MACRO CHANGES IN A MINUTE AMOUNT OF TIME:

HOW RACE TO THE TOP IS CHANGING EDUCATION POLICY IN TENNESSEE

By

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To all the parents, and especially mine, who teach their children to follow their dreams by pursuing their own passions.

And to Brad: Forever my Frog Prince.

For Oliver and Vivian: My two favorite toodles.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education policymaking in the United States has been aptly described as a "marble cake" (Bailey & Mosher, 1968) of interwoven elements, with barely discernible boundaries between the federal, state, and local levels of government. Beginning with the historic Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 attempt to ensure equality of educational opportunity and continuing with the present push to maximize academic outcomes, both federal and state government have worked to advance policy changes. Yet, while reform efforts at the federal level and their impact on states are well documented (see Berman & McLaughlin, 1976, 1978; Debray-Pelot &McGuinn, 2009; Fusarelli, 2005; Manna, 2001; McGuinn, 2006), state initiatives to improve education remain under-examined (Mazzoni, 1994). However, the recent Race to the Top initiative sparked a flurry of state-led education reform as states competed against each other for federal dollars. This complex policy environment presents a unique opportunity for studying state and political influence on education reform in a federalist system.

Emerging Policy Lever

Though traditionally dominated by local control, more recently authority for educational governance has become a struggle among the federal, state, and local levels

of government. Commonly used policy levers have included mandates and inducements. However, both have been criticized because the costs can outweigh the proposed benefits (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). In 2009, a new policy lever emerged in the form of a competitive grant program, Race to the Top.

Race to the Top was the first major education policy advanced at the federal level since No Child Left Behind. Although it extended the emphasis on student and teacher accountability established by No Child Left Behind, it is not a reauthorization of the legislation and departs from earlier education reform efforts in several ways. First, Race to the Top is not a federal mandate, but instead, extended an invitation to states to participate. Second, the program was a competition: Participation did not guarantee funding. States had to demonstrate their commitment to implementing the program's priorities in an extensive application, and fewer than half of the states that applied became winners. While mandates are criticized for provoking the minimum response necessary, a competition has the opposite effect: Contestants do all they can to win. Thus, one effect of this new policy lever was to raise the bar for education reform and incite state-level policymaking efforts.

Further, a key element of a state's application was demonstrating buy-in from different education stakeholders, including districts and teacher unions. Previous reforms had not sought this cooperation. In order to win, local districts had to develop their own plans in support of the state's application. Accordingly, this type of policy lever appears to address several of the shortcomings presented by mandates and incentives. It encourages inter-government cooperation often absent in mandates, and permits states to advance school reform tailored to their state's needs, a challenge to inducements.

Perhaps one unanticipated consequence of this new approach was the emergence of new participants in the policymaking process. As states began implementing the ambitious reforms outlined in their Race to the Top applications, several pursued an innovative method: policy development by a diverse committee of education stakeholders. An inquiry into the progression of events in one state, a first round winner in the competition, informs our understanding of the relationship between the different levels of governance in a federalist system, and specifically state-led policy innovations. In particular, it documents both the promises and pitfalls of this latest approach to education reform.

The next section presents a brief historical overview of education policymaking since the latter half of the twentieth century. Following this overview, the chapter closes with a more detailed description of Race to the Top and Tennessee's efforts to win the competition.

The Marble Cake of Education Policy

Early efforts

The struggle to reallocate authority in educational governance is a relatively recent development. Before the 1950s, the federal government's involvement was limited to construction of new schools and teacher salaries (Bailey & Mosher, 1968). Further, while the Constitution bestowed authority in education to the states, they in turn largely

allocated this power to local districts (Cohen & Spillane, 1992). However, in response to growing concerns about national security and segregated schools, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 signified a departure from this pattern.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was predicated on the idea that reducing inequities in education would solve many challenges confronting the system. To accomplish this, the ESEA focused on inputs in the form of federal funding. Among the programs it established, Title I, aimed at improving the education of disadvantaged students, represented the first time the federal government offered funding to help low-income students (Debray, McDermott, & Wohlstetter, 2005). Although money was distributed to schools under Title I, accountability requirements for schools were minimal. For over a decade this piece of federal legislation was the primary means through which the governance of education was shifting.

Several events in the 1980s, including the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and the increased role of state governors in education, led to what McGuinn (2005) describes as a change in regimes from equity to accountability, simultaneously weakening local autonomy of education (Brady, 2009), and expanding state-level participation in educational governance. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) exposed American students' failure to keep up with, let alone surpass, their international counterparts and warned that national security was in jeopardy unless comprehensive reform efforts were undertaken. As public concern grew, policymakers focused their attention on education reform. McDermott (2009) describes three waves of reform that spanned the next two decades. She characterizes the first wave as centered on the actions of governors and the increased role of the state in education. During this time, states began imposing

requirements on districts, the emphasis on curriculum standards emerged, and just as there was a thematic shift from equity to accountability, there was a parallel shift in focus from inputs to outputs (McDermott, 2009).

Moving forward

The second wave of reform expanded governors' increased presence in education with the development of National Education Goals, but also foreshadowed the rise of the federal role with the 1990 legislation, Goals 2000 (McDermott, 2009). By the conclusion of the third wave of reform, the federal role in education was firmly entrenched, exemplified by the successful passage of the No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation.

These parallel efforts at improving schools have been described by some as "fragmented governance," (Cohen & Spillane, 1992, p. 6) because authority is so dispersed. However, they have also been defined as "systemic reform" (Smith & O'Day, 1991, p. 234) suggesting that No Child Left Behind led to a more "tightly coupled educational system," (Fusarelli, 2005, p. 132). Still, Brady (2009) warns that organizational and capacity differences across the states present formidable challenges to establishing a viable system for improving education at the federal level. Manna (2006) offers another way of understanding the relationship between federal and states efforts: leveraging capacity at one level of government to enhance the likelihood of policy change at another. Borrowing strength, as Manna (2006) calls it, allows policy entrepreneurs to identify weaknesses in one system and to borrow strengths in this same

area from a different system. Race to the Top appears to exemplify this idea, as the federal government seeks to improve education by leveraging state capacity.

Race to the Top

Guidelines

Race to the Top, one of President Obama's education reform initiatives, invited states to submit applications for federal grant awards to support improvements in education. The program was announced in July 2009, and allocated $4.35 billion from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Award recipients received a disbursement of money that could not be used to fund perpetual programs. In other words, states had to explain how the money would be used to implement reforms that did not rely on recurring funding. The program was initially divided into two rounds; states were allowed to apply to either or both stages provided they were not winners in the first round. A third round, open to second round finalists, was announced in late 2011.

Applications for Race to the Top funds asked states to document previous reform successes and outline plans to extend reforms in accordance with standards and assessments. The Obama administration's priorities for education reform are reflected in the key principles of the program:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals how to improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around their lowest-performing schools, (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Although heavily guided by the federal priorities outlined in the application, specific details about how to address the priorities were left to the states to propose.

States received a score of up to 500 points based on the following six criteria: state success factors, standards and assessments, data systems to support instruction, great teachers and leaders, turning around lowest-achieving schools, and general selection criteria. The fourth criterion, great teachers and leaders, was awarded the most points (138), and within that category, a state's proposal to improve teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance received the greatest weight (58/138 points). Panels of reviewers independently scored proposals and then met to finalize comments and scores. The total score was an average of the reviewers' scores.

States' efforts

Applications for the first round of Race to the Top were due on January 19, 2010. Sixteen finalists were announced on March 4, 2010. (See Table 1, pp. 9, 10 for a list of

states, Race to the Top applicants, and winners by round). Finalists were invited to present their proposals and answer questions from the reviewers. Delaware and Tennessee won the first round, receiving $100 million and $500 million, respectively. In the second round, 36 states applied. Though the vast majority of states also participated in the initial round, six states entered the competition for the first time. Both the number of finalists and winners increased in the second round. Out of 19 finalists, ten winners were announced on July 27, 2010, and they received awards ranging from $75 million to $700 million based on the size of their student population. Third-round winners, announced in late 2011, included Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. They each received $200 million.

Table 1: States and Race to the Top competition

State	Applied 1st Round	Finalist 1st Round	Winner 1st Round	Amount	Applied 2nd Round	Finalist 2nd Round	Winner 2nd Round	Amount	Applied 1st or 2nd Round	Winner 3rd Round	Amount	Gates Foundation Grant
Alabama	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		Yes
Alaska	No	-	-		No	-	-		No	-		
Arizona	Yes	No	-		Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	200 mil	Yes
Arkansas	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		Yes
California	Yes	No	-		Yes	Yes	No		Yes	No		
Colorado	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	200 mil	Yes
Connecticut	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		Yes
Delaware	Yes	Yes	Yes	100 mil	-	-	-		Yes	-		
District of Columbia	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	Yes	75 mil	Yes	-		Yes
Florida	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	Yes	700 mil	Yes	-		Yes
Georgia	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	Yes	400 mil	Yes	-		Yes
Hawaii	Yes	No	-		Yes	Yes	Yes	75 mil	Yes	-		
Idaho	Yes	No	-		No	-	-		Yes	-		
Illinois	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	200 mil	Yes
Indiana	Yes	No	-		No	-	-		Yes	-		
Iowa	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		Yes
Kansas	Yes	No	-		No	-	-		Yes	-		
Kentucky	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	200 mil	Yes
Louisiana	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	200 mil	Yes
Maine	No	-	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
Maryland	No	-	-		Yes	Yes	Yes	250 mil	Yes	-		
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	Yes	250 mil	Yes	-		Yes
Michigan	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
Minnesota	Yes	No	-		No	-	-		Yes	-		Yes
Mississippi	No	-	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
Missouri	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
Montana	No	-	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
Nebraska	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
Nevada	No	-	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
New Hampshire	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
New Jersey	Yes	No	-		Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	200 mil	

Table 1, continued

State	Applied 1st Round	Finalist 1st Round	Winner 1st Round	Amount	Applied 2nd Round	Finalist 2nd Round	Winner 2nd Round	Amount	Applied 1st or 2nd Round	Winner 3rd Round	Amount	Gates Foundation Grant
New Mexico	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		Yes
New York	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	Yes	700 mil	Yes	-		Yes
North Carolina	Yes	Yes	-		Yes	Yes	Yes	400 mil	Yes	-		Yes
North Dakota	No	-	-		No	-	-		No	-		
Ohio	Yes	Yes	-		Yes	Yes	Yes	400 mil	Yes	-		Yes
Oklahoma	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		Yes
Oregon	Yes	No	-		No	-	-		Yes	-		
Pennsylvania	Yes	Yes	-		Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	200 mil	Yes
Rhode Island	Yes	Yes	-		Yes	Yes	Yes	75 mil	Yes	-		Yes
South Carolina	Yes	Yes	-		Yes	Yes	No		Yes	No		
South Dakota	Yes	No	-		No	-	-		Yes	-		
Tennessee	Yes	Yes	Yes	500 mil	-	-	-		Yes	-		Yes
Texas	No	-	-		No	-	-		No	-		Yes
Utah	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
Vermont	No	-	-		No	-	-		No	-		
Virginia	Yes	No	-		No	-	-		Yes	-		
Washington	No	-	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		
West Virginia	Yes	No	-		No	-	-		Yes	-		Yes
Wisconsin	Yes	No	-		Yes	No	-		Yes	-		Yes
Wyoming	Yes	No	-		No	-	-		Yes	-		
Totals	41	16	2		36	19	10		47	7		14

Although Race to the Top was an opportunity rather than a mandate, its reach was wide, extending from state legislative assemblies to private corporations. Tennessee and California were among the first to pass education reform bills in 2010 that explicitly addressed at least one of the selection criteria, but they were by no means the only states. Nineteen states passed bills related to teacher evaluation and effectiveness, likely reflecting the heavy emphasis on this area in the Request for Proposals (Education Commission of the States, 2010). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation gave grants to 14 states, worth $250,000 each, to help with the proposal writing, (Dillon, 2010b). Of the 16 finalists in the first round of the competition, only two, Delaware and South Carolina, did not receive funding from the Gates Foundation.

Over the past two years, winning states and districts have begun implementing their ambitious, and often contentious, reform plans. In many cases, this process has not unfolded as original applications outlined. Six states and the District of Columbia requested approval from the Department of Education to amend their plans (McNeil, 2011). Tennessee was one of the first states to enact legislation and also one of two winners in the first round. In 2011, it became one of the first states in the nation to implement annual teacher evaluations, with a significant portion of the evaluation dependent on test scores, in all public K-12 schools. The events that have unfolded in Tennessee surrounding Race to the Top present a unique opportunity to analyze current education reform policymaking contexts.

Tennessee First to the Top

Tennessee was one of only two winners in round one of Race to the Top. This mid-sized state is the 16th most populous, and has a history of low educational outcomes among its predominantly White and English-speaking students[1]. Yet, in a ten-year time span from 1997 to 2007, Tennessee's high school graduation rate increased 13 percentage points (from 53 percent to 66) (Editorial Projects in Education, 2010). And though Tennessee students, on average, continue to score below other states on NAEP reading and math assessments, mathematics scores have improved (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Poverty is another challenge facing Tennessee. Nearly half of the state's one million students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009). Perceiving Race to the Top's potential for helping the state confront these problems, then Governor Phil Bredesen convened an Extraordinary Session of the Tennessee General Assembly in January 2010 to pass legislation designed to enhance the state's application.

Tennessee General Assembly

The bicameral legislature of Tennessee is comprised of 33 senators and 99 representatives. As is typical in other states, senators are elected for four-year terms and representatives serve for two years; there are no term limits for members seeking re-election. Tennessee has a part-time legislature, meaning that its members balance the demands of lawmaking with another career. Tennessee law stipulates 90 legislative days

[1] According to the Tennessee Department of Education, 69% of students are White and 3% are English language learners (n.d.)

over a two-year period. However, the governor or both speakers of the chambers may call an Extraordinary Session where only pre-determined issues appear on the agenda. This was the case in December 2009 when Governor Bredesen announced that Tennessee would submit an application for the first round of Race to the Top and called lawmakers to the state capitol to pass a comprehensive education reform bill that would align Tennessee school practices more closely with Race to the Top criteria.

First to the Top

The bill became known as the "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010" (SB7005/HB7010) and had six main areas of emphasis (See Appendix A for a full copy of the legislation):

1) Established an "Achievement School District" allowing the commissioner of the state Department of Education to intervene in consistently failing schools;
2) Required annual evaluations of teachers and principals;
3) Created a 15-member advisory committee charged with the task of recommending guidelines for evaluations;
4) Removed restrictions against using teacher effect data until data from three complete years are obtained;
5) Required personnel decisions (promotion, retention, tenure, compensation) to be based partly on evaluations;
6) Mandated that 50 percent of teacher and principal evaluations be based on student achievement data.

With less than two weeks to understand, amend, and vote on the bill, both chambers of the legislature met in session eight times and the education committees met four times. Legislators overwhelmingly voted in favor of the bill - just three senators and ten representatives opposed it. Although Republicans controlled both chambers, there was bipartisan support for the bill, proposed by a Democratic governor. After Tennessee was declared a winner, the Tennessee First to the Top Advisory Council was established to facilitate implementation of the policy. A study of the legislative process and subsequent implementation efforts after Tennessee won the money is timely and relevant, as states across the country are experiencing similar events.

This dissertation is a two-part case study examining how Race to the Top impacted education policy in Tennessee, from events designed to enhance the state's odds of winning to initial enactment of new laws regarding educator evaluations. To better understand this process, I describe state-initiated reform efforts that led to Tennessee's status as a strong contender for Race to the Top on the eve of a special legislative session called by the governor just days before the application deadline. The legislation passed during the Special Session was considered a linchpin in Tennessee's bid to win the competition, and thus, the events surrounding its passage are the focus for the first part of this study.

The new law, called First to the Top in Tennessee (FTTT), stipulated several policy changes, including annual evaluations of teachers and principals. In the second part of this dissertation, I explore the initial enactment of this aspect of the law. This dissertation encompasses several of stages of the policy process and offers a

comprehensive analysis of education reform efforts related to Race to the Top in Tennessee.

Overview of this Document

This dissertation contains six more chapters. In Chapter Two I review the literature that frames this study. I begin by tracing the evolution of federalism in American education, and then I consider scholarship on state-level governance of education. During this review, I present an argument for employing political science frameworks to guide this study. I conclude the chapter with a presentation of the research questions and a discussion of the significance of this study.

The third chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology I used in my dissertation. For each part of this project, I outline the goals and specific research questions guiding the study. I explain the sampling method I employed, as well as the data collection process. Finally, I describe the analytic strategy I applied in examining my data.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six I present an in-depth description of the results of my analyses. I outline the political climate in Tennessee that preceded the decision to enter the Race to the Top competition, with particular attention to Governor Bredesen's school reform efforts in Chapter Four. Following that, Chapter Five describes the events in Tennessee that led to the successful passage of the First to the Top bill and chronicles the state's path of innovative reform. I examine the factors that contributed to the vast and rapid support for Tennessee's bid for Race to the Top. Shortly after the legislation

passed, implementation efforts began. In Chapter Six, I analyze interviews with members of the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee as they describe the process of developing policy recommendations for the statewide annual educator evaluation system. Collectively, these three chapters examine the democratic policymaking process that unfolded in this Southern state.

I bring together the previous chapters to briefly summarize the results in Chapter Seven before situating this dissertation's contribution within the extant literature. Included in this chapter are a discussion of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the relevant scholarship that undergirds this study. It begins by examining American education policymaking in a federalist system, primarily considering state-level governance of education with a focus on the roles of various individuals and institutions in education policymaking. Following that, I present a rationale for using political science frameworks in this education research. In addition to describing how scholars apply these lenses to their work, I provide a comprehensive description of the frameworks I apply in my dissertation: Mazzoni's (1991) arena models and McDonnell's policy feedback. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the research questions and a discussion of the significance of this study.

