presented—challenge it; prove it wrong, if you can. That creates engagement, which is the key to understanding" (2015, p. 1). When in a situation with a power imbalance, skepticism came with cultural and relational costs that reduced my long-term effectiveness at least until power shifted and I became more valuable to the organization. What I had to learn at the NYCDOE was other ways to understand that were less interrogative and to hold onto that approach as my power and influence increased over the course of the residency. The temptation to abandon these approaches in favor of the short-term expediency of exercising influence gained is great yet ultimately destructive. The frames used by improv actors proved useful in combating this tendency.

Improv actors use a "gift" lens to look at other people which allows them to elevate others by seeing the gift in each person and moment (Madson, P.R., 2010). This is in stark contrast to the other two lenses Patricia Ryan Madson notes in her book *Improv Wisdom* that come most readily to me. These are "to see what's wrong with it," which is the critical method—commonly used in higher education where the self looms large, and "to see it objectively," which is the scientific method where both the self as well as others are meant to disappear (Madson, P.R., 2010, p. 89). This shift to see the gift in others, no matter what the context, served me well when I had the sense to use it during my residency.

When I was concerned that the person responsible for some particular aspect of the project would not be able to deliver based upon my perception of their competence, I made an intentional choice to stick with the person instead of bringing in additional people to do the work. I leaned into Madson's advice to "accept him as he is. Pay attention to him. Begin a story with him as the hero" (Madson, P.R., 2010, p. 79). If you treat those who most challenge you as you would treat those you admire most, you are able to access the ideas and opportunities they bring to the table. A friend and mentor puts it another way in one of her favorite adages—that we ought to treat all people with dignity and respect not because of who they are but because of who we are. Madson's advice provided me an approach for how to see people's contributions in this manner. When I did this and clearly communicated deadlines and expectations, I found the individuals involved rose to the occasion even if they did not in other aspects of their work.

When we find mediocrity in those we lead it is more likely a mediocrity in our leadership and not some trait inherent in the person. It is easy to write people off, and "cancel culture" is only growing. My leadership journey leads me to believe that schools, and likely society at large, cannot afford this approach. No person can be worked around. This is especially true when taxpayer dollars and public trust are on the line and children bear the results of these decisions. We need everyone because all people matter. Our approach to leadership must be to get curious about those we may marginalize through our assessment of their value. This requires us to be vigilant in the stories we tell and listen to. The stories we tell about ourselves, others, and the work matter. Our stories are our reality.

My relationship to my own identity as a leader launched this section. The act of leadership is authentic inquiry. It is the question open to mutual change. That relationship

to my identity informs my relationship with those I lead. Seeing people as gifts and for their gifts is foundational. The final relationship is my relationship to the work.

There are two ways in which my relationship to the work has changed over my time with the NYCDOE. First, it is my understanding of what my work is. My previous professional life has been in the world of design and creation. However, the work of senior leadership in political bureaucracies is not the work of the artist; it is the work of the prophet. It is the work of decision. Drawing upon the wisdom of a former presidential cabinet member, John Kingdon describes the role in this way: “people at the secretary’s level do not really discover issues. They elevate issues. The issues are all there. There is nothing that is new in what is available. The question is, ‘what will you elevate? The question is, what do you have sufficient interest in to spend your time on?” (2011, p.28-29). Senior systems leaders add value through prioritization and coherence, not creation.

Second, my relationship to how the work happens is evolving. As a teacher, I could watch change and improvement happen weekly, if not daily. As a building leader, I measured change and saw it in years. For systems, change can be measured in generations. But that is only part of the story. Change is slow...until it isn’t. There really can be a straw that breaks the camel’s back. What can look like intractable conflict, what can seem like the inefficient intransigence of bureaucracy can go from stasis to revolutionary change overnight. Based upon my experiences guiding the transition of special education services within the Pathways to Graduation, there was steady pressure until dynamic change happened after a decade. Still waters run deep. The work of system leadership is to prepare the organization for future change by keeping the pressure up until the conditions for change are right and it is finally time *to change at a rate the system can stand* (Heifetz, 2017). We are all best served to remember that we plant trees whose shade we will never see.



I leave this residency with a better understanding of myself as a system leader when it comes to roles of influence without positional authority. This starts with an identity where leading and teaching are synonymous. It continues with a commitment to all people and seeing the gifts they bring. Finally, it recognizes that the work is to elevate and celebrate, not generate. To focus the efforts of others and to create the conditions for success to one day be possible even if it is not currently reasonable to believe.

### Implications for Site

*Making something out of nothing  
The need to express  
To communicate  
To going against the grain...*

*To being an us, for once  
Instead of a them*

*- The Cast of Rent, "La vie Bobème"*

Work at the scale of the NYCDOE is inherently interdependent. This is both obvious and an understatement. Most initiatives and change efforts require coordination and commitment from multiple autonomous actors in order to be successful. Currently the NYCDOE utilizes two strategies to engage in cross-functional work. The primary vehicle is email, and for most purposes it is sufficient. It can quickly provide information and is not inhibited by a lack of proximity. For more complex work, the organization utilizes teams. These teams are constructed differently but design is not always clearly informed by the task and desired outcome. Increased transparency and intentionality grounded in a willingness to be professionally vulnerable could improve the efficacy of both these strategies for achieving organizational coherence.

A colleague at the NYCDOE regularly repeats the maxim that *knowledge is currency*. Much energy is expended across the organization in the search to know things. Therefore, if information was more readily shared, decision makers at all levels of the organization would

be able to spend more time delivering on informed strategies. It is my opinion that within a public sector knowledge economy, the organization benefits when the “market” is flooded and the currency is devalued through inflation. In his book, *The Knowledge Creating Company*, Ikujiro Nonaka supports this claim stating “free access to company information also helps build redundancy. Redundancy is a word with negative connotations, and yet it has great value for organizations. Organizations work better when most people know the things that matter most including: what the organization is attempting to achieve, how it will get there, what is each individual’s role in actualizing that plan, and how that role fits in with everyone else’s role. When information differentials exist, members of an organization can no longer interact on equal terms, which hinders the search for different interpretations of new knowledge (2008, p. 40). For the NYCDOE to solve the complex challenges it faces, making information more readily available will be important. This could include transparency enhancing moves such as defaulting to public calendars and clearer and more inclusive expectations on who is included on email communications. This logistical and technical move can lay the foundation for a culture where greater information sharing about strategy, analyzed failures and successes, and innovations in how people work could be more readily shared. This would be a countercultural move for the organization and it would require being more vulnerable than the default culture will allow. However, there is a lesson to be learned, as Priya Parker cheekily reminds us, in the fact that “superheroes wear their underwear outside their costumes” (2018, p.201). The NYCDOE requires the sort of “superhero” leaders whose superpower is their willingness to be vulnerable and take risks. It is in embracing our humanity and celebrating & sharing who we are as professionals AND as people that we can transform bureaucratic cultural norms.

In addition to greater information sharing and transparency, there are opportunities for increased intentionality when developing teams. Cross-functional teams at the NYCDOE must be clear on purpose in order to thrive. Leadership must make the determination whether the purpose of the team is decision making, advisory, or information sharing. Too often team size grows beyond what is efficacious when this is left assumed or the purpose is allowed to broaden. Determining the 3-5 key people to achieve the objectives is more important than allowing everyone who might be valuable to be on the team. There are other vehicles through which additional perspectives can inform the work of the team. However they are included, it is critical that the voices and perspectives of those at the margins of the system—like the students and teachers of the Pathways to Graduation program—are identified and elevated as part of the process of team learning. Narrowing who does the work as recommended here while expanding who is aware of the work as recommended above are not in conflict as approaches. In fact, the two approaches must work in concert in order to be effective. Teams need to have the right people, they need to be able to make decisions, and they need to have a clear sense how they will share info with other teams.

Another gap in team development is providing clarity on how the work happens. It is unrealistic for most members of senior leadership teams to attend larger team meetings more than 30-60 minutes a week. There are simply too many tasks to which individuals are held responsible and too few hours in a day. Senior team members are utilized most effectively when their cross-functional meetings prioritize decision making and sufficient groundwork for content development and deliberation is teed up through their teams and Chiefs of Staff. There could be a benefit to formalizing a “meeting-before-the-meeting” process in order to best use the assets of each function and level within the organization.

Having clear pathways for accomplishing work outside of the meeting would likely both free up time and increase attendance as meetings that would be perceived as more effective. This level of coordination could best be supported by ensuring there is a “boundary spanner” appointed for each cross-functional team. The purpose of this role, as described by Jody Hoffer Gittel is “to integrate the work of other people around a project, process, or customer” (2016, p. 68). Someone has to own the spaces between the circles, squares, and lines on the organization chart.

The NYCDOE is an organization built to execute. The more cynical might describe this as a tendency to approach the work “ready, fire, aim.” However, it is a rational response given the amount of important work that needs to be done at any given moment. It makes sense to think in terms of default 10-15 minute meetings. It makes sense to make decisions based upon a paragraph summary. While it is a rational approach, more importantly, most of the time it works because those making decisions are both knowledgeable and experienced leaders. Even with this being generally true, there are times when, like the fictional Ian Malcolm from *Jurassic Park*, leaders in the organization need more opportunities to ask *not whether they can, but whether they should* engage in some given course of action. Edgar Schein warns of this danger when “we value task accomplishment over relationship building and either are not aware of this cultural bias or, worse, don’t care and don’t want to be bothered with it” (2013, p. 55). There are missed opportunities and missed solutions when we do not design for the need to build, maintain, and sustain relationships. When she was asked about the three most important things necessary to support teachers, former CEO of the New Teacher Center, Ellen Moir, always responded, “relationships, relationships, relationships.” Modelling and prioritizing relationships and people is a pathway to greater information

fluidity and therefore better decision-making that will enhance NYCDOE's strength in being action-oriented.