Federalism and Educational Governance

As outlined by the Tenth Amendment, America has a federalist structure of educational governance that gives governance of education to the states. This dual sovereignty grants independent powers to both the federal and state levels of government. Historically, states delegated this authority to local districts. Until the end of World War II, the federal government's involvement in education was primarily through land grants, teachers' salaries, and the beginning of student assistance under the G.I. Bill (Bailey &

Mosher, 1968). However, a major shift in authority to the federal level began in the late 1950s as a result of growing concerns about national defense and the belief that unemployment and poverty could be remedied by equalizing educational and economic opportunities (Sunderman, 2009). To gain leverage in educational governance, the federal government, in the now historic Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, introduced the practice of using financial incentives.

States and districts do not have to accept federal dollars, but if they do, they must also comply with the federal stipulations attached (Manna, 2011). However, by introducing such inducements, the federal government must walk a fine political line with states because they must rely on the states' cooperation to carry out the initiatives. Thus, there is an inherent tension for authority amongst the different levels of government in a federalist system. Lauded by some as affording opportunities for inter-government cooperation, it is simultaneously criticized by others for its confusing and ad hoc approach (Peterson, Rabe, and Wong, 1986).

This complicated relationship is made manifest through federal mandates and states' resistance to them, but also in opportunities for leveraging license or capacity at one level to advance political agendas at another (Manna, 2006). To illustrate this tension, and the politics emerging from a federalist system of government in education, I present Manna's (2006) theoretical framework that merges the literature on federalism and agenda-setting. After summarizing his framework, I outline historical events in American education reform that have led us 'racing to the top.'

Borrowing Strength

Manna (2006) contends that scholarship on federalism fails to draw connections with theories about agenda-setting, too often adopts a top-down approach, and overemphasizes policy implementation. To address these shortcomings, he proposes a theoretical framework to explain how federalism influences agenda-setting (Manna, 2006). Manna identifies three components essential to policymaking: policy entrepreneurs, license and capacity. Policy entrepreneurs are key figures in agenda-setting and policymaking (Kingdon, 1984). These individuals analyze the political climate looking for opportunities to champion their issue. In pursuing this endeavor, policy entrepreneurs assess the relative license and capacity available at their level of government (Manna, 2006).

Manna (2006) identifies four sources for license: political capital; linking one issue to an issue currently receiving attention; laws granting control over the issue to one level of government; and previous policy changes that have persisted over time. Policy entrepreneurs enjoy greater license when there are formal sources, such as regulations or relevant pre-existing policies. Capacity encompasses the human capital, financial resources, and organizational structures that enable government to implement policy changes. The combination of these two elements is essential: Weakness in one area inhibits the ability of a policy entrepreneur to stimulate government action (Manna, 2006).

However, in the absence of either of these two events, Manna (2006) explains how a savvy entrepreneur can mobilize resources at another level of government to

supplement this weakness. "Borrowing strength" is how Manna describes the actions of policy entrepreneurs who leverage license or capacity at a different level of government to advance their agendas. This notion of a reciprocal relationship between the federal and state governments dismisses a top-down or bottom-up perspective of policymaking as too simplistic and instead suggests how it can foster momentum for policy innovation (Manna, 2006) Manna applies this framework to changes in education policymaking during the second half of the twentieth century to explain the increasing attention to education on the American agenda, beginning with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Title I is perhaps the best known element of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act because its provision for providing money for disadvantaged children persists today. However, Manna (2006) notes the salience of Title V because it was an indication by the federal government of the interdependence between federal and state levels. In the 1960s, state departments of education were as weak, or weaker, than the federal government in terms of education policy involvement (Manna, 2006). To address this weakness, Title V directed money to state agencies to support reform efforts. According to Manna, Title V was a deliberate capacity-building strategy that furthered federal interest in education.

Although lacking the authority to enforce the law, the federal government's program brought focus to concerns that were being neglected at the local level

(Sunderman, 2009). For the first time, there was widespread attention on addressing the needs of particular students; this focus was unique to the federal government and something lacking in the states (McDonnell, 2005). New roles for the different levels of government were established. The federal role in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was to give money to schools for specific groups of students. The state's role was to spend the money, at their discretion, provided it targeted disadvantaged students. Most often, states left these decisions to local districts with the state education agency acting as the moral enforcer (McDonnell, 2005).

States' Efforts

The contemporary role of the state in education policymaking and implementation emerged over several decades. Although at one time, such decisions were left to educators, concerns about a state's economy coupled with pressure from the business community to reform education gave way to a new regime in education reform (Fusarelli, 2005; Gittell & McKenna, 1999). Governors and state legislators, and in some cases chief state school officers, emerged as the main forces shaping education policy, with state boards of education and departments of education assuming secondary roles (Brady, 2009; Fuhrman, 1987; Mazzoni, 1994). Several factors coalesced to bring about these changes in the early 1980s.

Educators to politicians

Although previously the business of education was left to educators (Timar, 1997), concerns over special interests and demands about collective bargaining subsequently fragmented the power of educators (Fuhrman, 1987). In the 1970s, two more events further shifted authority of governance from educators to elected leaders. First, state departments of education began to focus more on monitoring compliance of federal programs and less on matters of curriculum, thus diminishing their involvement in state policymaking (Timar, 1997). Their role was further curtailed in the early 1980s when cuts in federal spending necessitated reductions in staff (Fuhrman, 1987).

Second, states began to address school finance reform. The 1970s were characterized by school finance litigation as districts were forced to address the inequitable distribution of resources to schools (Manna, 2006). School finance was the one area in education where governors and legislators had a history of involvement, and their leadership in this area was a natural product of previous participation (Fuhrman, 1987). The rise in gubernatorial and legislative interest in education was furthered by growing concerns over the economy and led to the promotion of state policies concerning curriculum, graduation requirements and teacher quality (Brown, 2008; Fuhrman, 1987; Fusarelli, 2005; Vergari, 2009). A final contributing factor to this shift was the political behavior of educators. Teacher and principal interest groups tended to be reactive rather than proactive (Fuhrman, 1997). This stance distanced them from the policymaking process, unintentionally ceding power to the state.

Pressure to change

State leaders turned their attention to education in the 1970s in part because they recognized the implications it had for economic development (Timpane & McNeill, 1991). Concerns about providing high quality education in order to attract newcomers to the state and to prevent talented people from seeking employment elsewhere led states to assume a more aggressive role in education governance (Furhman, 1987, McDermott, 2009, Ravitch, 1995). Although education finance dominated the policy agenda, the early stages of the accountability movement began to emerge, with a focus on statewide assessments (Mazzoni, 1994).

This increase in state activity was bolstered by other national dynamics. The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* galvanized public attention and raised concerns about school systems nationwide at the same time that President Reagan called for a decrease in federal involvement – both fiscally and programmatically - in education policy (Sunderman, 2009). Instead, the administration utilized the bully pulpit to incite and exhort states to action through seemingly easy policy solutions (Mazzoni, 1994; McDonnell & Fuhrman, 1986).

Increased activity in education reform across states did not imply uniformity in policymaking (Fuhrman, 1989). As states responded to their own contexts, regional, rather than national, characteristics emerged (Mazzoni, 1994). Particularly salient to this study, Southern states championed some of the earliest efforts (Pipho, 1986). Three contextual conditions contributed to the South's foray into education accountability: economic implications for weak school systems (Timpane & McNeill, 1991); a desire to

change its underachiever reputation (Vold & DeVitis, 1991); and a conservative predilection for states' rights and little tolerance for federal interference (Mazzoni, 1994). Reforms in these states were expedited by favorable fiscal conditions (compared to other parts of the country) (Mazzoni & Sullivan, 1986) and policy diffusion, including the Southern Regional Education Board forum for exchanging ideas, (Mazzoni, 1994).

By the late 1980s and the early 1990s, in response to public concern and as education consumed a larger portion of states' budgets, governors became even more enmeshed in the politics of education (Mazzoni, 1994; McDonnell, 2009). In 1989 governors convened in Charlottesville, Virginia for an education summit. One of the meeting's leaders was then-governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton. The outcome of this meeting was a set of national goals intended as a framework to help states develop their own standards (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). Another important outcome of the meeting was the agreement that education governance should remain state-led, but also an acknowledgement of the importance of the federal role in funding education (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). Changes in education policy undertaken by individual states and the work of the governors at the summit are contributing factors to the federal government's foray into accountability-based policies applied across the nation (Wong & Sunderman, 2007).

Accountability through Mandates

Education reform during the 1990s is characterized by the standards movement and initial forays into school choice policy (Manna, 2006). During this time, then-President Bill Clinton reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to

reflect state efforts. Although these changes represented the first time the federal government attempted to introduce accountability into the schools, it was a direct outgrowth from the work being done in the states. The intention was to further this work, not disregard it.

Yet a variety of challenges resulted in the implementation and enforcement of Clinton's Improving America's Schools Act being described as "uneven" and "relatively weak" (Debray, 2003: p. 58). Seven years after Improving America's Schools Act passed, many states still did not have standards and assessments for all students, and only 21 states were in compliance with the single accountability system; the rest still held Title I students to different standards (Debray, 2003; Goertz, 2005). Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that states' lack of compliance was not so much defiance as perhaps a reflection of an unintended consequence of Improving America's Schools Act's attempt to build upon state policy initiatives (McDonnell, 2009). Amending current policies to adhere to federal requirements presented different challenges than establishing new ones. Finally, variability in state capacity was also an issue (McDonnell, 2009). No Child Left Behind attempted to tackle the challenges Improving America's Schools Act encountered.

Shifting focus

An important distinction of No Child Left Behind from previous reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is the lack of collaboration the federal government sought from the states in developing the law. No Child Left Behind was a

clear expansion of federal involvement in and marginalization of state control over education (Sunderman, 2009). It is precisely this lack of cooperation between the two levels of government that led to implementation challenges. While No Child Left Behind enjoyed public support, the public was not charged with the task of implementing the law (Debray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). In his careful analysis of the challenges No Child Left Behind presented, Manna (2011) argues that while No Child Left Behind needed to be tougher than previous reauthorizations, it simultaneously weakened federal authority and increased variability across the states by continuing to give so much power to the states. Furthermore, the practice of establishing broad mandates at the federal level but leaving the substantive decisions up to the states reversed the principal-agent theory (Manna, 2011). As a result, the federal government's role was relegated to administrative oversight rather than making fundamental changes (Manna, 2011).

In her work examining the implementation of No Child Left Behind, Goertz (2005), concludes that the success of No Child Left Behind is dependent upon the will and capacity of states, with many states lacking the necessary resources to implement all the provisions of the law. In particular, fiscal and human capacities were deficient in many states (Goertz, 2005). Another implementation study concluded that while states have made progress in the development of standards and assessments, they must work to increase capacity to meet the demands of No Child Left Behind (Wanker & Christie, 2005). No Child Left Behind has been criticized for being an unfunded mandate by governors decrying the burden implementation imposes on their states (Wong & Sunderman, 2007). In short, it has increased the tension between the federal and state

governments, contributing negative, rather than positive, feedback to the system (Manna, 2006).

Changes to the policy game

Unlike earlier federal policies, Race to the Top is not a mandate; rather it is an administrative initiative of President Obama that distributes money to states and schools through a voluntary competition. However, like previous federal education programs, if states want funding, they must comply with stipulations. Although extrinsically motivated like No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top offers rewards rather than sanctions. A lengthier discussion of the components of Race to the Top is presented in Chapter I. Here, I confine the description of Race to the Top to the way it redefines the relationship between the federal and state levels of government.

The development of Race to the Top as a voluntary program can be interpreted as an attempt to correct for previous reforms' shortcomings. Improving America's Schools Act had the support of governors and business leaders (Wong & Sunderman, 2007), but lacked the muscle to enforce its requirements. No Child Left Behind did not seek states' cooperation and applied coercive tactics to enforce compliance, which resulted in high levels of criticism from state education policymakers, interest groups, and teachers. Race to the Top adopts a middle of the road approach. The program is voluntary, but there are clear stipulations that states must accept if they want to receive money. Perhaps most notable of all was the requirement that different education stakeholders commit to supporting the state's plan. The Race to the Top application asked for signatures from

school superintendents, school board members, and teachers' unions indicating their cooperation.

Race to the Top also changes the politics of education by expanding the participants involved in the process. Tracing the history of participants in education reform from the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Debray-Pelot & McGuinn (2009), conclude that reform efforts have redefined the roles of participants, sometimes curtailing previous influence while at other times uniting disparate groups. If the 1980s saw the rising influence of governors in education (Fusarelli, 2005; McDermott, 2009) and the 1990s are marked by business leaders' involvement (Cibulka, 2001), then Race to the Top gives evidence of the growing influence of private citizens (Spring, 2011). We observe this phenomenon in both the expansion of charter schools promoted in Race to the Top's criteria as well as the involvement of private foundations in education. For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation offered $250,000 in grants to state education departments to assist them in writing the Race to the Top application (Quaid & Blakenship, 2009). With the introduction of the influence of private citizens in education governance, the politics of education are once again redefined. We have come a long way from the days when political leaders felt the business of education was best left to educators (McDermott, 2009).

State Leaders in Education

To better understand the complexity of the challenges confronting states I consider the roles of various state level education stakeholders. In particular, I examine

the variation that exists among the states in how individuals come to hold such positions, the scope of their job, and how these factors in turn influence educational governance.

Primary actors

The role of governors and legislators as predominant actors in education policymaking is clear when one considers that in the past 20 years, "state legislatures across the United States have passed thousands of education-related bills, numerous state commissions on education were created, and state gubernatorial education plans were promulgated," (Brady, 2009, p. 178). Governors have built coalitions with the business community to advance education policy, ranging from the standards movement in the 1980s to market-based solutions in the 1990s (Gittell & McKenna, 1999; McDermott, 2009). In state legislatures, the establishment of committees helped foster expertise in education policy among its members (Rosenthal & Fuhrman, 1981). Although their work on education policy is often done in accord with one another, governors and legislators have also encountered contentious battles (Brown, 2008; Gittell & McKenna, 1999).

Other roles

In addition to governors and legislators, chief state school officers (CSSO), the state education agency and the state board of education all participate in education policymaking. The CSSO in most states serves as the executive officer of the state board of education and the head of the state education agency. Just over three-fifths of CSSOs

are appointed, most by the state board of education, but in five states, directly by the governor. CSSOs in the remaining 19 states are elected. Despite their dual role of working with both the legislative body and state board of education, there is not a systematic relationship in terms of the degree of influence the CSSO has with these two groups (Campbell & Mazzoni, 1976). The state education agency (state department of education) is responsible for enforcing federal and state policies and providing resources, including technical assistance, and information to the public schools. Finally, the state board of education is responsible for governing and policymaking in the public system. In fact, Brady (2009) considers members of the state board to be the most important for promoting equitable educational policies because of the diversity of voices they represent. However, early research on the influence the state board has in the education policymaking process concluded that members were "minor participants," (Campbell & Mazzoni, 1976, p. 74).

Tennessee leaders

In Tennessee, the CSSO (called the commissioner of education), and members of the state board of education are all appointed by the governor. The commissioner of education is the executive officer of the state department of education and a member of the governor's cabinet. The individual who holds this position is responsible for implementing, administering, and enforcing laws and policies for public education. Unlike the commissioner, who serves at the discretion of the governor, members of the state board of education in Tennessee serve a nine-year term. The state board is

comprised of nine members, one from each of Tennessee's congressional districts. It works with both the legislature and department of education.

The multitude of actors who participate in state policymaking for education and the variability surrounding their role precludes uniformity across the states. It can also provoke conflict within a state as officials negotiate their authority. To facilitate our understanding of these dynamics, scholarship on the politics and policies of education is often advanced through the lens of political science frameworks. In the next section, I present a rationale for using such frameworks in this education research. In addition to describing how scholars apply these lenses to their work, I provide a comprehensive description of the two frameworks I apply in my dissertation: Mazzoni's (1991) Arena Models and McDonnell's (2009) Policy Feedback.

Political Science Frameworks and Education Policy and Politics

The policymaking process is complex because of the number of actors, levels of government, prolonged time span, and quantity of proposals involved (Sabatier, 2007). Further, it encompasses identifying problems, proposing alternative solutions, and selecting and implementing a proposal (Kingdon, 1984). An ad hoc approach to policy analysis is beset with flaws, the most serious of which is the inability to detect and correct errors (Sabatier, 2007). Therefore, applying a scientific framework to politics and policy research provides a lens for analyzing this process in a focused and disciplined manner. Moreover, applying multiple frameworks to current and historical events develops clarity through comparisons with competing ideas (Sabatier, 2007; Allison,

2005). Despite the availability of such tools, current research in education is criticized for failing to attend to questions about what drives policy, concentrating instead on whether or not the policy works (Fowler, 2006; Hochschild, 2004). Yet, the importance of explicating political contexts and contributing to theory should not be underestimated (Cohen-Vogel & McLendon, 2009).

Frameworks Applied

Because of the general applicability of theory in qualitative research and the specific relevance of political science frameworks to this research, Mazzoni's (1991) arena model and McDonnell's (2009) policy feedback theory undergird this study. Mazzoni's arena model was specifically developed to understand the state-level policymaking process, while the politics created by policies, and the impact these politics have on subsequent policies, is the subject of McDonnell's policy feedback. The first part of this study explores the policymaking process that occurred in the state legislature. Mazzoni's model is particularly relevant because it examines the influence of the site, or arena, in policymaking. The recent education reform legislation passed in Tennessee presents an opportunity to study this influence on legislation proposed by the governor in response to a federal competition that gained overwhelming support in both the House and Senate. The second part of this study investigates the implementation of a specific aspect of the bill: policy recommendations for a statewide annual evaluation system of educators. Policy feedback permits me to analyze the politics that emerged during this process (McDonnell, 2009). These models are more fully explained in the next section.

Mazzoni's Arena Model

Arena defined

The arena model, like Kingdon's (1984) multiple streams, examines how actors and ideologies vie for attention in the agenda-setting process, and expands to analyze the contextual influence specific sites have in provoking major policy change (Bastedo, 2007; Mazzoni, 1991). Mazzoni (1991) draws on case studies of state-level education policymaking and previous literature to hypothesize a framework for addressing "how" questions in policy development and transformation. Central to this model is the role of the site, or arena, where policy decisions occur. Mazzoni describes an arena as "…a middle-range term, referring to the political interactions characterizing particular decision sites through which power is exercised to initiate, formulate, and enact public policy," (p. 116). However, an arena is more than just the site of policymaking; it also identifies relevant actors, defines the shared context, negotiates the availability and power of resources, and influences the mode of reaching consensus. Further, Mazzoni (1991) stipulates that a change in arenas is highly likely to affect the outcome of a policy initiative.

Initial arenas

Mazzoni's (1991) hypothesized model identifies two arenas for policymaking: subsystem and macro. The subsystem arena is dominated by small groups of legislative committee members, agency bureaucrats, and interest groups. The emergence of an iron triangle is not uncommon in the subsystem arena. The subsystem is usually concerned with representing the interests of stakeholders, particularly those with resources. When conflicts arise in the subsystem, they are usually short-term and resolved through orderly negotiations. Low visibility of the subsystem to the public affords a degree of privacy prompting a "…predominant bias of the subsystem toward interests already represented at the bargaining table, interests accepted by lawmakers as having a legitimate and substantial claim to favorable treatment," (Mazzoni, 1991, p. 117). Participants in the subsystem have neither the motivation nor inclination to advocate for major change because it would disrupt the status quo where all participants are generally satisfied. Thus incremental changes where interests are accommodated are more likely.

Because of the subsystem's tendency toward accommodation, major policy change is necessarily located in another arena. Mazzoni (1991) characterizes the macro arena as more visible and accessible to the public, but also distinguished by more strife. Actors in this arena include top-level elected officials – governors and legislative leaders – who proactively push their policy ideas along with mass media, opinion leaders, state officials, agency bureaucrats, policy entrepreneurs, interest groups, and grassroots networks. Elected officials seek media attention to champion their position and mobilize support from stakeholders. In the macro arena, in contrast to the more subdued subsystem, "(t)he frontstage appeal replaces the backstage deal; the evocative politics of

the theater replaces the pragmatic politics of the meeting room," (Mazzoni, 1991, p. 117). When conflict intensifies, participants seek support from powerful allies to bolster their position, and the process becomes messy and disorganized. It is this dynamic nature of the macro arena that enhances the likelihood of success for major change as careful negotiation gives way to direct confrontation and success depends on the power of the participants. Mazzoni notes, however, that the concentrated energy required in the macro arena prevents its long-term sustainability.

External factors

The initial arena model identifies two factors that instigate a shift in policymaking from the subsystem to macro arena: external pressure and the availability of revenue. Mazzoni (1991) draws from Kingdon's (1984) explanation of how an issue becomes a problem as well as the important role of policy entrepreneurs to this process. External pressure to change could include organized interest groups, public attitude/mood, media attention, and major events. Policy entrepreneurs advocate positions, garner support, attract attention and offer solutions to problems. Their actions promote a softening of the system's resistance to change.

In addition to external pressure, the availability of new revenue is also an important motivating factor for major policy change. It is even possible that elected officials would initiate such change without public demand when confronted with unanticipated resources. While Mazzoni (1991) allows that increased revenue without public pressure could result in change within a subsystem arena, more likely, "… (i)f

however, outside pressures for change are powerful, then abundant revenues do facilitate nonincremental, redistributive policies," in the macro arena (p. 118). Yet, even here, Mazzoni cautions, if the battle is ideological, rather than material, opponents are not likely to be persuaded by increased revenue because losing means giving up moral ground.

Arenas revised

Based on findings from a study of school choice in Minnesota, Mazzoni (1991) revised his hypothesized model to include the enhanced role of elites and leaders in instigating policy innovation, and added two additional arenas. Mazzoni's revised model gives greater consideration to the important role of organized elites in imposing pressure on the system to change. These elites, members of business, policy, and civic organizations, have both the resources and access necessary to make their demands heard and encourage change. Also absent from the initial model is the critical role of proactive leadership at the top level (e.g. governor). This leadership is essential in mobilizing mass public support for implementing policies. Policymakers can establish reforms, but will need support to successfully implement them. A proactive leader fulfills this role. Mazzoni also noted the presence of two additional arenas.

Commission arena

The commission arena is comprised of appointed members who represent broad interests. In the case of Minnesota, the governor appointed a commission when the debate over school choice became too contentious and progress stalled (Mazzoni, 1991). In the commission arena participants work to legitimize, expand, and revise policy proposals that originate in the macro arena. The goal in the commission arena is consensus among all actors, and persuasion is the most common bargaining tool. This process is mostly orderly, yet still unpredictable because power must be distributed among participants. The commission arena enjoys a mid-range level of visibility with some media coverage and attention from the general public, but typically it is not closely scrutinized by these groups. However, interested stakeholders can monitor the commission's actions more carefully if they choose. In this arena, major changes are likely to be discussed, but not recommended. More likely are recommendations that reflect the most basic level of consensus among such a diverse group of participants (Mazzoni, 1991).

Leadership arena

The final arena of state-level policymaking is the leadership arena. This site is characterized by interaction among top-level elected officials and between these officials and the private groups who influence them. When appropriate, subsystem participants, such as committee chairs, may participate in the leadership arena as well. The success of major policy change in this arena depends on: unity among participants; commitment of

resources to proposed policy change; lack of visibility to general public; and shaky opposition from groups and constituents (Mazzoni, 1991). While some of the participants in the leadership arena can also participate in the macro arena, the rules of engagement are different. Where the macro arena is more open and contentious with higher degrees of chaos and visibility, membership in the leadership arena is more restricted, and the more orderly negotiations take place behind closed doors out of public view.

Policy innovation in the arenas

The revised model considers the conditions that affect the likelihood of major change occurring in each of the four arenas (Mazzoni, 1991). The subsystem is unlikely to produce major policy change because of the pre-existing relationships and rules of engagement which favor political niceties. The macro arena is threatened by the very forces that ignite it: a highly visible increase in competing demands resulting in gridlocked decision-making. The commission arena can move beyond this impasse but is still unlikely to enact innovation because of the diverse positions members represent. According to the Minnesota study, the leadership arena is the most likely setting for major policymaking – both in initiating legislation and ensuring its passage (Mazzoni, 1991).

Mazzoni attributes this to the bargaining chips top-level elected officials possess, including: party backing, larger staff, the ability to make political appointments, access to media attention, political savvy developed through experience, and accumulated political

favors. These advantages position leaders with "…the knowledge of, access to, and authority over the procedures, rules, and institutions that govern the workflow in legislative policymaking. They can – and often do – structure this workflow in ways that assist friends and confound foes," (Mazzoni, 1991, p. 130).

However, Mazzoni (1991) also identifies several conditions with the potential for dismantling the leadership arena. Fragmentation of the system, high political costs associated with policy proposals, and the increased numbers of interest groups all threaten policy innovation in the leadership arena. Also noteworthy are the probable implementation problems which arise from innovation in the leadership arena. The closed nature of this context violates expectations for participatory decision-making and can result in a lack of support from the wider community, and more worrisome, lack of commitment among those who must carry out the policy (Mazzoni, 1991).

Arenas revisited

A case study of Ohio's innovative education reform process provided an opportunity to test Mazzoni's initial and revised arena model (Fowler, 1994). Ohio's non-incremental policy change addressed student assignment plans and school choice. Fowler (1994) interviewed twenty state policymakers and analyzed related documents. She found little evidence of a shift from the subsystem to macro arena primarily due to the lack of external pressure from the media and public opinion (Fowler, 1994). Instead, she finds the governor's promotion of policy to be proactive, driven by his own agenda, rather than reactive to external pressure (Fowler, 1994). Yet even the governor's

courting of the media to promote his proposal did not cause constituents to mobilize, either in support or opposition, another indicator of the "inert" role of the macro arena in Ohio (Fowler, 1994, p. 341).

Following the examination of the macro arena, Fowler (1994) turns her attention to evidence of the commission arena. Interviews and news articles identified the presence of three commissions during Ohio's school choice policy initiative period. Although some of the commissions' recommendations subsequently appeared in the legislation, Fowler suggests that rather than providing evidence in support of the arena model, the formation of three commissions reflects divisions within state leadership. Fowler also proposes that the commission arena was not entirely divorced from the leadership arena, as Mazzoni's (1991) model indicates. Further, the study reveals the lack of consideration given to commission reports, as well as friction among commission participants (Fowler, 1994). This friction is particularly interesting given Mazzoni's (1991) characterization of the commission as consensus-seeking.

Mazzoni's (1991) criteria for innovation in the leadership arena (unity, commitment of resources, low visibility, and weak opposition) were all met in the Ohio study (Fowler, 1994). Additionally, interview subjects consistently identified top leaders (members of the leadership arena) as instrumental in bringing about reform (Fowler, 1994). However, Fowler also notes two conditions in Ohio not identified by Mazzoni: external pressure from national-level actors and the presence of the business elite within the leadership arena. While Mazzoni's revised model notes the importance of organized elites, including business organizations, he identifies them as external pressure points.

Fowler (1994) concludes that Ohio's education policy innovation reflects a moderate fit to Mazzoni's (1991) revised arena model because it did predict a shift to the commission and leadership arenas and policy innovation ultimately occurred in the leadership arena, but she also offers several critiques. First, Fowler rejects the assumption of the commission's independence from the leadership arena and challenges their ability to achieve consensus. Second, Fowler calls for an expansion of the leadership arena to include business elites and consideration of national level pressure for change. Finally, despite Mazzoni's certainty of the essential role new revenue plays in bringing about policy innovation, the legislation in Ohio passed without budgetary concerns (Fowler, 1994).

Arenas in Tennessee

Applying Mazzoni's (1991) arena model provides a lens for understanding how the Tennessee legislative process regarding Race to the Top unfolded and to explore the generalizability of an education policymaking framework. This theory offers the most comprehensive perspective for understanding the state-level policymaking process, including the individuals involved and both agenda-setting and subsequent policy change. I interviewed state policymakers and education stakeholders about their perception of and participation in the process of passing the bill. Mazzoni's revised arena model will scaffold my analysis, allowing me to consider the actors, bargaining strategies, and level of visibility present during the policy innovation process. This study also provides an opportunity to extend our understanding of a theoretical framework in light of Mazzoni's

revised model and Fowler's critique. Finally, this dissertation makes a contribution to the scholarship on state policymaking in education, an area criticized for being understudied (Mazzoni, 1994). In the next section, I unpack McDonnell's policy feedback model that I apply to the second half of this study.

McDonnell's Policy Feedback Theory

Policy feedback considers how policies create politics which, in turn, lead to new policies (McDonnell, 2009). Typically, scholars approach this process by first considering the political factors that shape policy. In contrast, policy feedback first addresses the politics that result from instigating policies (McDonnell, 2009). McDonnell does not dismiss this traditional approach, but argues that it is incomplete and that a policy feedback model provides additional insight into the politics of education. To apply this lens, research "…focuses analytical attention on the institutional structures and rules policies establish, the elite and public interpretation of those policies, the interests that are mobilized, and how these factors interact to shape future policies," (McDonnell, 2009, p. 417). McDonnell draws from the literature on historical institutional approaches to political science as well as mass political behavior to develop her theory.

Central to McDonnell's (2009) model is an understanding that policies are both outputs of and inputs to the policy process. In either case, policy innovation has the potential to create institutional arrangements and spur the mobilization of interest groups in support or opposition of the policy – both of which impact subsequent policy

development. In particular, McDonnell advances this model as a way of understanding the dynamic between elites and the mass public and the role of democracy in education policymaking. Ultimately, McDonnell defines policy feedback as "…applying knowledge of past policies and the politics they create to predict how they are likely to shape the next generation (p. 425).

Instigating policy

To begin applying a policy feedback approach, one must unpack the characteristics of the instigating policy (McDonnell, 2009). An analysis of these characteristics includes identifying the origins of the policy, whether the policy represents incremental or major change, the nature of the policy targets, and the type of policy instruments. The answers to this analysis provide grounds for speculating about the politics that are likely to be generated. For example, identifying the origins of the policy can imply whether the policy is likely to face challenges from other branches of government. Further, classifying policy targets by policymakers' perceptions of their value and the political power they possess can illuminate probable reactions from these groups or individuals (McDonnell, 2009; Schneider & Ingram, 1997).

Institutional structures and rules

Following an examination of the policy characteristics, the analysis proceeds to focus on the institutional structures and rules that emerge (McDonnell, 2009). A policy

can create new institutions or, alter or dismantle existing ones. In this phase, the structures and capacities for governance are explored. A policy can guide who participates, establish rules for decision-making, and allocate power and resources within an institutional establishment. This component of policy feedback is situated between the policy characteristics that influence its structure and the mobilization it provokes. Understanding the structural rules encourages predictions about which individuals and groups might mobilize in support of, or opposition to, the policy.

Two branches flow from the analysis of the institutional structures and rules. In the first, interpretive effects, McDonnell (2009) draws from Pierson's (1993) concept that how institutions implement policies mediates an individual's interpretation of them. Accordingly, "(i)nterpretive effects capture the impact of policies on political identity, learning, and trust," (McDonnell, 2009, p. 419). Interpretive effects focus on public opinion, both in general and specific to stakeholders.

The institutional structures combine with the public's interpretation to mobilize interests. The way in which institutions allocate resources, for example, can incentivize targets to organize. Whether individuals perceive a policy as advantageous or not also influence their reaction. Positive policy feedback can extend the shelf-life of a policy whereas negative feedback can curtail it (Hacker, 2004 in McDonnell, 2009 & Pierson, 2000). Finally, a policy can have differential effects because of the advantages and disadvantages it offers various groups. McDonnell (2009) explains that mobilizations can occur "…at just the elite level or at both the elite and mass levels," because of the inequalities it promotes (p. 420).

Provoking policies

All of these components – policy characteristics, institutional structures and rules, interpretive effects, and the differential mobilization of interests – provoke politics that then shape subsequent policies. Policy feedback, as conceptualized by McDonnell (2009) is a relatively recent development in the political science tradition. As such, McDonnell's application of the model relies "…on extant research, much of which was not conducted with the explicit purpose of discerning what kinds of politics each policy has produced," (p. 418). The application of policy feedback in this study makes an initial contribution to McDonnell's call for developing a research agenda that concentrates on the politics policies provoke.

Research Questions

This dissertation focuses on two distinct parts of the policy process in Tennessee and steps to win and then implement Race to the Top. First, I explore the sequence of events, including the Special Session in the General Assembly that occurred when Tennessee decided to enter the competition. I interview key actors, including policy advisors to the governor, state legislators, and Tennessee Education Association (TEA) officials about the comprehensive legislation they passed in 2010 in an effort to secure Tennessee's chances of winning Race to the Top.

This phase of the study draws from Mazzoni's (1991) arena models to consider the political environment surrounding the legislation, paying particular attention to why the bill was considered instrumental in Tennessee's bid and how political leaders garnered support for it. Importantly, I also include an historical account of recent education reform in the state that suggested the state was well poised to win. In addition to examining the policymaking process, this phase of the study examines the parallels between the Race to the Top application guidelines, Tennessee's education reform initiatives, and Tennessee's plan for continued improvement outlined in their Race to the Top application. The research questions guiding this component of the study are:

1) How did Race to the Top evolve politically in Tennessee in 2010?
    a. What external forces opened a window for widespread change in education policy?
    b. How did the political arena contribute to the bill passing?

The next part of the study considers the state's efforts to enact the legislation. I focus on one particular aspect of the 2010 legislation: the annual evaluation of teachers and principals. The legislation established an advisory committee charged with the task of developing and recommending policy for the new system, including the use of student achievement data. The committee began meeting in March 2010, and state-wide implementation of the system was set to occur during the 2011-2012 school year. To understand how this new policy was developed, I interview committee members and analyze pertinent documents, including the agendas and minutes from the meetings and the proposals and guidelines produced from their work. In this part of the study I use

policy feedback (McDonnell, 2009) to examine how the characteristics of the legislation and the perspectives of the participants shaped the policy recommendations.

The research questions guiding this component of the study are:

2) How did the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee work to implement the Tennessee legislation concerning annual educator evaluations?
    a. How did the policy characteristics of the legislation influence the political dynamics of the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee?
    b. How did the institutional structures and rules of the committee impact the process of recommending guidelines for the educator evaluation system?

Significance of the Study

This study brings together three bodies of literature to investigate connections among policymaking in a federalist system, the political context of education reform, and current trends in education policy change, including emerging actors in the policymaking process. In particular, it extends our understanding of state level education policymaking. The extant literature frequently addresses education policy change initiated at the federal level, but studies of state-led reform are less frequent. Studies of state-led reform efforts and initiatives are important because, in shaping education policy, they tend to reflect the nation's preference for local control in education more than federal policymaking. While tensions between the state and individual districts do exist, these may be substantially less pervasive than the tensions between federal and local

levels, as the state is in a better position to anticipate and respond to context-specific needs.

Current context

The Race to the Top program represents a new policy lever in education by creating a competition among states to produce the most ambitious reform plans. Unlike previous federal mandates, notably No Child Left Behind which has been criticized for encouraging states to establish minimum requirements, Race to the Top had the opposite effect: States pushed the limit for policy change within their state in an effort to win federal dollars. It is likely that states' haste to amend policies before the application deadline was exacerbated by the tough economic conditions facing the nation. Yet, money alone cannot explain the willingness of so many states to commit to such ambitious plans. Thus, this study provides an expanded explanation for the political conditions that facilitated these changes.

For the first time since Title V in the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act gave money to states to strengthen state education agencies, the federal government, through the Race to the Top program, invests heavily in developing states' capacity to reform education. This program offers states the opportunity to continue the work they have already initiated on education reform while simultaneously guiding the direction of these efforts toward specific focal areas. The result is increased state capacity to support education policy change, but also more standardization across the states. This study offers a close examination of the process in one state and lays the

foundation for future research to compare Tennessee's process with similar changes in other states.