These recommendations for cross-functional teams are intended to leverage transparency and effectiveness by increasing access to information, designing for decision making, and attending to relationships. The goal is to develop the infrastructure of what Jamie and Maren Showkeir call the "critical elements of organizational power:

- **Business literacy**, so that everyone in the organization knows 'the business of the business,' what is at stake, and what their roles are in a successful endeavor.

Everyone understands the story the information tells.

- **Choice**, which allows people who are literate about the business to quickly make good decisions in service to the business and customers without having to navigate several layers of bureaucracy.

- **Accountability**, which espouses and supports the notion that people hold themselves accountable for the way they engage the business, making good choices in the context of the marketplace and business results, and living openly with the consequences of their actions" (2009, p. 115).

Attending to the structures and designing in ways that enhance business literacy, choice or autonomy, and intrinsic accountability must be the work of senior leadership if the NYCDOE is going to be responsive through cross-functional teams to the intractable conflicts within its environment.

## Implications for Sector

*If we don't change the world will soon be over  
Living just enough, stop giving just enough for the city  
- Stevie Wonder, "Living for the City"*

Policy is a blunt instrument. It is typically written with the mythical average case in mind. The goal is to write the policy so that it fits best for the 50% or the most frequent occurrence. The assumptions that policy creators make about those will be impacted by the policy determine whose experiences are privileged by the infrastructure of the system. In the preK-12 education sector, this means that most policy leaders are thinking about elementary schools with about 400 kids and secondary schools with 1,000-2,000 kids. These schools have 20-30 kids in a class with 1-2 teachers and the curriculum is focused on literacy and math. With this design schema, policymakers create guidelines that are adequate for many kids but can be harmful for students at the edges. Policy design usually depends on the exploration of means, medians, and modes. There is an opportunity to create better policies by shifting our design thinking within the sector to that other statistical tool for working with averages—the range.

We can learn so much by spending more time in outer boundaries of a system. My time in New York City centered on these youth. This past year we attempted to address the unique needs of students returning to school to achieve their high school equivalency, of students who were involved with the courts, and of undocumented students participating in career development internships. Too often the response of large bureaucracies is to treat outliers as *other*, as abnormalities rather than a predictable reality of any grouping of people. This leads to treating these youth as problems to be solved, usually through the use of special programs outside the main structure. A better way to view our students at the extremes of the system is to view them as assets. These are the groups that are the “canaries

in the coal mine” who feel the pain points of the system’s design and who develop hacks for bureaucracy when it does not meet their needs. Prioritizing these groups and their experiences can be significant in improving the larger system. If we learn the hacks these individuals invent and use them to change the bureaucracy, we can address both their pain points as well as needs that have not yet surfaced.

The Pathways to Graduation program is an excellent example of what this approach can look like in practice. This program seeks to support students for whom the historical structures of traditional school have been unsuccessful. This year, the Pathways to Graduation leadership team confronted how special education services, the most regulated and burdensome education model within U.S. schools, could be designed to both serve the intent and legal requirements of IDEA informed by the needs of this particular population. For many of these students their experiences with the special education bureaucracy was a contributing factor to their exiting school before earning their diploma. While many changes to internal programming happened in response to the compliance assurance plan, the movement toward improving policy at a state level with this population in mind included key lessons systems and states should consider. While many of these students were over the age of eighteen, lived independently, and were treated by state law as adults, in the area of special education services they were still minors requiring parent involvement in their education decisions until the age of 21. Based upon the conversations and collaboration stemming from getting to know the Pathways to Graduation student population better, NYSED and NYCDOE began working together to change state regulations to prioritize the experiences of these students. I am optimistic that the new regulations will provide greater agency and empowerment to students while ensuring better academic outcomes. This was the intent of

IDEA, and designing for this population at the margins of the education system is what is driving improvement of policy for all students in New York state.

Another example from NYCDOE is the effort made to include undocumented students in paid internship programs. Historically, only students with citizenship status could participate due to the legal requirement that social security numbers are required for payroll. This past year, the team responsible for this program committed to designing a program open to all students regardless of status. This work required getting deep into the weeds of law, policy, external partnerships, and curriculum. It was certainly more work than what had previously been in place. However, the team developed a new program model for all students that included both paid internships and college credit from CUNY. By prioritizing undocumented students, a new policy was developed that was better for all students involved. Students who had previously dropped out of school took a first step toward college completion in addition to receiving the job training skills and monetary compensation available with the previous model.