Tennessee leading the way

Southern states have historically been at a disadvantage in education, and Tennessee is no exception. Improving outcomes for students has important implications both economically and for civil rights. Therefore, a close examination of what Tennessee is doing to improve its education system is both timely and relevant to the current discourse in education. As we seek to understand the policy changes surrounding Race to the Top, it is also important to consider other recent changes in the state's education system that positioned Tennessee as a front-runner and eventual winner of the competition. This understanding can forecast the necessary conditions for future policy change.

Legislative changes made to enhance the state's likelihood of winning do not stop after the vote is tallied. Even before Tennessee was declared one of two first round winners, work had already begun to put the policy into practice, or at least to formulate the policy that would become practice. The most significant change in Tennessee legislation was the requirement of annual evaluations for all teachers and principals. Further, the Race to the Top guidelines stipulated that a major portion of the evaluation must come from student achievement data. Many other states also passed similar laws, but Tennessee was the first to implement the policy on a statewide scale. This policy

represents a major change in education and threatens what teachers have come to expect – tenure, autonomy, and a "close the door" mentality.

Interestingly, in Tennessee, a committee of educators, legislators, and members of the business community came together to make recommendations for the new system. This too, was unusual. Not just because the group included non-educators, but because, it is the State Board of Education which makes policy recommendations in Tennessee. Policy development by volunteer stakeholders is a new landscape, and it introduces new actors to the policymaking process. This study explores this dynamic and pays particular attention to the roles of the individual members and the interests they represented.

Policy innovation explained

This study presents an examination of rapid, fully supported policy change in one state, including a description of how non-traditional actors developed policy. It considers the shifting role of the TEA, the importance of political leaders in negotiating tough legislative changes, the emergence of new participants in the policymaking process, and the role of a popular governor in the waning days of his administration. This dissertation investigates how democracy worked, including the factors that coalesced to set an agenda, and also initial implementation efforts. It offers both a broad picture of the policy process and a close examination of one aspect of the legislation. Together, these components provide a detailed description of recent policymaking in Tennessee, a state that hopes to become a national leader in education.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed for this dissertation is detailed in this chapter. To begin, I present a rationale for the selection of a case study design. Thereafter, I explicate the methodology, including the specific research questions the study sought to answer, data sources and sample selection, and interview procedures. I then detail my analytic strategy and conclude the chapter with a discussion of the strategies employed to ensure validity and reliability.

Rationale

A case study is appropriate to this dissertation because it "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident," (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Further, this form of empirical inquiry benefits from prior development of a theoretical framework to guide data collection and analyses with a goal of expanding our understanding of how and why phenomena occur (Yin, 2009). To accomplish, this, it is essential to triangulate multiple sources of data (Yin, 2009).

This dissertation employed qualitative methods in the form of interviews and document analyses to understand the events surrounding the Race to the Top education

reform legislation and implementation in Tennessee. Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain the suitability of qualitative methods when attempting to understand and explain events because, "(t)he world is very complex. There are no simple explanations for things. Rather, events are the result of multiple factors coming together and interacting in complex and often unanticipated ways," (p.8). As a result of this complexity, qualitative researchers must,

> …try to obtain multiple perspectives on events…We realize that, to understand experience, that experience must be located within and can't be divorced from the larger events in a social, political, cultural, racial, gender-related, informational, and technological framework and therefore these are essential aspects of our analyses, (p. 8).

The case study approach and qualitative methods applied in this study are complimented by an emergent strategy that allows for agility in design as the study progresses.

A case study embraces an emergent, rather than a priori, design because "… it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the multiple realities to devise the design adequately," (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 41). This flexibility underscores the intention of the study conducted here to capture unanticipated phenomena of state-level education policymaking that surface during data collection. By employing an emergent design in a naturalistic setting, my methodological approach supports the overall goal of this study to understand a process embedded in its context.

In summary, qualitative studies allow for more extensive and in-depth descriptions of a contemporary phenomenon, concentrate on "how" and "why" questions, and are well-suited for multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). This is perhaps best articulated by Corbin and Strauss (2008) who write that among the many reasons to

employ qualitative methods "…perhaps the most important is the desire to step beyond the known and enter in to the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge," (p. 16).

Research Questions

My dissertation is an analysis of state policy changed in preparation for entry in the Race to the Top competition and explores the initial development of specific elements of the corresponding legislation. To accomplish this I focused on two main phases of the process: the education reform bill passed in 2010 in an effort to win Race to the Top, and work of the Teacher Evaluator Advisory Committee established to develop an evaluation system for educators, as stipulated by the legislation. This two-pronged approach permits an analysis of both the policy *formulation* process as well as the *enactment* phase. The overarching research question for the first phase is:

1) How did Race to the Top evolve politically in Tennessee in 2010?

Two sub-questions lend further shape to the analysis of the policy formulation phase:

a) What external forces opened a window for widespread change in education policy?
b) How did the political arena contribute to the bill passing?

In the second part of this study, I examined the initial enactment process of a key component of the education reform legislation: the development of policy

recommendations for a statewide educator evaluation system linked to student achievement data. To understand this process, I asked:

2) How did the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee work to implement the Tennessee legislation regarding annual educator evaluations?
    a. How did the policy characteristics of the legislation influence the political dynamics of the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee?
    b. How did the institutional structures and rules of the committee impact the process of recommending guidelines for the educator evaluation system?

The subsequent sections detail the data sources and sample selection for each part of the dissertation and the interview procedures I followed.

Data Sources and Sample Selection

Part I

Two data sources supported each segment of this study. The cornerstone of each data collection component is participant interviews, supplemented with archival document analysis. Interview participants were purposefully selected to ensure that they were knowledgeable, willing to talk, and represented a range of perspectives (Rubin, & Rubin, 2004). However, as is also appropriate in an emergent design, I employed snowball sampling, a technique whereby participants refer other individuals relevant to

my study. Both of these approached allow me to reach saturation, the point "when all the concepts are well defined and explained," (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 145).

To begin, I gathered primary source documents relevant to the legislative process including Race to the Top guidelines, the First to the Top legislation, Tennessee's Race to the Top application, text from the governor's speeches, and secondary sources such as news articles from *The Tennessean* and other media sources covering the events surrounding the Special Session. Information in these documents initially served three purposes: to further my own knowledge about the topic, to inform the development of my protocol, and to allow me to identify key legislators. Following this analysis, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of 21 Tennessee state legislators in Spring 2010[2]. Purposeful sampling, a hallmark of qualitative research, allows the researcher to select "*information-rich* cases for study in depth," (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Table 2 (p. 56) presents an overview of my sample of legislators[3].

[2] I requested interviews with 23 legislators; two declined to participate.

[3] These legislators included both key informants (e.g. the bill sponsors as well as some members of the Education committees in both the Senate and House) and members of the General Assembly who voted on the bill, but did not have specialized knowledge of education policy. I conducted interviews with the Senate and House sponsor and co-sponsor. Six additional interviews were conducted with members of the Education committees. To ensure that I was hearing different perspectives, the remaining eleven participants voted on the bill, but did not play an active role writing and revising the bill, although all of them attended committee meetings and some asked questions or spoke against the bill during this time. In the second stage, I gave consideration toward balancing Democrats and Republicans and dividing interviews among Senators and Representatives in a way that reflected the distribution among the full legislature. In total, I interviewed 11 Democrats and 10 Republicans. To reflect the fact that the Senate represents one-third of the legislature, seven of my participants were Senators. A final consideration was to ensure that I spoke with both supporters and opponents of the bill. As the bill passed by an overwhelming majority in both the House and Senate, I oversampled dissenters; nearly one-third of my participants voted against the bill. Since my intention was to focus on the legislative process, I do not think this overrepresentation compromises my analysis.

Table 2. Sample Description (Legislators)

	Sample (n=21)[1]	Total (n=132)	%
Senators	7	33	21
Representatives	14	99	14
Education Committee Member - Senate	3	9	33
Education Committee Member - House	5	22	23
Vote - Yes	15	112	13
Vote - No	5	11	45
Vote - Abstained	1	1	100
Republicans	10	70	14
Democrats	11	62	18
Male	14	59	24
Female	7	15	47

[1] I requested interviews with 23 legislators; 2 declined to participate.

In these initial interviews, legislators identified their colleagues and other policymakers who were instrumental in ensuring the successful passage of the First to the Top education reform bill. In the fall of 2011, I conducted four follow-up interviews with legislators who held leadership roles in the General Assembly during this time as well as interviews with seven public employees who participated in Tennessee's bid for Race to the Top. The non-elected study participants (Table 3) represented four members of the governor's staff, one Department of Education bureaucrat, and two officials from the TEA. In total, I conducted interviews with 28 individuals for this component of the study.

Table 3. Sample Description (Public Employees)

	Sample (n = 7)
Governor's staff (former)	4
Tennessee Department of Education	1
Tennessee Education Association	2

Part II

The second part of the dissertation also relied on archival documents and participant interviews. To begin, I gathered agendas and minutes from the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee (TEAC) meetings. These documents are publicly available online. An initial examination of these documents informed the principal data component – interviews with committee members.

I contacted 16 members of the TEAC[4]. Twelve members agreed to participate in my study. Table 4 shows the classification of my sample. Of the two who declined to participate, one attended only 25% of the meetings, and the other expressed concern for jeopardizing her position if she participated. Two members did not respond to repeated requests. Interview participants identified the meeting facilitators as instrumental to the process. I requested an interview with the primary facilitator, who consented, and thus I had a response rate of 76%.

Table 4. Sample Description (Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee)

	Sample (n = 13)[1]
Educators	8
Legislators	1
Other Stakeholders	3
Facilitator	1

[1] I requested interviews with 17 individuals.

Two declined to participate; two did not respond.

[4] The legislation established a 15-member committee. However, four individuals served in the role of Commissioner of Education during the TEAC's term. I interviewed two of the four commissioners. The remaining two only held the position for one meeting, and thus are unlikely to provide much additional information.

Interview Procedures

I applied a recruitment procedure of sending an initial introductory letter or email followed by a phone call. Both for the convenience of the participants as well as the opportunity for the researcher to understand the political environment, legislator interviews were conducted on-site at the General Assembly. Interviews with the remaining participants were a combination of in-person meetings and phone interviews, when distance necessitated such a forum or when requested by the participant. With the participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded. Interviews ranged in duration from 14 minutes to 65 minutes, with a typical interview lasting approximately half an hour.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol, asking informants to describe their role in and perceptions of either the legislative events surrounding the First to the Top bill or the work of the TEAC. For example, I asked legislators "Why did you decide to vote yes (or no) on the proposed legislation?" and I asked committee members, "Was someone in charge of the meetings?" (See Appendices B- E for copies of my interview protocols.) My protocols drew from the political science frameworks that scaffold this study as well as my analysis of relevant archival documents. These instruments provided a flexible structure to my interviews and allowed me to pursue unanticipated subject areas that emerged during our conversation (Patton, 2002). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

My Role as a Researcher

Prior to conducting the interviews, I had never met any of the participants. In my introductory script, I explained that I was conducting research for my dissertation. At times during an interview I briefly described my background in education. I found this particularly helpful when talking with educators because it established my credibility with the topics and built rapport with the participant. However, I was mindful not to offer my opinion of the changes to education policy, and specifically, of the teacher evaluation system, in order to avoid compromising my objectivity. While conducting interviews with legislators, I had the opportunity to observe the daily activities of the General Assembly, and I was also invited to sit on the floor of the House during one of its sessions. This prolonged engagement enhanced my own knowledge of how the legislative branch operates in Tennessee.

Analytic Strategy

In keeping with the fluid nature of qualitative research, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Patton, 2002). This method permitted me to modify my protocol in response to emerging themes. I took detailed field notes following each interview, paying attention to moments where participants echoed (or disputed) what others had said, or when they suggested a new line of inquiry. In preparation for data analysis, interviews were transcribed verbatim and all data were uploaded to NVIVO, a software program for analyzing qualitative data. To capture my thoughts and decisions during data analysis, I utilized NVIVO's memo feature. These

memos documented my ideas: explaining why I created, expanded, or collapsed nodes; drawing connections between my data and my frameworks; and identifying additional sources to check for specific nodes. In sum, the records I created during data collection and analysis, in conjunction with my data, establish an audit trail that an independent third party could use to determine the trustworthiness of my study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

Since the data collection for this study involved two parts, I conducted separate analyses for policy formulation and implementation. Data analysis blended grounded theory and theory-driven approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2002). Race to the Top established a unique policy environment by engaging states in a cross-state competition responding to a request for proposals. Because of this new direction in education policymaking, it was reasonable to expect that the frameworks examined in the previous chapter may not quite fit. Rather than strictly adhering to Mazzoni's (1991) arena model or McDonnell's (2009) policy feedback, I used them to guide, not confine, my analysis. This blended strategy mitigates bias (Yin, 2009). Appendix F details my coding framework for themes that emerged during grounded theory and for themes derived from the literature.

Specifically, my initial coding procedure for each component applied grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory allows categories and properties of categories to develop from the data rather than fitting data to pre-existing classifications (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Emergent designs often utilize this approach because the multiple realities encountered are likely too vast for a priori theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My initial analysis concentrated on this approach, adding codes

for motifs as they emerged. For example, as I analyzed transcripts for the first part of this study, I developed nodes for the various factors that contributed to Tennessee's decision to enter the Race to the Top competition.

However, Fowler (2006) promotes the utility of applying existing frameworks in qualitative research, particularly for novice researchers. She contends frameworks help focus a study (Fowler, 2006). Further, Yin (2009) declares that theory development is crucial for case studies. Thus, after completing this preliminary coding, I reexamined the data for indicators suggested by theory, including: key actors, problem identification, politics created, priorities and goals valued, and policy levers. For example, in my analysis for the second part of this study, I identified components of McDonnell's (2009) policy feedback model and searched my data for support (or challenges) to the theory. Subsequent to these steps, I returned to the codes, looking for similar and contrasting dimensions. This iterative process can identify relationships within and across codes and facilitates theoretical saturation, the point in which no new themes arise (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

A major strength of a case study is the use of multiple sources of evidence to triangulate results (Yin, 2009). In this study, I supplemented my principal data source, interviews, with primary and secondary source documents. I purposefully selected many of my interview participants to ensure I heard a range of perspectives. This allowed me to analyze my transcripts for common and divergent themes. Additionally, I relied on an analysis of archival documents to augment my interviews as well as to provide evidence in support of (or against) the frameworks, and provide concrete examples for topics

discussed by participants. Finally, I endeavored to ensure the validity and reliability of this study in several ways.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

Internal Validity

The hallmarks of ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative study encompass four criteria: internal validity (credibility), generalizability (transferability), reliability (dependability), and confirmability (Guba, 1981; Patton, 2002). Perhaps the most important of these criteria is internal validity, often called credibility in qualitative research, which seeks to ensure that the results of a naturalistic study are indeed reflective of reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I employed several strategies to strengthen internal validity in this study. To begin, I applied an emergent design, which allows for the flexibility needed in working with human subjects. This design approach permitted me to utilize snowball sampling when members identified other individuals as important for me to interview. Additionally, I developed instruments grounded in theoretical constructs, developed familiarity with my subjects before entering the field, and established a data collection timeframe that supported prolonged engagement.

During my analysis, I attended to elements of the data that appeared to contradict emerging patterns. This negative case analysis was essential to the second part of my study, where participants frequently disagreed with each other and establishing

commonalities was difficult. To facilitate this process, I inserted an additional step into my analysis. After coding my transcripts in NVIVO, I created spreadsheets in Excel to track the frequency of comments made in reference to a particular theme. For example, after coding remarks members of the TEAC made regarding a specific component of the evaluation system, I summarized their responses in an Excel spreadsheet. This spreadsheet allowed me to note which members were absent during a particular conversation, count how they voted on an issue, and to categorize their preference for a four or five point rating system. Once I had organized the data in this manner, I could more easily search for common and contrasting patterns.

Because of the challenges in discerning these patterns among participants in the second part of the study, I added a final step in my analysis of these transcripts: color coding. Committee members represented three main types of stakeholders: educators, legislators, and the business community. Two members represented two of these areas. As I was curious to know the extent to which common patterns emerged within each of these groups and diverged across groups, I developed a color-coding system to highlight participants' responses in a way that allowed me to visually observe similarities and differences. I assigned the three primary colors, red, blue, and yellow, to each main category. For example, I assigned yellow to legislators, blue to educators, and red to the members representing the business community. For the two members who spanned two groups, I assigned the secondary color created by blending the colors from the corresponding primary colors. For example, for the legislator who was also an educator, I assigned the color green. These spreadsheets allowed me to more easily search for consistent and contradictory patterns in my data.

Confirmability

Triangulation of sources augments internal validity and also strengthens confirmability, concerns about the objectivity of the researcher. In this study, I triangulated my data in two ways: across methods and across different types of informants. The use of interview data and document analysis, "in concert compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits," (Guba, 1981 in Shenton, 2004, p. 65). Further, my interview subjects represent different interest groups. For example, when I interviewed Tennessee legislators, I included both members of the education committee as well as non-committee members to elicit similarities and differences in their experiences with the legislation.

I also attended to confirmability during data analysis and reporting of my results. During data analysis, I shared my transcripts with the chair of my dissertation committee and we engaged in informal debriefing discussions about the extent to which I had identified themes and patterns in common with the ones he recognized. These conversations helped to focus my analysis and also resulted in the addition of an interview I had not previously considered. The aforementioned memos and field notes contributed to the process of establishing confirmability, as did my inclusion of examples of quotations in reporting my results.

External Validity

Such thick descriptions of raw data correspondingly establish generalizability, or external validity. Because qualitative research is highly dependent upon context, it is incumbent upon the researcher to provide the reader with enough information about the inquiry to decide if the results and conclusions can be transferred to other contexts. In short, generalizability is concerned with balancing contextual factors with applications to a wider population. As it is difficult for the researcher to have enough knowledge of other contexts to confidently make such an assertion, this criterion is dependent upon the relationship between the investigator and the reader. I strove to provide thick descriptions of the aforementioned components in the chapters detailing my results. The explanation of my sampling methods also speaks to the generalizability and reliability of my results.

Reliability

Finally, reliability (dependability) was considered in two important ways. First, I addressed the traditional definition of reliability, which contends that repeated testing will reproduce results, by recoding sections of transcripts to ensure I was coding them consistently. Second, I dealt with the need to make the research design explicit by giving a detailed account, in this chapter, of the design plan and the actual implementation of my study. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six I offer an in-depth description of the results of my analyses.

Chapter IV

TENNESSEE'S EDUCATION POLICY ENVIRONMENT

"We were tired of being last, so…"
Tennessee State Representative

This sentiment, expressed by many state policymakers, reflects frustration and weariness with Tennessee's education system. Tennessee consistently ranks below the majority of other states in both reading and math, according to trends on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2011), and is in last place for per pupil expenditures (Baker, Sciarra & Farrie, 2010). Attempts to improve public education reach back several decades, but were intermittent. Table 5 (p. 67) contains a timeline of education reform in Tennessee.

To understand Tennessee's decision to enter and success in winning Race to the Top, it is necessary to analyze education reform efforts in the state that precipitated the competition. In this chapter I draw from interviews with legislators and non-elected policymakers to demonstrate how Tennessee's prolonged attention to education, uncommon in the typically fleeting lifespans of policy agendas (Kindgon, 1984) was instrumental in positioning the state for success in the Race to the Top program. I also consider the presence of environmental stimuli Mazzoni (1991) identifies as necessary for policy innovation in Tennessee.

Table 5. Education Reform Timeline in Tennessee Over Three Decades

1978	Legislation permitting Tennessee Education Association and affiliates to engage in collective bargaining.
1984	Comprehensive Education Reform Act. Established Career Ladder Program (merit pay for teachers) and a Basic Skills Program.
1991	Education Improvement Act. Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) introduced. LEAs required to report progress on students using TVAAS. System wide information is reported to the public. Individual teacher effect data is not.
1992	Basic Education Plan (BEP) created by legislation. Equitable funding formula for K-12 education shared by state and LEA. Three categories of funding: instructional, classroom, and non-classroom.
2002	Charter school program created by legislation. Limited to 50 schools. Enrollment extended to students attending, or zoned for, school failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), or who failed TCAP.
2007	BEP 2.0 passed by legislature. Increased state share of funding, eliminated cost differential factor formula, fully funded at-risk students, adjustments to student-teacher ratio. Governor Bredesen initated statewide conversation about raising state standards. Joined Achieve's Diploma Project aimed at increading high school standards and preparing students for college and careers.
2008	State Board of Education adopts new curriculum standards.
2009	Expansion of charter schools by legislature. Increased cap to 90 schools. Enrollment extended to low-income students. Race to the Top competition announced. Batttelle parternship announced to improve STEM education.
2010	First to the Top legislation passed. Mandates annual evaluation of teachers of which 50% must be based on student achievement data. Establishes Achievement School District. Tennessee wins first round of Race to the Top. Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee begins meeting to recommend guidelines for annual evaluations of educators, as stipulated in First to the Top bill.
2011	Charter school laws amended. Eliminated cap on number of charter schools. Eligibility extended to all students. Legislation ends collective bargaining for TEA and affiliates. State wide implementation of Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model.

Early Education Reform Efforts

The Comprehensive Education Reform Act of 1984, initiated by then-Governor Lamar Alexander, introduced a career ladder for teachers and a basic skills curriculum sequence

for students. The landmark legislation was the state's first major foray into education reform. Nearly a decade later, the Tennessee Value-Added System (TVAAS) was introduced. This longitudinal data system tracks student growth on standardized tests and links students with teachers and schools. A year later, in 1992, the Basic Education Plan was implemented. The BEP is a funding formula for ensuring equitable instructional, classroom, and non-classroom related allocations to schools across the state. Ten years later in 2002 lawmakers authorized 50 charter schools for children attending public schools that failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress. In spite of these efforts, Tennessee schools continued to struggle.

Crisis Event

Advancing an agenda

Tennessee might have continued along this path of making intermittent changes to education policy had it not been for the publication of the U.S. Chamber of Congress's *Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness* report in 2007. This study addressed concerns in the business community that students were not adequately prepared to succeed in college or the modern workplace. Each state was graded on nine categories, including academic achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), examinations to rigor of standards, and flexibility in management.

Tennessee received a failing grade in three of the nine categories, including the academic achievement of low-income and minority students, postsecondary and workforce readiness, and a category called truth in advertising about student proficiency (Institute for a Competitive Workforce, 2007). This category compared the percentage of students the state identified as proficient on math and reading exams to the percentage of proficient students on the NAEP in 2005. Tennessee's score reflected the large discrepancy between the two examination systems, with far more students scoring proficient on state assessments than on the NAEP. The report also noted that only 30% of ninth graders who finished high school enrolled in college. However, Tennessee did receive a B grade (the state did not receive any A's) in data quality for its value-added system that tracked student test scores over time.

In my interviews, five participants mentioned the significance of this report. According to one state senator, when Race to the Top was announced, the state's concerted attempt to reform education "…had been building over several years, actually, beginning with, I guess, even as early as '07. The truth in advertising F that the National Chamber of Commerce had put on Tennessee. So there were a lot of conversations going on statewide at different levels." One bureaucrat at the Tennessee Department of Education called it the "Cream Puff Award" for having such a large gap and not trying to remedy it. The publication of this report signified a crisis for the state and instigated a prolonged issue-attention cycle (Downs, 2005) bringing Tennessee's struggling schools to the top of policy agendas and putting pressure on policymakers for change.

Pressure for Change

Tennessee's Modern Education Reform movement

Mazzoni (1991) identifies several factors in the environment that bring pressure for change to the policy system including a crisis event, public and media outcry, and the organization of political elites and policy entrepreneurs. Figure 1 (p. 71) gives a summary of the arena model applied to Tennessee, including the environmental stimuli. Here I present an analysis of these stimuli.

In Tennessee, these factors coalesced to bring about Tennessee's "modern education movement" as termed by one former Bredesen advisor beginning "in 2007 during the standards movement," and "laid the foundation for a much more aggressive set of reforms and the Race to the Top." This movement was led by Governor Phil Bredesen and encompassed changes to the traditional public system like education funding and curriculum standards, as well as innovative reforms like school choice.

In 2007 the governor, who stated that education was his highest priority, embarked on a statewide campaign to alter Tennessee's reputation as an education laggard. To begin, he encouraged the successful passage of the Basic Education Program 2.0, which increased the state's contribution to education and lowered the student-teacher ratio. In the same year, Tennessee embarked on the Tennessee Diploma Project with the national education reform organization, Achieve. As part of this collaboration to prepare students for college and careers, Governor Bredesen initiated conversations about raising curriculum standards with education and business stakeholders across the state.

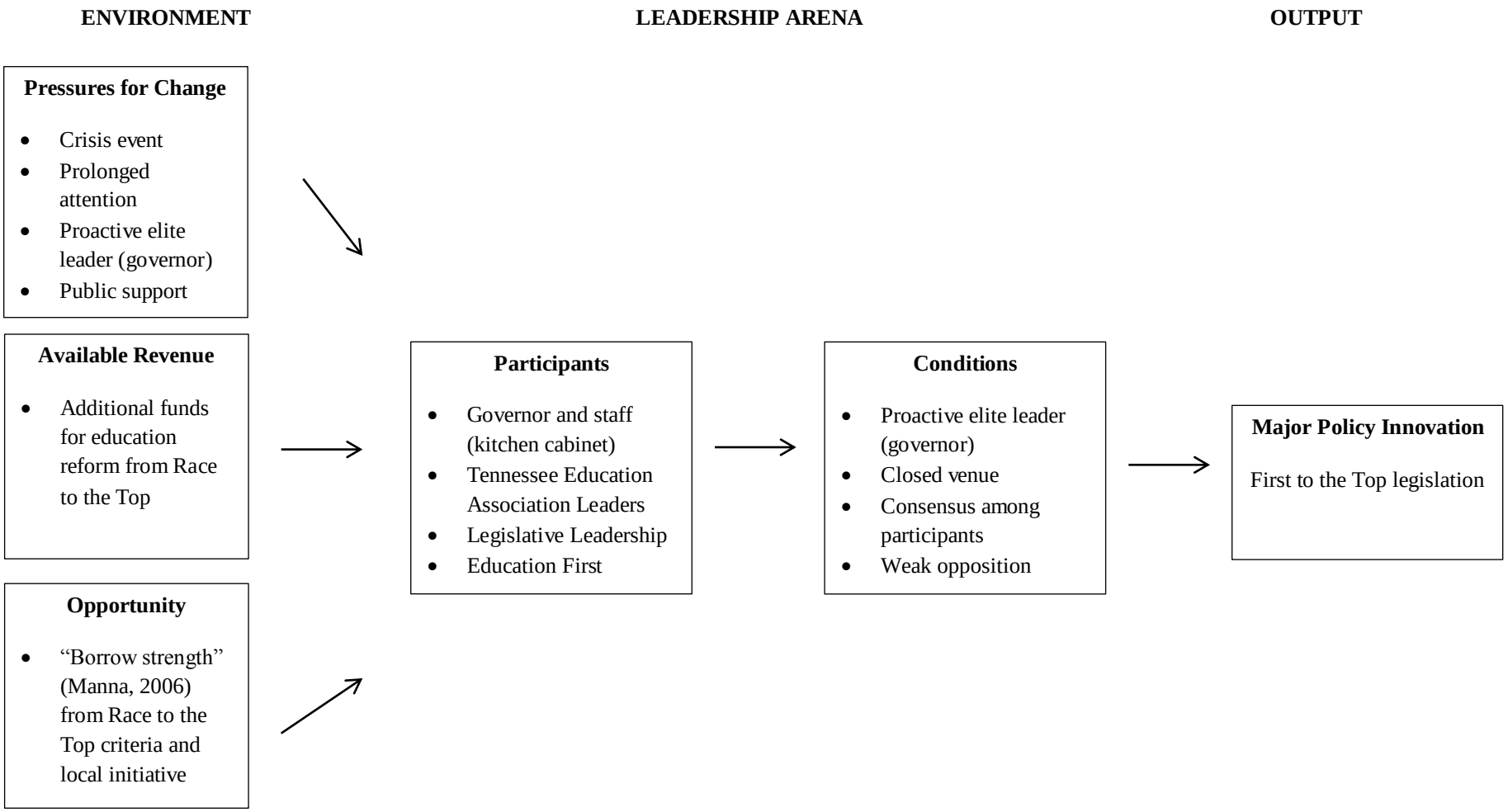

Figure 1. An arena model (Mazzoni, 1991) of the passage of Tennessee's First to the Top legislation.

Widespread participants to the policy process

The State Board of Education (SBE), rather than the governor, is responsible for approving curriculum changes. At the time most SBE members were Bredesen appointees, so presumably persuading them to agree would have been easy. However, as one former advisor to the governor explained:

> …instead what he wanted to do was to build a public case for it. So he had roundtable discussions all across the state with business leaders and CEOs talking to them about what was currently lacking in work force skills; what's not being addressed by the human capital they're getting out of high schools.

Over 100 business leaders joined in the roundtable discussions about curriculum standards hosted by the Governor. Participation from this community persisted throughout the Race to the Top application process and into the development of the educator evaluation system. These conversations brought the need for serious change in the education system to the forefront of public and political attention. Subsequently, in 2008, the State Board of Education adopted new K-12 curriculum standards in all subject areas.

Another effect of these conversations was inviting new participants to the policy process: business and community leaders as well as the education foundation, SCORE. Former U.S. Senator Bill Frist founded the Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education Commissions (SCORE), an organization dedicated to working with state and local governments to advance education policy reform. SCORE held town hall meetings across the state to gather information about the state's education priorities.

Eight interview participants specifically mentioned SCORE and their role in education reform. According to one legislative leader, SCORE "…brought in everybody from teachers, to the principals, the parents to the non-profit organizations, to the foundations, to the business people, the government folks, you name it. And to begin to kind of develop this consensus that we have to do something in Tennessee." While most policymakers expressed similarly positive statements about the work of SCORE, one legislator disagreed. A Harvard-educated attorney, this legislator described the report SCORE produced as "the biggest bunch of…after I read it I put it down, and they may not remember it, but I yelled. I said this was the biggest bunch of gobblygock bullshit I've ever read. It was just nothing but buzzword bingo." He further explained his criticism was due to the report's failure to address the fundamental problem: the high cost of fixing the schools. Nevertheless, it is clear that even though this legislator disagreed with SCORE's assessment, he, too, was concerned about education.

Statewide efforts were not limited to reforms within the traditional public education system. At the urging of the governor, and after a contentious battle in the state legislature, approval was given to expand the charter school cap to 90 schools and to extend enrollment to low-income students. Finally, endeavors to improve Tennessee's schools were not limited to state participants. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded Memphis City Schools a $90 million grant as part of its Teacher Effectiveness Initiative. The significance of this external agency's involvement in Tennessee cannot be underemphasized, as the Foundation was the top-ranked philanthropy and the third-place organization overall in a 2006 report of the leading influences in education policy (Swanson & Barlage, 2006).

My analysis of Tennessee's reform efforts precipitating Race to the Top finds evidence of a crisis event, widespread demand for change, and the organization of policy entrepreneurs thus corroborating the pressures for change Mazzoni (1991) identifies as preceding policy innovation. The pressure for education reform in Tennessee from 2007-2010 appears cyclical in nature: Reforms brought attention to the issue, which then led policymakers to call for more reforms. Repeated public attention – whether in the form of test scores or national reports – garnered political attention and engendered a sense of urgency. Additionally, the presence of a political elite, the governor, committed to the issue ensured its continual presence in the policy spotlight over several years. Both the pressure to improve and the governor's attention to public education facilitated several education reforms, and led Tennessee to be considered a strong contender for the Race to the Top competition (Brill, 2011; Gates Foundation, 2009).

Further Stimulus for Reform

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the protracted focus on education, there was widespread agreement in 2009 among policymakers that problems persisted. Legislators on both sides of the political aisle commented that Tennessee's decision to pursue Race to the Top, and the eventual success of the education reform bill, was due to the need to address a broken system. One Democratic representative expressed this sentiment saying, "I think the bill passed because there's enough bad stuff going on in education, enough doubt, misgivings, and frustration, that folks were ready to try anything at least once." His Republican counterpart stated simply, "The system is broken and we have to

recognize that…" Throughout the General Assembly, legislators expressed concerns similar to these, along with a desire to find policy solutions. A Knoxville legislator speaking about the research he had done regarding the proposed policy changes explained the need for new policy thusly, "…because obviously what we're doing now isn't working."

The governor also believed there was much work to be done. According to a former policy advisor and Tennessee Department of Education bureaucrat, Bredesen's concern about the state of education in Tennessee was "…coupled with this issue he had been struggling with for three years about what do we really do with our most failing schools and our lowest performing schools? How do we implement some sort of system to help turn those around?" Thus, when Race to the Top was announced it offered dissatisfied policymakers a new stimulus for reform efforts in Tennessee.

Race to the Top Criteria and Tennessee Policy

When the requirements for the Race to the Top competition were revealed, Tennessee found itself in an enviable position. Like many states, it had a struggling education system; the Volunteer State also had a recent history of education reforms. Finally, there was a favorable political climate across the state, led by a popular second-term governor. Rather than proposing a radical new direction for education reform, in Tennessee at least, Race to the Top became an opportunity to advance a path the state was already treading.

Three former members of the governor's staff spoke specifically about Bredesen's efforts to improve education by strengthening standards and assessments. One of these individuals declared that the state had "done all of the things that the application asked for… with the exception of the evaluation." Another, referring to the Race to the Top application priorities, stated that "the federal Race to the Top program just teed it up so nicely (for Tennessee), because of the four pillars, we arguably were pretty strong in most of them." Finally, one former policy advisor spoke about how Tennessee's previous work to improve standards was inadvertently a "cornerstone for Race to the Top." None of the participants in this study gave any indication that Race to the Top represented a revolutionary shift in education reform. Instead, it seemed to provide the leverage the state needed for policy innovation that was the next logical step.

Table 6 (pp. 77, 78) shows the alignment between the Race to the Top criteria and education policy in Tennessee. This next section focuses our attention on the first two columns – connections between the criteria and Tennessee's standing prior to the Special Session. The remaining columns are addressed in the following chapter.