What these experiences should teach those who wish to influence the sector is that the principles of universal design are not just the gold standard for education and architecture, but for all aspects of human community. Our default design principle must not begin just with the needs of the user but must surface and center the needs of our extreme users. It is by meeting their needs that we can create systems of policies, of schools, of people that work best for all of us.

There is a need within the sector to design for the margins. Surface and privilege the voices of the youngest, the oldest, the “troublemakers,” the teachers of obscure subjects, and the communities of 2-3 people who don’t seem to fit anywhere else. When you do, you get everyone.



*What would not get done if you were not here? Consider your unique vantage point, your talents, your loves, what you have been given to do.*

*- Patricia Ryan Madson*

Upon exiting the NYCDOE, I am reminded of Aesop's fable about the mouse council debating what to do about the cat that kept attacking them. After much debate and disagreement, one young mouse suggested that they attach a bell to the cat's neck so they could always hear her and have time to hide. This plan was met with universal praise until one older mouse broke through the cheering to say, "the bell would work fine in theory, but who amongst us will tie it around the cat?" There is a plan and pilot in place for providing special education services to students within the P2G program. It is a plan that makes sense in theory, but someone needs to bell the cat. That is work that will extend beyond my tenure at the NYCDOE and will likely need to extend beyond this administration. It is the tension between episodic policy and continuous implementation. It is the work of middle managers.

Middle managers are the "bridge between visionary ideals of the top and the often chaotic reality of those on the front line" (Nonaka, 2008, p. 55). Their actions remake reality according to the organization's vision by mediating between "what is" and "what should be" (Nonaka, 2008). My time at the NYCDOE is a case study in conflict. The NYCDOE is bureaucratic, complicated, complex, and full of intractable conflict rooted in such urgency because the lives of children are at stake. In this respect, New York is not unique. My time at the NYCDOE is a case study in hope. When top leadership provides vision and direct service providers create the demand for change, middle level teams can unstick the immutable. In this respect, New York is not unique. Conflict without hope leads to desperation. Hope without conflict leads to stagnation. Learning lives in the space created when conflict and hope intermingle. May we meet there.

A strong closing has two parts. First, it looks inward to understand, acknowledge, and reflect upon what has transpired. Second, it turns outward to prepare to part from one another and retake one's place in the world (Parker, 2018).

As I turn inward, I am drawn to the relationships that centered this work. Our survival depends on relationships—that makes getting teaming right so important. Some people criticize the NYCDOE as a place where relationships are transactional. adrienne brown offers a comforting response to this complaint. “If I can be useful to others, I should be. I am not important, but what I do—and don't do—matters” (2017). I appreciate all the relationships: the new and the old, the deep and the shallow, the cooperative and the conflicted I experienced this year. Let us not forget that this is the work of each of us who leaves the classroom in order to magnify our impact. Be useful.

As I turn outward, toward whatever is next, I take with me the humble reminder that “we almost invariably spend more time living with the consequences of our decisions than we do in making them” (Pfeffer, 1993, p.19). I hope the intent with which I made or influenced decisions or was a contributing factor to decisions happening over the past year lead to more good than harm, more learning than not.

*This Broadway's got  
It's got a lot of songs to sing  
If I knew the tunes I might join in  
I'll go my way alone  
Grow my own, my own seeds shall be sown in New York City  
- Elton John, “Mona Lisa and Mad Hatters”*

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Appendix A: Cross-Functional Team Design Tool

NYCDOE Cross-Functional Teams  
Standard Operating Protocol  
Design Tool

Most of the work at the NYCDOE that has the greatest impact on advancing equity and excellence is cross-divisional and collaborative. The purpose of this tool is to support district leaders in determining if a cross-functional team is appropriate for a desired goal and, if so, how best to design that team to ensure it meets the objectives.

**Step One: Set a Purpose-** *what is it that this group is uniquely situated to do in this moment?*

A) The team sponsor should define the task of the team. Typically, the following tasks lend themselves to cross-functional teaming:

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate efforts to execute an initiative | <input type="checkbox"/> Convene diverse viewpoints to diagnose an issue or make a decision | <input type="checkbox"/> Consider an issue and learn all about it in order to generate new ideas |
|--|---|--|

B) In addition to task, the team sponsor should define what success looks like. *At the end of the team's work, what will be true?* Consider this an initial draft that you will revise with the team lead once selected.

Criteria for Success: *Is this purpose?...*

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clear- the team knows enough about where it is going to orient to the work | <input type="checkbox"/> Challenging- the task will be sufficiently difficult to energize the time | <input type="checkbox"/> Consequential- what the team is doing is important enough to engage each member |
|---|--|--|

C) Unlike a diamond, a team is not forever. What is the trigger for concluding the team:

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A set time (by X date) | <input type="checkbox"/> A purpose achieved (X is done) | <input type="checkbox"/> Indefinitely for now |
|---|---|---|

This team will sunset...