Table 6. Connections between Race to the Top and Education Policy in Tennessee

Race to the Top Criteria	Education policy in TN prior to Special Session	First to the Top legislation	Tennessee's RTTT application	TN's points received
State Success Factors (125 points) 1) Articulate reform agenda and LEA's participation 2) Build capacity to implement and sustain plans 3) Demonstrate progress in raising			1) All 136 districts support TN's RTTT plans 2) 93% of TEA local leaders support TN's RTTT plans	112/125
Standards and Assessments (70 points) 1) Develop and adopt common standards 2) Develop and implement common assessments 3) Support transition to enhanced standards and assessments	1) 2007 Joined American Diploma Project 2) 2008 Approved new standards		1) Will adopt Common Core standards	67.6/70
Data Systems to Support Instruction (47 points) 1) Longitudinal data system 2) Accessing and using state data 3) Use data to improve instruction	1) TVAAS 18 years of longitudinal data		1) Create a P-20 state longitudinal data system 2) Expand existing data dashboard to include TVAAS 3) Require training for pre-service teachers on how to use TVAAS to improve instruction	43.6/47
Great Teachers and Leaders (138 points) 1) Provide high-quality pathways for educators 2) Improve educator effectiveness based on performance 3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective educators 4) Improve effectiveness of educator preparation programs 5) Provide effective support to educators		1) Mandates annual evaluation of teachers and principals 2) Establishes Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee to develop guidelines for evaluations 3) Mandates evaluations be a factor in personnel decisions 4) 50% of the evaluation based on student achievement data 5) Removes prohibition on using teacher effect data until three years of data are obtained	1) Fund expansion of traditional and alternative teacher training programs in hard-to-staff subjects 2) Competitive fund to assist distrcints in implementing alternative salary schedule	114/138

Table 6, continued

Race to the Top Criteria	Education policy in TN prior to Special Session	First to the Top legislation	Tennessee's RTTT application	TN's points received
Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (50 points) 1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs 2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools		1) Establishes Achievement School District (ASD) for persistently failing schools 2) Commissioner of education contracts with person or entitity to manage schools in ASD		48/50
General Selection Criteria (55 points) 1) Make education funding a priority 2) Ensuring successful conditions for charters and other innovative schools 3) Demonstrate other significant reform conditions	1) 1992 Basic Education Program 2.0 for equitable funding of schools 2) 2009 legislation expanded cap on charter schools			43.2/55
Emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (15 points, all or nothing) 1) Offer rigorous course of study in STEM 2) Cooperate with industry partners to prepare and assist teachers 3) Prepare more students for advanced study and careers in STEM	1) Partnership with Battelle to establish state network of programs and schools designed to expand teaching and learning in STEM educaton. Announced in December 2009.			15/15

The Race to the Top application encompassed seven sections: state success factors, standards and assessments, data systems to support instruction, great teachers and leaders, turning around failing schools general selection criteria, and emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Tennessee could claim established progress in three of these areas when the competition was announced: standards and assessments; the general selection criteria, and data systems to support instruction. Issues that the state needed to address were 'unlocking' the value-added data so that it could be used to evaluate teachers and principals; developing a plan for failing schools, and building widespread support for the plan.

Standards and assessments

In 2008, the State Board of Education approved new curriculum standards, and as the Governor's staff member indicated above, the state planned to adopt Common Core standards with other states and had implemented more rigorous assessments. These actions, coupled with the state's participation in the American Diploma Project, indicated commitment to the federal program's emphasis on standards and assessments.

Data systems and Tennessee's linchpin

Arguably Tennessee's greatest strength at this time was the longitudinal data system, TVAAS, that tracked student progress on state assessments and linked teachers with individual students. The application outlined an expectation that states would

develop such systems, but Tennessee's had been in place for 18 years. As the earlier report from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (2007) indicated, few states could make this claim. In the preceding years, Tennessee's districts had been required to report student progress to the state, and value-added information about the districts was publicly available. However, the legislation prohibited reporting teacher effect data for individual teachers, and the information was not used for teacher evaluations or retention and tenure decisions.

In a speech to the General Assembly, Governor Bredesen stated that he believed Tennessee had a competitive edge over other states for many reasons. However, he also clearly identified Tennessee's greatest weakness regarding its use, or, rather lack of use, of the longitudinal data system. Two senators with leadership roles in education explained how the statute in Tennessee prohibited the use of the data in many ways now required by Race to the Top. One of the senators explained that the First to the Top legislation was necessary to ensure there weren't any barriers to using data. The other senator was more direct in saying that if Tennessee did not remove this prohibition, then there was no reason for the state to apply.

The Race to the Top application distributes a total of 500 points across six categories. The fourth category, great teachers and leaders, had the highest possible number of points, 138. Within that category, a state's plan for improving educator effectiveness based on performance was weighted most heavily, at 58 points – more than double any combination of two other criteria in the category. Finally, within that one criterion – improving educator effectiveness – states needed to establish a plan to measure student growth (5 points); design and implement an educator evaluation system

(15 points); conduct annual evaluations of teachers and principals, including the use of student growth data (10 points); and use the evaluations to inform professional development, make decisions regarding pay, promotion, retention, and tenure or teachers, and remove ineffective teachers and principals (28 points).

If the point distribution left any question as to the Obama administration's intention that student data was to be an essential component of teacher evaluations, Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education, forcefully clarified it when he announced that any state with "a law on the books forbidding the linking of student test scores to individual teachers," would be prohibited from applying, (Brill, 2011, p. 260). A senior policy advisor to Governor Bredesen was quite accurate in his statement "that ultimately what was going to be the linchpin in the proposal would be unlocking the value-added assessment system to be used in teacher evaluations."

General selection

Two other recent policy changes reflected Race to the Top general selection priorities: changes to school funding and charter school restrictions. Improvements to the Basic Education Plan in 2007 ensured a more equitable distribution of money to schools, while the cap on charter schools was increased to 90. The latter legislation also authorized the closure of charter schools that failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress for two years, which according to Tennessee's Race to the Top application, was one of the toughest charter school accountability laws across the country.

Failing schools and STEM subjects

As a member of the governor's staff explained, once they understood that legislation would be necessary for the state's bid to win, "we also knew that there had to be some stuff done giving the state authority to take over schools more clearly." Turning around the lowest achieving schools, the fifth category in the Race to the Top application, was worth 50 points, in the middle of the point distribution, but Tennessee had nothing in place that addressed this criterion. According to a member of the governor's staff who went on to work for the Department of Education, both the value-added data and the issue of what to do with failing schools weighed heavily on the governor's mind. So did another aspect of the competition: the emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). This seemingly innocuous category – worth a mere 15 points, but to be awarded as all or nothing – became "a very important part" for Tennessee, recalled a senior policy advisor.

In summary, education reform in Tennessee was already on the policy agenda in 2009 when the Obama administration announced its competitive program to fund innovative solutions in the states. Even more promising for the Volunteer State, many of the reforms they had recently implemented reflected Race to the Top priorities. According to Mazzoni (1991), major policy change is preceded by environmental stimuli. In Tennessee, negative publicity about the education system generated a series of policy changes intended to reform the state's reputation. As reforms commenced, widespread public support grew from non-traditional sources, namely the business community and non-profit organizations. This dynamic created conditions amenable to additional reform

endeavors, and when an additional stimulus was introduced by the federal government, Tennessee was well-positioned for a competitive advantage.

Available Revenue

In addition to environmental pressure for change, the arena model (Mazzoni, 1991) requires new revenue to enhance the likelihood of policy innovation. Race to the Top, with its promise of money to winners in difficult financial times was an attractive incentive. Although the policy initiatives outlined by Race to the Top promoted ideas many states were interested in pursuing, the opportunity to win money cannot be underestimated. A former deputy to the governor with a long career in government gave his assessment about how the money mattered:

> I will tell you this, others will tell you, that the reforms that we undertook around First to the Top were things that needed to be done, that would have been done irrespective of the money, that would have been proposed irrespective of the money. Truth is, it would not have happened but for the promise, the opportunity, to achieve some serious financial assistance through Race to the Top. Now if we're truthful, it would have been proposed over time; I think all of these things would have happened but it would have been a decade.

This civil servant made no attempt to hide his admiration for the stimulation Race to the Top provided. He continued:

> (s)ome pretty far-reaching kinds of policy changes were all achieved in that very short window of time and were driven primarily by Race to the Top. I mean, Arne Duncan is a genius. Whoever helped conceive of this thing for him. Because it really did move the needle on policy in a way that skipped a generation. It was amazing.

Other study participants also commented on the effect the promise of money seemed to have. For one Senate Republican, the competition, "was really a vehicle for there to be some wind in our sail financially in a really tight budget time…" Dismissing the notion that the money was the only reason for Tennessee's interest, she continued, "it was just good timing for Tennessee to get an investment in what was already building to be a comprehensive plan for Tennessee." Like the former deputy governor who believed the policy changes would have occurred eventually, this legislator views Race to the Top as the catalyst the state needed to continue its efforts.

The aforementioned senator, who spoke about the necessity of changing laws if Tennessee wanted to enter the contest, adopted a more cynical view about the lure of money. He expressed bemused bewilderment as he talked about states' decisions to change policy in order to chase "this money, which, let's face it, is chump change." Although he acknowledged that Tennessee's $485 million award is a significant amount of money, when he considered the share his county will receive over a period of several years, it was only a fraction of the county's entire education budget. But, nonetheless, he believed it was the money that prompted the governor to take on these issues because, he says, "the governor was absolutely convinced that number one we were going to get some serious dough, and number two was that we weren't going to get anything unless we changed things. So he decided that was what we were going to do."

According to my study participants, Tennessee decided to enter the Race because it allowed the state to continue its reform efforts. However, they also acknowledged the importance of the money winning the competition would bring. Thus, while Fowler (1994) does not find evidence that additional revenue is necessary to provoke policy

innovation in her application of the arena model (Mazzoni, 1991), this study finds support for this condition of Mazzoni's model.

Pressure or Opportunity?

Mazzoni (1991) identifies several environmental stimuli that provoke policy innovation, by concentrating on pressure at the state level. In her critique of the arena model (Mazzoni, 1991), Fowler (1994) calls for an expanded conceptualization of the environment to include national level policymakers as a source of pressure. Although Race to the Top was advanced by the federal government, interviews with Tennessee policymakers (both elected official and non-elected civil servants) do not substantiate the idea that the state was responding to pressure when it decided to enter the Race. In this next section, I draw from Manna's (2006) theory of borrowing strength to propose a third potential precursor to policy innovation: the opportunity to leverage license from other levels of government.

Leverage at the federal level

The governor could, and did, use the competition as justification for the legislative changes embodied in the First to the Top Legislation. In his speech to the General Assembly at the commencement of the Special Session, the governor declared that he was exercising his right to call a Special Session for only the second time in his term because, "I believe there are opportunities – and obligations – before us that are as

compelling as any I have seen in my time as Governor." Bredesen looked to the federal government for the license he needed to build support for radical policy changes in reforming struggling schools. Specifically, he outlined the discrepancies between Race to the Top criteria and Tennessee's education policy in two areas: failing schools and teacher and principal evaluations.

In discussing the governor's concern for failing schools, a former policy advisor did not believe the governor "felt like a single solution was having the state take over and run schools, but yet, he looked for some way to create more teeth in the laws and looked for more ways the state could intervene or force some intervention or change in the lowest performing schools." Race to the Top stipulated that a plan be developed for direct state intervention in the "persistently lowest-achieving schools." This offered the state the necessary leverage to warrant its intrusion into local control.

Most important, Bredesen was also able to draw strength from the competition for his proposals regarding educator evaluations. Secretary Duncan's assertion that states that prohibited the use of student data for teacher evaluation were ineligible to apply, coupled with the high-point value assigned for developing such systems, provided a strong rationale for pursuing an ambitious plan. The present statute prevented value-added data from being used until after a teacher's third year, by which point tenure decisions had already been made. To be competitive, Tennessee would need to make changes to existing policy.

Local license

A local initiative also provided some leverage for the proposed legislation. A Bredesen policy advisor talked about how the Gates Foundation grant awarded to Memphis for developing a teacher effectiveness program helped the governor's push to unlock the data. He believed it "eased some political tension through the process," because:

> you had this Democratic stronghold of state politics down there (in Memphis) that ordinarily would be prone to kind of follow the union wherever the union told them to go. But they had already had this very open conversation in their community about teacher effectiveness and it was a very positive situation happening down there.

Unexpectedly, a reform effort in one urban district provided a source of strength for a state-wide initiative. Tennessee policymakers were able to leverage their plans for the state by looking to both the federal and local levels for support.

Whereas Bredesen's policy advisor felt the Memphis initiative generated what Manna (2006) considers positive feedback, one Memphis area representative felt it had the opposite effect. Referring to the Gates grant, he explained, "There were a lot of folks who didn't necessarily like that. They felt it was a sell-out of the city, so Race to the Top, in a lot of folks' opinion, was just a continuation of the sell-out." Rather than viewing the grant as an opportunity to leverage Governor Bredesen's proposed policy changes, this representative espoused the idea that opposition to the Memphis program generated a negative attitude for the state's Race to the Top bid.

This notion of borrowing strength to build the state's capacity was noted by a former Senator and member of the Republican leadership team. She described the federal government's approach as "very out of the box" and "really wise, because states were able to build on their own conversations that they were having and develop their own pretty rigorous plans for moving forward." Her explanation lends further support to the idea that federal competition presented Tennessee with the opportunity to continue education reform efforts already underway rather than mandate conformity. Accordingly, Tennessee's decision to enter the Race can be understood as a result of three factors: a cyclical and prolonged process of pressure and attention, the availability of new revenue, and the opportunity to leverage license from other levels of government. One other reason was mentioned by study participants.

Legacy

Thus far, there is evidence to suggest that the state's decision to enter Race to the Top was motivated by pressure within the state to reform education, the opportunity to leverage license for reforms from other levels of government, and the lure of money which might accelerate innovative policy changes in a short time. Yet, four other participants offered another reason for consideration: a legacy play by the governor. Although all of these individuals acknowledged other motives for Tennessee's decision, including that it was a way to continue the path of education reform already in place, they also felt the governor was aware that his term was drawing to a close and this was an opportunity to "put a final stamp on his legacy as an education governor," (State senator).

Whatever the many reasons for Tennessee's decision to enter the race, and in spite of the state's strong position, winning was not guaranteed. There was a great deal of work to be done in a very short amount of time. Accordingly, the governor's team launched a relentless campaign to soften the system (Kingdon, 1994) and allow for an unprecedented level of bipartisan support for education reform.

Chapter Summary

The Race to the Top competition, though unique in many ways, did not propel education reform onto the policy agenda in Tennessee. Rather, it provided additional stimulus, both financially and symbolically, to an endeavor begun in 2007. Earlier efforts to collect longitudinal student data and ensure equitable funding to schools notwithstanding, Tennessee's launch into concerted reform efforts was precipitated by the U.S Chamber of Commerce's publication that gave the state failing scores in several areas.

Phil Bredesen, the popular Democratic governor in his second term, focused his attention on high school graduation rates, curriculum standards, and statewide assessments. His efforts were neither constrained to traditional facets of education, nor to conventional stakeholders. Under his guidance, the laws governing charter schools were amended to increase both the number of such schools allowed in the state and expand the criteria for student eligibility. During this same time, the governor invited members of the business and foundations community to participate in conversations about what Tennessee needed to do to strengthen K-12 education.

This cyclical process of attention and policy change generated momentum for keeping education reform on the state's agenda. Led primarily by Governor Bredesen's commitment to education, the Volunteer State was well positioned to enter the Race to the Top competition. Yet, though Tennessee could claim progress in several of the areas outlined by the competition criteria, three areas – teacher evaluations, intervention in failing schools, and STEM priorities – would become crucial targets for success. Among these, unlocking Tennessee's longitudinal data system, TVASS, was absolutely essential in the state's efforts to win. To build support for this dramatic policy change, Governor Bredesen was able to leverage strength from both the federal competition with its promise of money, as well as local initiatives in Memphis, one of four districts to receive a grant from the Gates Foundation to improve teacher effectiveness.

CHAPTER V

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION IN TENNESSEE

The education policy environment in Tennessee was committed to reform, and as Governor Bredesen's term was drawing to a close, Race to the Top was an opportunity to continue reform efforts and represented one final chance for him to leave a lasting mark on the state. This potent mixture of pressure for change, money, and opportunity instigated an intense ambition to be 'first to the top.' In this chapter, I report my results from interviews with legislators and non-elected policymakers to examine the participants and conditions in Tennessee's leadership arena that facilitated major policy innovation with the passage of First to the Top. Figure 1 (p. 71) summarizes my findings for the arena model in Tennessee (Mazzoni, 1991).

First to the Top

Tennessee's First to the Top Act had six main areas of emphasis:

1) Established an Achievement School District allowing the commissioner of the state Department of Education to intervene in consistently failing schools;
2) Required annual evaluations of teachers and principals;

3) Created a 15-member advisory committee charged with the task of recommending guidelines for evaluations;

4) Removed restrictions against using teacher effect data until data from three complete years are obtained;

5) Required personnel decisions (promotion, retention, tenure, compensation) be based in part on evaluations;

6) Mandated that 50 percent of teacher and principal evaluations be based on student achievement data.

Although the Achievement School District shifted authority of failing schools away from local districts and to the state, the most provocative aspects of the bill were the changes it made to teacher and principal evaluations: namely, requiring annual evaluations, basing half of those evaluations on student achievement data, and mandating that evaluations be a factor in personnel decisions. (Appendix A presents a copy of the legislation while Table 6, pp. 76,77, provides a concise summary of the alignment between the Race to the Top criteria and Tennessee's proposed legislation, including the components of the state's application and points received.)

Arenas in Tennessee

. The arena model identifies the presence of four arenas with the state policymaking system: subsystem, macro, commission, and leadership (Mazzoni, 1991). Both Mazzoni (1991) and Fowler (1994) find evidence to support the likelihood of policy

innovation when there is a shift from the subsystem to leadership arena. Because of their findings, and importantly, because the reform efforts in Tennessee immediately preceding Race to the Top were led by the governor, this study does not seek to confirm the existence of the subsystem, macro, and commission arenas. Instead, it accepts the presence of the leadership arena as the dominant venue for policy innovation and investigates the participants and conditions that facilitated innovation in this arena.

Proactive Leadership of Political Elite

Initial conversations between the governor and his staff about how to position the state for success began shortly after the stimulus bill was passed and the Obama administration announced that $5 billion would be set aside for the competitive program – well in advance of the release of the specific criteria for the contest. Proactive leadership at the top level of government such as this was identified as essential to policy innovation by Mazzoni (1991), following his study of education reform in Minnesota.

In Tennessee, Governor Phil Bredesen enjoyed a job approval rating that hovered around 70%. He was re-elected in a landslide victory, winning all 95 counties within the state; a remarkable accomplishment in any event, but particularly so for a Democrat in a very Red state. Given this, a former deputy governor admitted he would not have been surprised if the governor had "adopted the attitude that these last two years, I'm going to do victory laps." Instead, Governor Bredesen led the charge to change state statutes that would have precluded the state's entry in the race.