D) The main task of the team sponsor is to select a team lead who has the technical AND interpersonal skills to lead the day-to-day work.

Possible Team Lead	Technical Skills Relevant to Purpose	Interpersonal Skills Relevant to Purpose

**Step Two: Create Team** *what skills and experiences are necessary for this team's success?*

A) The team sponsor and team lead should review and confirm team purpose. Based upon that purpose they can create overarching goals and define accountability mechanisms.

Overarching Goal	Measure of Success and How Team Accountable

B) Diagnose the current capacity for cross-functional work for the following elements:

Coordination- what processes are in place that help to harmonize information and activities across divisions?	
Cooperation- what processes, power allocation, and cultural norms are in place that encourage working together?	
Capability Development-what processes are in place to ensure that team members and those they support have the skills to do the work required by the team?	
Connection- what processes are in place to develop relationships with internal and external stakeholders beyond the team?	

**Step Three: Select Team** *what are the complementary skills needed for this team's success?*

A) Determine the 4-6 members of the team who have both the knowledge to do the work and the authority to make decisions/recommendations that senior leadership will follow. Team members should be selected because they have the necessary mix of skills- be careful not to fall into the trap of selecting people because they are new, are available, or are willing.

Team Member	Technical Assets Relevant to Team Purpose	Interpersonal Assets and Unique Perspectives Relevant to Team Purpose	List other team members this person served on teams with before

B) Who else needs to be updated on the work of the team or may need to support the team's work with resources:

Division/Role			
Frequency and what information			
Names:			

#### Step Four: Launch the Team

The first meeting of a team is critical to determining its future success. The following actions should be built into the first meeting agenda with sufficient time to address fully.

Action items:

- Share leadership expectations, overarching goal and limitations/design constraints
- Share with each team member (and collective) what capabilities each member brings
- Provide time for Q&A
- After the meeting: address member concerns and communicate broadly to build trust
- After the meeting: develop project plan with performance objectives, key milestones, deliverables, and interim success metrics and communicate broadly to build trust

#### Step Five: Care for the Team

A team is an organism that needs structure and care if it is to remain healthy and effective. The following actions are experiences and tasks a team must complete in order to sustain itself through the challenges of doing the work.

Action items:

- Create a shared sense of identity. This can happen through creating a team name, logo, slogan. It can be through shared experiences or identity activities such as the Compass Protocol, Strengths Finder, or What's in a Name?
- Train the team to work together and make implicit assumptions about the goals of the team explicit
- Create norms for: communicating, decision making, solving problems, resolving conflicts, and managing meetings. Practice them and reflect on effectiveness each meeting. Adjust as needed



- Identify resources necessary for the project plan and develop ways to acquire/create them

**Step Six: Motivate and Sustain the Team**

Once the team is up and running, the team lead must both attend to project managing the work of the team and the motivation and effort of the team. This means designing ways to accomplish the following actions:

Action Items:

- Identify and track early wins
- Develop ways to celebrate and communicate success
- Utilize AAR process to review team process, products and relationships at least quarterly.
- Leader uses a team and individual coaching process to support each team member-ensure check ins at beginning, middle, and end of project

**Step Seven: Ending Well**

Change in team membership is a natural part of a team’s lifecycle. Sometimes this is because the skill needs of the team shift and other times it is due to normal transition in personnel. Additionally, a team’s usefulness ends or evolves to create a moment when stopping the team makes sense. These tasks are intended to bring closure to the team and ensure nothing is lost in the organizational changes.

<b>Key Tasks</b>	<b>Transitioning Team Members Off the Team</b>	<b>Transition Team Members onto the Team</b>	<b>Sunset the Team</b>
Capturing and sharing knowledge about the work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To whom does the team member share their knowledge about the work of the team and their individual roles and functions?</li> <li>• How does that process differ depending on if the new team member is onboarding concurrently or not?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the team bring the new person up to speed?</li> <li>• How does the new team member provide insights and expertise on previous tasks of the team?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you capture the institutional knowledge of the team?</li> </ul>
Capturing and sharing knowledge about the team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the exiting interview protocol look like for team members?</li> <li>• How does the team member share information about the team and individual members for feedback and growth?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the team tell their story about who they are and the culture of the team?</li> <li>• How does the team create space to change who they are based upon the identities of new team members?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where does the knowledge of the team live? How is it communicated to other leaders and teams?</li> </ul>

<p>Celebrating the person or team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will the team acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of the team member.</li> <li>• What actions will the leader take to demonstrate appreciation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will the team welcome the new team member and communicate excitement for the expertise the person brings?</li> <li>• How will the team ensure the new person feels just as connected and valuable as those who have been on the team longer?</li> <li>• What actions will the leader take to check in with the person to ensure they feel cared for?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does each member of the team share gratitude for every other member on the team?</li> <li>• How does the team reflect upon what it means to be a team.</li> <li>• How does the organization surface and celebrate the contributions and honor the legacy of the team?</li> </ul>
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## **Summary of P2G Program Individualized Education Program (IEP) Proposal**

**March 2020**

District 79's Pathways to Graduation Program (P2G) program serves students who have dropped out of high school and are between the ages of 17 and 21, helping them earn a High School Equivalency (HSE) Diploma by preparing them to pass the TASC (Test Assessing Secondary Completion). The program serves about 8000 students a year, 27% of whom are students with IEPs, and offers small classes (average class size= 8), high levels of counseling, individual attention and a wide range of program options and settings to support the unique needs of reengaging adult learners.

The Compliance Assurance Plan (CAP) issued in May 2019 outlined NYSED's position that P2G students must receive IEP-specified programs and that the D79 program could not ask students to sign a consent which NYSED said constituted a waiver of rights to special education services. NYCDOE has been collaborating with the State to develop an IEP structure that meets the needs of the program and its students. As of September 2019, P2G stopped the use of its acknowledgment form, resolving the "waiver" issue. The structure described below ensures that students in P2G have IEPs aligned to the P2G program and has been well received by SED.

This proposal addresses how the P2G program will provide students with IEPs with a free appropriate public education (FAPE), considering the unique and alternative nature of the P2G program. In all cases, students will begin the P2G program as soon possible, and services will be provided in accordance with either an amended IEP or a plan to provide services comparable to the student's current or prior IEP. Staff will gather data on the efficacy of these services and supports monitoring student progress to inform an IEP meeting or further amendment, as necessary, to ensure appropriate supports to meet the student's unique needs.

### **The P2G IEP Structure:**

Students enter the P2G program at very different places in their educational journeys:

- Some students essentially transfer from NYCDOE High Schools while others have been out of school for some time.
- Some students have IEPs that are current while others are more than a year out-of-date or need reevaluation.

To address these different cases, we have developed two protocols. Protocol 1 will result in an updated IEP through amending a student's current IEP or provision of comparable services until the IEP is amended; Protocol 2 involves creating a comparable service plan to provide programs/services immediately upon entry to P2G and development of a new IEP through an IEP meeting held within 30 days of placement. In both cases, students will follow an intake process similar to that for General Education students, which includes completing

enrollment forms, taking a series of skills assessments and reviewing their previous records (including IEPs) with a P2G counselor.

Depending on student needs, one of these two protocols will be followed:

**Protocol 1: STUDENTS ENTERING THE P2G PROGRAM WITH IEPs THAT ARE CURRENT AND PARENT OR, AS APPROPRIATE, A SURROGATE PARENT, IS ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN AMENDMENT PROCESS**

**STEPS IN THE PROCESS**

1. **Initial intake:** Initial intake occurs on Day 1 when the student enters a P2G site to enroll in the program. Students will complete an intake form and meet with a counselor who will gather their school records. Students are advised to come back a second day so the program can assess their skills and determine an appropriate P2G site placement. If the student had an IEP when last enrolled in school and the IEP is current (i.e., it has been less than 1 year since the last IEP meeting was held), the student's parent and the student will be invited to participate in the Day 2 session to discuss the appropriate P2G site placement.
2. **Assessment of student need and review of IEP:** The student will return on Day 2 to meet with the counselor. The student will take the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE). Any testing accommodations noted in the student's last IEP will be provided. The student's IEP will be consulted, along with the TABE results, coursework completed and other information available to determine student needs and strengths.
3. **IEP Amendment Process for Students with IEPs That Are Current:** If the parent, or surrogate parent (hereinafter referred to as parent<sup>1</sup>), as appropriate attends the program assignment meeting or is available by phone and the student's IEP is current, the district representative (which could be the counselor)<sup>2</sup> may amend the IEP without an IEP meeting. The counselor will discuss the student's learning needs and goals with both the student and parent. Following this discussion, and if the parent verbally indicates agreement to an amendment, the counselor will make a P2G program recommendation with a description of how the student's needs will be addressed in that program based on

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<sup>1</sup> Consistent with section 200.5(n)(1) of the Commissioners regulations, the board of education or other appropriate body shall select a surrogate parent from a list of individuals who are eligible and willing to serve as surrogate parents in order to ensure that the rights of a student are protected if: Surrogate parent must be identified when (i) no parent, as defined in section 200.1(ii) of this Part, can be identified; (ii) the school district, after reasonable efforts, cannot discover the whereabouts of a parent, or the student is an unaccompanied homeless youth, as such term is defined in section 100.2(x)(1)(vi) of this Title; or (iii) the student is a ward of the State and does not have a parent as defined in section 200.1(ii) of this Part or the rights of the parent to make educational decisions on behalf of the student have been subrogated by a judge in accordance with State law. Additional information regarding qualifications for a surrogate parent and procedures for assigning a surrogate can be found in Sections 200.5(n)(2-3)