There was a perception among bureaucrats and legislators that Bredesen's popularity was well-deserved. Members of the governor's staff and bureaucrats at the Tennessee Department of Education (six in total) talked about his tendency to reach out to other stakeholders, even the opposition. A former Department of Education employee gave an example of this strategy from early on in Bredesen's first term:

> The very first challenge he had in January of 2003, when he came in, we were looking at the third small school system lawsuit staring us in the face. And the first thing he did was bring in a group of legislators from both sides, all the different stakeholders, higher education, business representatives, the whole gamut and started working through it with that approach. So yes, he's always been noted for that regardless of the issue…

Bredesen also had a good relationship with the TEA, a sentiment expressed not only by the governor's staff but also by both TEA officials interviewed for this study. Bredesen's popularity is noteworthy because Mazzoni (1991) contends that political elites in the leadership arena are more likely to benefit from additional resources including: political savvy developed through experience, larger staff, the support of their party, access to favorable media attention, and accumulated political favors.

Additional Resources

Deploying a kitchen cabinet

In Tennessee, Governor Bredesen first accessed these resources when he deployed a "kitchen cabinet," reporting to the deputy governor, to begin strategizing

about the state's application for Race to the Top. According to one senior policy advisor, the group included the governor's staff and representatives from the business and foundation communities, the Department of Education and the State Board of Education. The kitchen cabinet's efforts were bolstered by the Gates Foundation's decision to provide technical assistance to Tennessee, and a handful of other states whose chances for winning they deemed "promising"(Brill, 2011; Gates Foundation, 2009).

Tennessee chose the consulting firm Education First to help finesse the state's application. Throughout the summer of 2009, this working group – the kitchen cabinet, now joined by Education First – put together the crux of Tennessee's plan to win. Although the state could demonstrate progress in three of the areas outlined by the Race to the Top application (see Chapter IV and Table 6, pp. 76,77) it needed to address other critical areas. According to a senior policy advisor, the plan included:

- affirming the state's commitment to common core standards and common assessments;
- deploying more charter schools;
- developing the Achievement School District;
- contemplating new types of professional development for educators;
- and aggressively investigating what it would take to unlock TVAAS data.

It was this last point upon which the kitchen cabinet focused the most. As stated by the deputy governor, by late summer, it became clear that, "for us to be successful we really needed to position the state aggressively in this teacher evaluation dynamic." To accomplish this, the state needed to do two things: remove the statute prohibiting the use

of value-added data and develop an evaluation system based on student success. (The third column of Table 6, pp. 76, 77, details the specifics of the First to the Top legislation as it corresponds to the Race to the Top criteria in the first column.)

STEM partnership

In addition to these five focal areas, to be competitive, the state needed to accomplish two other important tasks to complete the application and build momentum for the proposed policy changes. These accomplishments are shown on Table 6 (pp. 76, 77). First, in December 2009, the governor announced a partnership with the research and development firm, Battelle, to develop a network of programs and schools with a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics focus. Although only assigned 15 points on the application, Governor Bredesen believed strongly enough in this aspect that when he addressed the General Assembly, he described it as one of the three major areas of emphasis in the state's application.

LEA support

The second task was persuading all 136 school districts to pledge their support for the plan. The state asked the school board, superintendent, and local Association president of each district to sign a memorandum of understanding (per Race to the Top application guidelines) indicating their agreement to participate in new state standards and assessments as well as the new annual evaluation system for principals and teachers.

Like the partnership with Battelle, the governor's announcement to the General Assembly that all districts had signed-on strengthened the case that legislators needed to pass the First to the Top bill. I asked two members of the governor's staff who were intimately involved with planning the Special Session if they intentionally obtained the districts' agreement before the session commenced. Both denied that there were any conversations about this, but also acknowledged that it certainly did help. One individual explained:

> No, it was really more… it wasn't about the legislation passing. It was really more about competing for the Race to the Top grant. I'm not sure in my mind we ever related that to the passing of the legislation. It was a great point to make and it suggested to the Assembly that it was a big deal and it was a state-wide effort. But having everybody sign up was really more about showing folks that we were going to be scoring the proposal and everybody was on board.

These two factors, the STEM partnership and the districts' participation, were initiated as part of the state's goal of submitting a competitive Race to the Top application; however, they had a secondary function of making it more difficult for legislators to object to the proposed policy changes. As one representative later explained, "The fact that all school systems in Tennessee signed a pledge to support this pretty much established the boundaries of how far they (opponents) could go to overtly work against the bill."

Governor Bredesen was able to accomplish these tasks, in part because he had the staff to manage the process and media access to announce these successes. Another resource at his disposal was the ability to call a special legislative session to address his reform proposals outlined in First to the Top.

Special Session strategy

As the deadline for the first round of Race to the Top applications drew near, the decision was made to address the First to the Top legislation in a special legislative session. Tennessee's Constitution grants governors the power to call such a session, but it is a power they use sparingly: Governor Bredesen had only called one other such session. When it was announced on December 15, 2009, the governor stated, "Sometimes the stars line up to create an opportunity that no one expected. And when you're in public office, you're obligated to seize the moment when it happens." (Bredesen announces plans for a special session, 2009) The governor would repeat this statement in his address to lawmakers on the eve of the Special Session in January, and while the opportunity to compete for much-needed dollars was extraordinary, the decision to hold a special session was not nearly as capricious as the phrase "seize the moment" conveyed.

The policymakers I interviewed were highly consistent regarding the decision to hold a Special Session. According to a former bureaucrat at the Department of Education, as well as other insiders, the benefit of a Special Session is that legislators "can only talk about that one thing and you can't get bogged down in…some other issues because you have to stay completely focused on just that one issue. Not just education in general, but that one bill that's being proposed." A more blunt sentiment was offered by a governor's policy advisor:

> …just to be honest about it, part of doing the special session quickly is that you get it all lined up and you get it done really quickly. That's sort of the point of a special session is you don't have the time for things to become bigger issues.

Two other members of the governor's staff acknowledged these benefits, and said the decision to call a Special Session was done in part because of the Race to the Top deadline, but also because there is too much going on in the regular legislative session to give this issue the attention it deserved.

Another informant, a House Democrat, explained, "Bredesen, I think, was smart…at first I criticized him for it, to wait for the last minute, but I think strategically he did that on purpose…to put on pressure." Whether the decision to wait until only a week before the deadline was strategic or the result of logistics, it engendered a sense of urgency and concentration among legislators both because of the looming Race to the Top application deadline and the need to begin the regular legislative session. This level of determination provoked a drastic change, "probably one of the biggest first steps that the state has ever made in education," commented a member of the House education committee.

Governor Bredesen was able to strategically utilize the resources available to his position, including large staff, media access, and the ability to call a Special Session in preparing Tennessee's application for Race to the Top. However, before considering the outcome of the Special Session, it is important to examine the effect of the closed nature of the leadership arena.

Closed Arena

This leadership arena (Mazzoni, 1991), characterized by the interactions of individuals – both government officials and private groups who influence them - affords

its members lower public visibility, subsequently restricting access in the initial planning stages and increasing the likelihood of consensus among the participants. In Tennessee, there was an additional necessity for restricting access to the leadership arena: the competitive element of Race to the Top.

During the kitchen cabinet's initial planning, efforts were made to keep the plans "under wraps" in an effort to prevent other states from learning about Tennessee's plans. According to one member of the governor's staff, this was "very different from how education policy normally works." Typically, she explained, education policy is characterized by conversations similar to "what have you done in your state, and tell me more about it, and I'm going to figure out how to do that in my state." Yet that was not the case with Race to the Top. Secretary Duncan promised that only a few states – those with the strongest plans – would win. This forced states into an interesting position: trying to develop viable winning plans without showing their hand to their competition. And, as the fourth quarter approached, the planning "kicked into overdrive" as the urgency to make statutory changes was heightened.

The U.S. Department of Education's announcement that a state's application would only receive points for legislative changes that had been made – not for promises to make changes if the state won - was a game changer for Tennessee. As the governor would later explain in his speech to the General Assembly:

> While we once thought that we could promise in our Race to the Top application to change this in the future, we learned in November that the only things that will count are those that are established in the law on the date of the application: January 19th. Right now we're not competitive. Your job this week is to fix that.

However, the immediate impact of this announcement was the realization that the working group needed to reach out to other stakeholders, namely TEA and the legislative leadership.

Opening the Arena

Tennessee Education Association

In many states, the Race to the Top application was threatened by strong opposition from teachers' unions (Brill, 2011). Colorado, Michigan, and New York are a few examples. Tennessee's story was different. The state would ultimately pass comprehensive education reform legislation with nearly unanimous support and submit an application with support from 93% of local teachers' unions. What explains the contrast between Tennessee and states like Colorado, Michigan, and New York? According to TEA officials and members of the governor's staff who participated in negotiations with TEA, it came down to two factors: trust and political reality.

Back and forth negotiations

Governor Bredesen reached out to TEA leaders in late November. At a luncheon the governor hosted for the executive director of TEA, the director of government relations, and the Association president, he presented his plan, saying "I want to talk to you about something that is not in TEA's DNA." TEA officials describe the governor as

speaking "candidly" about his support for Race to the Top and its stipulations. He wanted to win, and he wanted the Association's support to do it. The luncheon initiated a series of "tough" negotiations between the TEA leadership and members of the governor's staff.

The Race to the Top application guidelines clearly outlined expectations for annual evaluations of educators linked with student data. What it did not specify was the weight that needed to be given to the data. Tennessee wanted to win, as did all the other states that were entering, so no one wanted to divulge the percentage they were promising to give. As one policy advisor explained, a rumor circulating among education policy circles was that Indiana had settled on 50% of a teacher's evaluation depending on student data. So, Governor Bredesen decided Tennessee would go for 51%.

As individuals involved in this process explained, TEA officials were adamant that this was too much; they wanted 35%. Negotiations went back and forth with little progress. At one point, the deputy governor, following Bredesen's orders, told TEA officials they could either agree and continue to have input into the legislation or the governor would go ahead "and beat you in the legislature." The officials walked out; a few hours later the governor's representatives called them back and offered to settle at 50% of the teacher's evaluation comprised of student data, with 35% of the 50% specifically value-added data. TEA officials agreed to present this compromise to their Board.

TEA officials met with the Board to explain the compromise on the table and to discuss the pros and cons of endorsing the plan. One TEA leader wanted to make it very

clear to the Board that he was deferring to them. He told them, "We can either accept this compromise and move forward, or I'll be glad to chain myself to the pillars of the Capitol in opposition to this, but you all are going to make that decision. I'm not." The Board voted to support the plan.

Trust

While representatives from all parties involved in these negotiations talk about the challenges they encountered, they also speak with great respect for each other and the process. One TEA official believes the people representing the governor's office "went as far as they could go to really be conciliatory in this process." Another lauds the relationship TEA had with the governor:

> I've said this over and over again to people, and I've said it to our own members: never, never did I think that I could not trust the governor's office. I couldn't say that now. But never did I think that they would not do what they said they would do or that they would not honor their word. And I think they felt the same way about us. And I think we had probably built that relationship over the eight years that Governor Bredesen had been there, (TEA official).

This idea was substantiated by other informants and Bredesen himself acknowledged it (Brill, 2011).

These feelings of respect and trust were mutual; one member of the governor's staff describes a TEA official as demonstrating "incredible personal courage to do what he did" in supporting the legislation. Another believes TEA "came to the table and agreed to do some things …that probably weren't comfortable for them to agree to" in "good faith" because of "their longstanding good relationship with the governor." This

relationship is an example of another resource the governor possessed: accumulated favors. TEA was willing to participate in these discussions because they trusted the governor to treat them fairly. No one overtly classified this as a situation where TEA owed anything to the governor, but rather it is a more implicit understanding of the value of cooperation.

Political reality

Undoubtedly influenced by the positive relationship that existed between the governor and TEA, the political reality of the situation also forced the outcome. One TEA official says that while the organization agreed to the compromise, he was "not real comfortable with what we agreed to do," but that over the years he had learned "to count the votes. And it was going to pass. We could have laid down in front of the train and gotten run over by it… but there's no question in my mind that it was going to pass." Both TEA officials interviewed in this study acknowledged that it was better to try to impact the legislation in a positive way rather than jump aboard a sinking ship.

The other TEA official explained, "It was very much a political decision for us, not an education and policy decision… our paramount reason to agreeing to it was just the political reality that we found ourselves in." Further, because TEA officials were communicating constantly (primarily through email) with their members, they sensed that the majority of teachers also "understood the dynamics of the situation" and that the Association did "what we had to do." Nonetheless, they did catch "a lot of heat" from some members.

The political reality of the situation influenced the governor's camp as well. TEA officials believed that the governor sought their support because he needed their signatures for the Race to the Top application. One member of the governor's staff agreed that this was important, but they also wanted to persuade the Association not to "mount a vigorous opposition to trying to pass the bill" because that "can be a political problem."

The Tennessee leadership arena, which until that point had been restricted to the kitchen cabinet, had now expanded to include leaders at the TEA. And, based in part on the governor's positive history with TEA, there was a great deal of willingness on both sides to negotiate. In Tennessee, there was a sense among TEA officials that opposing the bill, which was sure to be enacted, would provoke more of a backlash than supporting it did. For their part, the governor's office believed the bill could pass regardless of the Association's support, but still preferred to avoid a messy fight in the legislature. Both parties were motivated to avoid conflict, and the high level of trust ripened conditions for innovation without interference. While working to gain TEA's support, the administration was simultaneously building its case with the legislative leadership.

Legislative Leadership

The governor had been meeting regularly with members of the legislative leadership to talk about what changes were needed in higher education. According to two senate leaders, Bredesen first announced his plans for Race to the Top at one of these meetings. Gaining the support of the legislative leadership was important because the

reforms Governor Bredesen was proposing, much like the criteria in the Race to the Top application, were more commonly championed by Republicans. And, although Republicans enjoyed a slight majority in both the Senate (18 to 14) and House (50 to 48), one informant contended, "…the Republicans said they were in charge but they weren't," because there was "one Republican who voted with the Democrats a lot." Thus, though Mazzoni (1991) contends that a political leader is likely to enjoy party support, a TEA leader believed most Republicans were "on board" and the "division would (have been) in the Democratic caucus."

An interview with one of the bill's sponsors, a Democrat, lends support to this idea. He explained, "As a matter of fact, I would not have carried the bill if the teachers didn't sign off on it. I told the governor that." Four other legislators also commented that their decision to support the bill was based largely on gaining the support of educators. Thus, an added incentive for the governor to gain TEA's support was to convince legislative leaders to endorse the plan and work to convince their colleagues to do the same.

One benefit of the leadership arena's restricted access that was strategically opened to TEA and the legislative leadership was low visibility. This low visibility simultaneously encourages consensus among members and decreases the likelihood that opposition groups will form. Both of these conditions also increase the likelihood of policy innovation (Mazzoni, 1991). The events in Tennessee indicate that the passage of First to the Top was not about opposing voices, but about those who supported it.

Supporting Innovation

Session Logistics

The narrow focus of a special legislative session changes the way the General Assembly typically operates. Rather than having multiple committees working on issues, only the committees affected by the specific legislation operate during a Special Session; in this case, education and finance. As one senator described, during the regular session "…we have many things going on, many things you have to make up your mind. We have multiple voices at all times, all clamoring for our attention. And the challenge is to be heard." But, for one week in January 2010, there was an opportunity for "concentrated study and review" much like learning a language "when you're totally immersed" said a Republican Representative.

Widespread support

When the Special Session began, TEA was openly, albeit cautiously, supportive of the legislation, leadership in both parties and houses were actively working to build support, and the governor could also claim support from all 136 school districts. So it makes sense that four individuals specifically commented there were few changes to the bill the governor originally proposed and instead, most of the time during the week was spent "letting people get comfortable with it," as one bill sponsor described. The session was "politics at its best, rather than at its worst," summarized one representative because, "we had an opportunity to speak our minds and voice our opposition. But then, ultimately, one side won, but that's the way democracy is supposed to work."

The bill passed with only 11 "no" votes out of a possible 132. And, although the Democrats might have needed more convincing, four of them, along with five Republicans, say they voted for the bill because they agreed with the changes. A Republican freshman, whose first experience as a legislator was the Special Session, says he thought "overall" there were good ideas in the bill and notably, supported the idea of using the data Tennessee had been collecting for many years. A Democratic senator concurred, declaring that tying teacher evaluations to student test scores would "put pressure on teachers to achieve…we all do better when we're working under a little pressure." Similar sentiments expressed by others who supported the bill likely contributed to five legislators describing the bipartisan nature of the special session. One representative believes the bipartisan effort "was key to the bold aspects of this piece of legislation and how it came to be and how it finished up."

Such high level of cohesion among members in the leadership arena is an important factor for facilitating policy innovation (Mazzoni, 1991). Another factor is weak opposition. In addition to the reasons offered by the legislators who voted against the bill, the weak opposition can be attributed to a lack of organized leadership.

Weak Opposition

Voting against the bill

I interviewed five of the legislators who opposed the bill as well one representative who abstained from voting. They offered three reasons for opposing the bill. One senator representing counties just outside of Nashville was upset at being asked to make such a major policy change in a short timeframe and opposed the bill because she believed Race to the Top violated the 10th amendment. Although another Republican legislator also mentioned his objection to the federal government's interference in state affairs, this senator stood out as the only one to vote against the bill for this reason.

The remaining legislators who opposed the bill did so either because they disagreed with its provisions or because they heard from constituents, primarily educators, who urged them not to support the bill. For one Democratic representative who had served his community for many years, it was a difficult decision, particularly because of his respect for the governor. Yet, in the end, he decided to vote "against an education bill for the first time," because of the concern teachers from his district had and his own worries about making such big changes without the money being guaranteed. Although these legislators spoke passionately about why they voted against the bill, their voices were lost in the sea of supporters. Another reason for the successful passage of the bill was the lack of organized opposition.