<sup>2</sup> The IDEA and its regulations are silent as to which individuals must participate in making changes to the IEP where there is agreement between the parent and the public agency not to convene an IEP Team meeting for the purpose of making the changes.

all information available, including student and parent input. The parent must agree, in writing, to amend the IEP. The Amendment process will follow state guidelines described below:

- (a) The counselor must inform the parent of the option to amend the IEP without an IEP meeting. If an IEP amendment is needed in consideration of the unique and alternative nature of the P2G program, P2G will describe the proposed changes on the “Waiver of IEP Meeting to Amend IEP” form and will provide this to the parent. This form must clearly and specifically describe all proposed changes, in language understandable to the parent. This form will also inform the parent that they have the opportunity to consult with the appropriate personnel or related service providers concerning the proposed changes. This consultation could occur in person or via phone. Should the parent refuse to amend the IEP without a meeting, he/she has a right to request an IEP meeting.
  - (b) P2G staff will provide the completed Waiver of IEP Meeting to Amend IEP form to the parent, either in person or via mail, and will also provide a copy to the student to give to the parent. If the parent agrees to the changes, the parent must sign and return the “Waiver of IEP Meeting to Amend IEP” form. Upon receipt of this form, the P2G program will amend the IEP in SESIS and will issue the IEP and a Prior Written Notice of these proposed changes to the parent. If the parent fails to return the agreement form or declines to amend the IEP without a meeting, Protocol 2 will be followed and an IEP meeting will be held.
  - (c) For students for whom a current IEP is not immediately amended or a surrogate parent has not yet been identified, a comparable services plan (CSP) will be provided until the current IEP is amended. The CSP will identify the educational supports and services that will be provided until the IEP can be amended.
4. **IEP Implementation:** Special education programs and services will be provided consistent with the amended IEP. An amendment to the IEP without a meeting does not change the date by which the student’s next annual review must be conducted.

**Protocol 2: STUDENTS ENTERING THE P2G PROGRAM WITH IEPs THAT ARE NOT CURRENT OR PARENT (or SURROGATE) DOES NOT AGREE TO AMEND THE CURRENT IEP**

When students with disabilities enroll in the P2G Program with an IEP that is not current (has not been reviewed in the last year) or if their parent does not approve an amendment to a current IEP, then Protocol 2 will be used.

**STEPS IN THE PROCESS**

1. **Initial intake:** Initial intake occurs on Day 1 when the student enters or is referred to a P2G site to enroll in the program. The student will complete an intake form and meet with a counselor who will gather his/her school records. The student is told to come back a second day so the program can assess his/her skills and determine an appropriate P2G site assignment. If the student had an IEP that is now outdated or the parent does not

agree to amend a current IEP, the student's parent and the student will be invited to participate in the Day 2 session to discuss the appropriate P2G site assignment.

2. **Assessment of student need and review of most recent IEP:** On Day 2, the student will take the TABE. Any testing accommodations noted in the last IEP will be provided. The student's most recent IEP will be consulted along with the TABE results, coursework completed and other information available to determine student needs and strengths. During the Day 2 session, the counselor will discuss how the student will be served by the P2G program until their IEP is reviewed. The counselor will also schedule an IEP meeting with the student and parent to take place within 30 school days of the student's enrollment in the program. If the parent is unable to attend the Day 2 meeting, they will be contacted by phone to schedule the IEP meeting.
3. **IEP development process for students with IEPs that are not current:** Students with IEPs that are not current will still be considered a student with a disability. The P2G program will provide students with disabilities with FAPE, following the process described below:
  - (a) **Development of interim plan to serve student:** During the site assignment meeting on Day 2 the counselor, parent (if available in person or by phone) and student will discuss the student's learning needs, identify the best P2G site placement and identify the special education supports that will be provided until an IEP meeting is held. The services identified in this discussion will be incorporated into a comparable service plan (CSP) and will be given to the parent (or will be sent to the parent if the parent is not able to attend) and the student.
  - (b) **Implementation of CSP:** The student will begin attending the P2G program. The programs and services specified on the CSP will be provided to the student after the CSP has been created and sent to the parent.
  - (c) **Schedule an IEP meeting within 30 school days:** At the Day 2 session, the counselor will also schedule an IEP meeting with the student and parent to take place within 30 school days of the student's enrollment in the P2G program.
  - (d) **Determination of Needed Evaluation Data:** Reevaluation must occur at least once every three years, unless the parent and DOE agree that a reevaluation is unnecessary. Review of existing data is part of the reevaluation process. The IEP team and other qualified professionals, as appropriate, must review existing evaluation data, and on the basis of that review, and input from the student's parents, identify what additional data, if any, are needed to determine whether the student continues to have a disability, and the educational needs of the student
    - a. If the IEP team believes a reevaluation is necessary, parent consent must be obtained<sup>3</sup>. P2G will provide the parent with a Prior Written Notice before

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<sup>3</sup> The district does not need to obtain parental consent for the reevaluation if they can demonstrate that it made reasonable efforts to obtain consent for the reevaluation, and the child's parent has failed to respond to the request for consent.

initiating a reevaluation of the student<sup>4</sup>. The IEP team will determine what assessments are needed and will arrange for such assessments as a part of that reevaluation.

- (e) **IEP Development and Implementation:** The IEP meeting<sup>5</sup> will be held within 30 school days of enrollment. The school members of the IEP team will include, at a minimum, a special education teacher (or related service provider, as appropriate) and general education teacher. If a reevaluation was conducted, the school psychologist will also attend the IEP meeting. Other P2G staff will participate as appropriate. The student and parent will be invited and encouraged to attend. Reasonable outreach to the parent will be made, as well as an effort to schedule the IEP meeting at a time that is mutually convenient. The parent may participate in the IEP meeting by phone if unable to attend in person. Given the student's age and the purpose of the program, P2G will ensure the IEP meeting is held at the student's placement location, and at a time that aligns with the student's schedule. The parent will be provided Prior Written Notice<sup>6</sup> of the proposed changes to the IEP within a reasonable time before the IEP team proposes to initiate or change the provision of FAPE to the student.

### **When a Surrogate Parent is Needed**

In cases where there is no parent, we will follow NYS guidelines to have a surrogate parent appointed for the student (see footnote 1). Since this process can take time, the student will be able to begin the P2G program and receive comparable services until a surrogate parent is appointed and the current IEP can be amended or an IEP meeting can be held to develop a new IEP.

### **Process for Students Currently Enrolled in the P2G Program**

By the Fall of 2020, a system will be in place at all P2G referral centers to ensure that student IEPs are either amended or reviewed as appropriate when they enter the program. Students who entered the program prior to September 2020 will need to have their IEPs reviewed as well. Beginning in the Spring term of 2020, the P2G program will develop a schedule to review the IEPs of all students in the program who do not have current IEPs.

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<sup>4</sup>Prior Written Notice must be provided to the parent a reasonable time before the district proposes to evaluate the student, which fully describes the proposed evaluation, and the uses to be made of the information. The determination of the needed evaluation data must be based on the review of existing evaluation data on the student. If the district is proposing to base its reevaluation on existing information, the Prior Written Notice must identify the evaluations to be considered as part of the evaluation.

<sup>5</sup> All requirements in Section 200.4 specific to IEP development, implementation and annual review apply.

<sup>6</sup> Prior Written Notice must be provided on the State's mandated form.

## Timeframe Chart

To develop the systems and structures within P2G as well as ensure that all impacted staff are fully trained, we will implement a Pilot in one borough in the Spring term of 2020 and scale up to all of the P2G program in September 2020.

- January 31, 2020, all templates, guidance and training materials will be complete for the pilot
- January 31, 2020, training for P2G intake staff in pilot borough will be complete
- February 1, 2020, Begin pilot in one Borough
- March 31, 2020, review process in pilot sites and make any needed adjustments to the process
- April 30, 2020, Update all staff on any adjustments, revise all guidance and support materials
- September 2020, Implementation at scale begins for first day of school

## Additional Steps and Implementation Plan Chart

Action Item	Due By	Responsible for	Help from
Create D79-based implementation team and establish frequent meeting times	January 15, 2020 (First meeting held by 1/15)	Superintendent D79	Executive Superintendent, SEO, OFDC Sr. Dir Special Education
Develop P2G specific templates and guidance: NYSED PWN, IEP amendment, IEP, Guidance for staff, parent engagement log, etc.	Jan 31, 2020	SEO	Policy and SESIS teams in SEO
Professional Learning for all staff involved in the IEP process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New intake protocols</li> <li>• IEP process and writing</li> <li>• Programming to support IEPs</li> </ul>	Pilot borough complete by Jan 31, 2020	Implementation Team, D79 Principals and Assistant Principals (AP)	D79 Superintendent, SEO, OFDC (Executive Superintendent, Sr. Director, Spec Ed for OFDC)
Pilot entire process in one Borough	Start Feb 1, 2020	Implementation Team, Borough Principal and APs, Superintendent D79	SEO, OFDC
Develop schedule to address current students in need of IEP alignment	December 31, 2020	Implementation Team, Superintendent D79	
Scale to all Boroughs	By September 1, 2020	Implementation Team, Principals, APs, Superintendent	



## Initial Flow Chart Describing Pathways to Graduation Process