Lack of organized opposition

The lack of organized opposition to First to the Top can be explained by three factors: the closed nature of the leadership arena; timing; and politics. Restricting access to the leadership arena allowed the kitchen cabinet to prepare the state's application without alerting potential opponents to their plans. It is difficult for objections to develop when policies are developed behind closed doors. Though noted previously by one policy advisor, this is an unusual context for education policy, the competitive aspect of Race to the Top necessitated secrecy.

The timing of the events also had an effect on the lack of opposition. The kitchen cabinet began working on these matters in the summer 2010. However, the proposed changes were not made public until mid-December. Barely a month later, the process was over: First to the Top was enacted, and the state's application had been submitted. Opponents had less than two months to organize and build their case.

Finally, by inviting TEA to participate in the process, the kitchen cabinet effectively neutralized their most likely adversary. With the legislative leadership and TEA endorsing First to the Top, it was difficult to find opponents. And, as TEA asserted, it was "politically risky" to go against the opportunity to win money for Tennessee schools. A senate leader confirms this assertion, stating:

> There are certain political risks for voting for it and political risks for voting against it. Especially speaking loudly against it when your own governor proposes it. Which some people chose to do. There are people whose job it is to remember that.

To summarize, lack of information about the governor's plans, a rapid timeframe, and the political risks associated with opposing First to the Top resulted in a shortage of organized opposition that could prevent the passage of the bill.

A Return to Leadership

Policy innovation in the leadership arena depends heavily on the proactive leadership of an elite individual (Mazzoni, 1991). In her critique of the arena model, Fowler (1994) finds that the leadership of the governor of Ohio drove policy change even more than external pressures. Much of the success of the First to the Top legislation can similarly be attributed to Governor Bredesen's efforts. Ten participants specifically identified his leadership as instrumental in helping the bill pass. These policymakers noted Bredesen's leadership style of reaching out to all stakeholders and the copious information the governor and his team provided during the Special Session as crucial factors in the bill's success. One representative, a Republican, spoke of the impact the governor's presence during the Special Session had in creating a bipartisan spirit:

> …so we had a general consensus that we were pulling together, and the governor, he not only asked us to do this, but walked with us the entire way. He was in the hallways working; he was in the committee rooms with us. There was always a presence from the governor's office, motivating, driving, pushing forward with the schedule, listening to everything.

Two other individuals – one representing TEA and another from the governor's staff, expressed doubt as to whether such sweeping changes could have occurred if they

had been initiated by individual legislators. Yet, although the House sponsor of the bill claims his role was "secondary" to the governor and TEA, two Senators believe such changes can, and have, originated in the legislature. A senate leader further suggested that, while the governor's role was important, "there was a lot of shared ownership" among legislative leaders that also contributed to the bill's success. Nonetheless, although he stated that the education committee had proposed innovative changes in the past, another Senator emphasized that in this instance, "the political power came from the governor" whose proactive leadership "was a deciding factor." Conditions in Tennessee were set before the Special Session commenced for education policy innovation and, in the words of one Democrat, legislators either had to "get onboard or get off or you'll get run over. And it worked out pretty good."

A Change in Leadership

There is a codicil to this analysis that underscores the confluence of events, and particularly the high degree of bipartisan support Tennessee's education reforms garnered. Similar to many other states, in 2010 Tennessee voters turned out in favor of Republican candidates, including staunch conservatives and Tea Party members. Whereas the legislature had only slightly larger numbers of Republicans during the 2010 session, the 107th General Assembly opened with the GOP firmly in control of both houses (85 to 47 overall). And although the newly elected Republican governor, Bill Haslam, had pledged to support the reforms promised in the Race to the Top application, he would also support other changes that prompted one TEA leader to say, "the

legislature dishonored what had happened in the previous legislative session." Among the three largest changes, two are highly contentious: the end of collective bargaining for teachers and changes to tenure laws that extend a probationary period from three to five years for new teachers and allow a tenured teacher to be fired for poor performance evaluations. A third bill to eliminate the statewide cap on charter schools also elicited a fight from Democrats.

Comments about these changes from policymakers emphasize the demise of the bipartisan spirit that characterized the special session and the trust between legislators and the TEA. The high level of opposition to these bills sharply contrasts the near absence of such conflict during the Special Session and is a result of:

> the TEA being actively against it (collective bargaining restrictions) and being for the First to the Top. So had they [the TEA] done that during the Special Session we would have had lots more teachers there, which would have put more pressure on us,

explained one Senator.

Chapter Summary

Tennessee's entry into Race to the Top was supported by the state's recent reform efforts, but it required focused and strategic planning to win. Shortly after the competition was announced, Governor Bredesen spoke with his staff about Tennessee's entry. A kitchen cabinet of the governor's team, Department of Education bureaucrats, and members of the business and foundations community began meeting, preparing a case for the state's selection.

This elite group benefited from low public visibility in two ways. To begin, it helped keep Tennessee's plans secret. In contrast to the more open exchange of ideas that typically occurs between states, the Race to the Top competition created a competitive environment in which states guarded their plans with great intensity. The second benefit of these private meetings was that it did not allow opposition groups to develop. Instead, the kitchen cabinet quietly expanded its membership as it worked to build support from key stakeholders.

It soon became apparent that in order to win, Tennessee would have to make significant changes to laws that restricted the use of student data for teacher evaluations and human capital decisions. Drawing from the positive relationship he had cultivated with the TEA, Governor Bredesen invited leaders in that organization to the table. He offered them the opportunity to participate in the policymaking process and provide input to the plans. Although both representatives of the governor and Association officials spoke about the trusting relationship that existed between them, the negotiations were not easy, and trust does not fully explain why the governor's team included TEA, or the organization's eventual support.

Though confident the legislation would pass regardless of TEA's support, the governor's team sought their cooperation to reduce the likelihood that organized opposition could disrupt the process. For their part, the Association also seemed to foresee the bill's impending success. TEA offered its cautious support, motivated by a desire to avoid negative political fallout if the Association was perceived as preventing Tennessee from winning, and the opportunity, however slight, to influence the scope of the policy. This combination of trust and politics created an alliance between the

governor and TEA that was atypical of many other states as they prepared their own applications.

Gaining TEA's endorsement was important, but not the only place the kitchen cabinet looked for allies. Before Race to the Top was announced, Governor Bredesen had begun meeting with legislative leaders to discuss necessary changes to education policy. Finally, the governor's staff successfully negotiated a partnership with Battelle, a research and development firm, to bolster the state's focus on STEM education, and obtained the support of all 136 school districts for the state's application. All of these factors ensured that when the Special Session began in January 2010, anyone who opposed the plan would be viewed as contradicting the governor's efforts to improve education – a plan endorsed by educators.

The Special Session focused legislators' attention on a very specific issue with limited time for debate. The issue at hand – increasing accountability for educators- added its own twist to the unusual situation. Though typically legislators respond to their constituents, Democrats found themselves caught between different stakeholders: educators, parents, and other community members. To further complicate their position, TEA supported the plan. Ideologically, Republicans generally favor accountability reforms, which meant that Governor Bredesen faced more challenges getting his own party to support the bill than from the GOP.

Yet the governor and his staff followed a plan that was part strategy and part capricious timing, and they entered the Special Session with unstoppable momentum, fueled by the governor's reputation for reaching out to stakeholders and his commitment

to education. First to the Top enjoyed widespread support from private citizens and parents and the business community, and with cautious cooperation from TEA, the proposed bill was championed by legislative leaders throughout the General Assembly. It passed with wide margins, and two months later, Tennessee became one of two winners in the Race to the Top competition.

CHAPTER VI

MULTITUDE OF VOICES

This chapter explores the political dynamics created by First to the Top and their subsequent role in shaping the new education evaluation policy. In Tennessee, the First to the Top legislation established a new form of education governance: policymaking by a volunteer committee of diverse stakeholders. I apply a policy feedback perspective (McDonnell, 2009) to describe the process in Tennessee and organize contributing factors in a way that allows me to draw conclusions about the strengths and challenges of this new type of education governance. McDonnell advances this framework as a way of analyzing the political context that develops from an instigating policy.

The task before the 15 committee members was to develop a statewide annual evaluation system for teachers and principals and to recommend this plan for approval by the State Board of Education – in less than 18 months and in a forum open to the public and media. In the area of education governance, this approach to policy development and rule-making is unique. Typically, the General Assembly enacts legislation or the State Board of Education advances policy, and in either case, the state Department of Education assumes the role of implementing and enforcing the new course of action. However, the First to the Top legislation stipulated annual evaluations of educators with broad parameters, but delegated the policy details to a committee of public and private citizens. Skocpol (1992) asserts that policies generate new politics in part because they

transform state capacity, a transformation that is apparent in Tennessee's approach to fulfilling its Race to the Top promises.

Policy Feedback

In using policy feedback (McDonnell, 2009) to scaffold my analysis, I examine the parameters set by the legislation and what they forecasted for the committee's work; the institutional structures and rules that guided the committee work; the how the different members understood their role; and the opportunity for public input to this process. In short, this component of my study explains how the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee, established by First to the Top, worked to develop the new statewide educator evaluation system.

I begin with a description of the section of First to the Top that established the TEAC and outlined its charge. In this analysis, I describe the conditions set by the legislation's passage, the parameters it outlined for the new evaluation system, and the political context in which the committee began its work. I pay particular attention to how the policy characteristics forecasted the politics likely to emerge during the committee's term. Figure 2 (p. 119) summarizes my finding for this, and other, components of policy feedback (McDonnell, 2009).

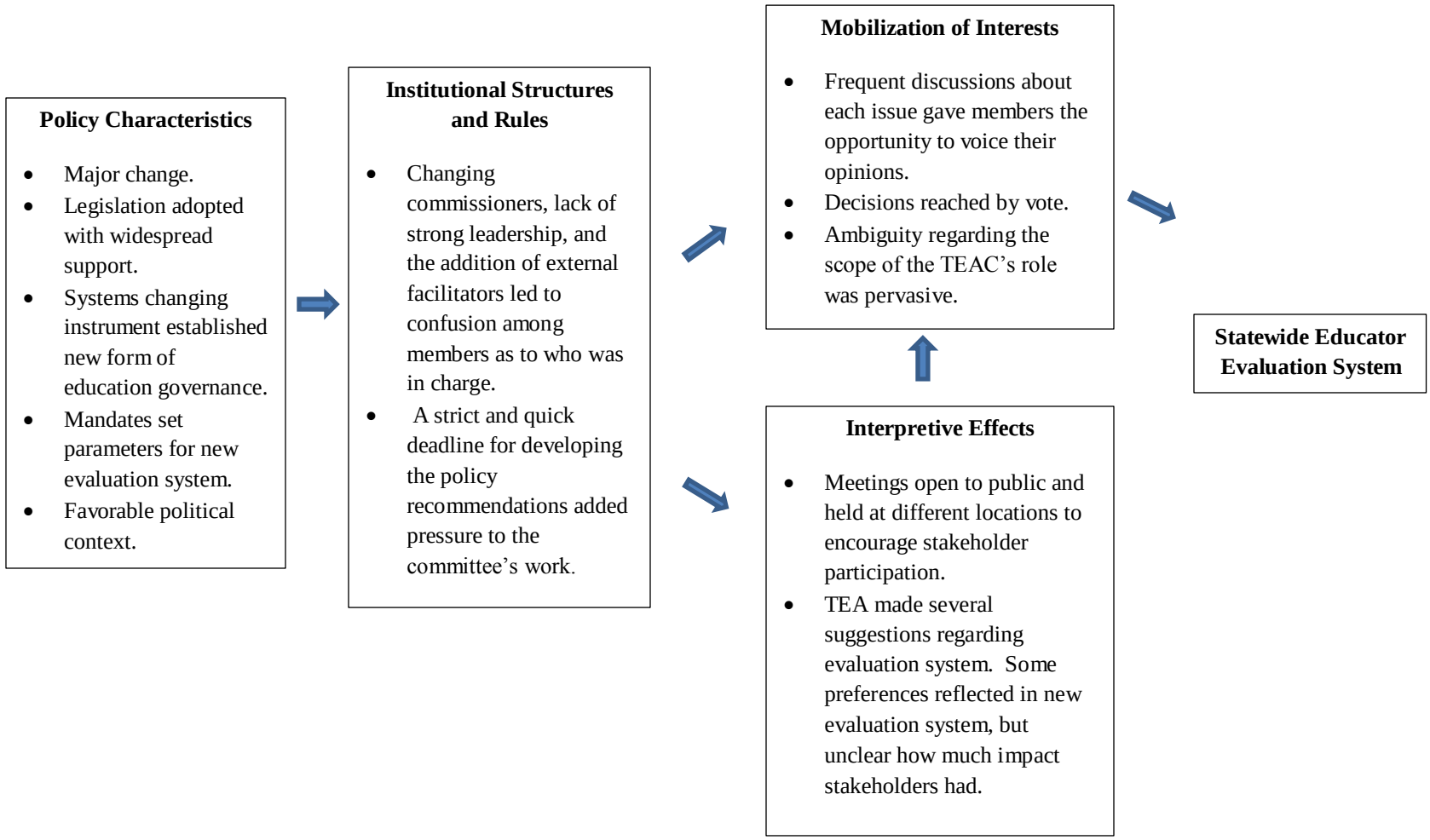

Figure 2. A policy feedback perspective (adapted from McDonnell, 2009) applied to the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee

Following this description, I draw from interviews with the TEAC members and the facilitator to examine the structures and rules of the committee, including their perceptions about leadership and the effect of the timeline for their work. Committee members represented a variety of fields - education bureaucrats, teachers, principals, businessmen, and legislators. Table 4 (p. 57) describes my sample while Table 7 reports the composition of the full committee. I explore the political dynamic created by considering the perspectives, motivations, and personal priorities for the evaluation system both within and across groups of members.

Table 7. Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee

Educators	Legislators	Other Stakeholders
Public School Teachers (5)	Chair, House Education Committee	Business Community (2)
Public School Principapsl (2)	Chair, Senate Education Committee	School Board
District Superintendent		
Executive Director, State Board of Education		
Commissioner of Education		

How these structures and rules affected the committee is the subject of the subsequent section. Here I examine the discord among members regarding the scope of their responsibilities and provide a detail description of one aspect of the policy development, educator effectiveness ratings, as an example of how this tension was manifested.

Finally, as meetings were open to the public and the TEAC invited representatives from different education stakeholders (e.g. TEA, education Foundations, local districts, and commercial education products companies) to provide input, I explore how their preferences and priorities impacted the final evaluation system the TEAC recommended.

Instigating Policy Characteristics

Policy feedback dictates that the characteristics of an instigating policy - such as an innovative new educator evaluation system - generate a set of political dynamics that, in turn, will influence subsequent policies (McDonnell, 2009). Because the new evaluation system represented a major policy change, the circumstances in which the new policy developed, the parameters of the legislation, and the political context deserve consideration for the effects they had on the TEAC's work.

Origins

The First to the Top legislation received strong bipartisan support. Just 11 legislators voted against the bill. Other stakeholders including Tennessee Education Association and local school districts also endorsed the legislation. These policy origins – binding legislation with widespread support – set initial conditions as promising for the development of the evaluation system. The policy instruments the legislation selected for this work also suggested possible political dynamics for the committee.

Policy instruments

The legislation employed two types of policy instruments (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) for the educator evaluation system: systems changing and mandates. Section 10 of the First to the Top legislation established a "teacher evaluation advisory committee" consisting of 15 members, including the state commissioner of education, the executive director of the State Board of Education, the chairpersons of the Education Committees of the House and Senate, five public school teachers, two public school principals, one director of schools, and three members representing other stakeholders' interests. (Table 7, p. 126) The formation of a committee of stakeholders to develop policy recommendations represents a system change to the traditional authority of state level education governance through elected officials and high-ranking bureaucrats.

The local level educators were selected, in part, to represent the variety of educators and schools across the state. They came from urban and rural districts, elementary and secondary schools, taught subjects ranging from math to vocational education, and represented traditional public schools as well as a magnet program within a district. The committee members appointed to represent other stakeholders' interests included businessmen and a member of a local school board.

The decision to empower a committee to develop the policy details was a strategic move. Four TEAC members were also involved in the legislative process that crafted First to the Top. Two of them stated that the rationale for the committee's diverse composition was a deliberate decision to hear all voices. As one bureaucrat explained, "Well, basically trying to make sure that we kept all kinds of people in mind and trying to

understand what everybody would look for…the main thing that we were trying to do was just to make sure that everybody had a voice."

A third participant in this process commented on the importance of having educators on the committee explaining, "that was one of the requirements that I really owned," and emphasizing his role in ensuring that "half of them (the members) were educators." Emblematic of Governor Bredesen's style of reaching out to all stakeholders, the committee's composition was both symbolic and practical: It suggested that this policy was a state effort, acknowledged the importance of having the individuals who would be affected by the system (educators) contribute to its development, and implied that there was support for the system from the education community.

The importance of this strategy is magnified when one considers Mazzoni's (1991) caution that policies emerging from the leadership arena, as First to the Top did, may be threatened by implementation challenges because "they violate participatory expectations for involvement, rest on a thin base of commitment, and inspire little feelings of ownership," (p. 131). A committee of stakeholders ranging from public to private citizens representing educators, parents, lawmakers, and the business community is a strong antidote to concerns that First to the Top reflected the preferences of only a few high-ranking officials.

Whereas the formation of a committee represents one type of policy instrument, other provisions in the legislation are more characteristic of a different instrument: mandates. The committee's charge was to "develop and recommend to the board, guidelines and criteria for the annual evaluation of all teachers and principals employed

by LEAs, including a local-level evaluation grievance procedure," (Public Chapter No. 2, 2010, p. 5). The legislation further stipulated that 50% of the evaluation criteria be based on student achievement data. Thirty-five percent of this piece was expected to come from student growth data, available from TVAAS, or "some other comparable measure of student growth, if no such TVAAS data is available," (Public Chapter No. 2, 2010, p. 5).

The remaining 15% was to be based on other measures of student achievement selected from a list developed by the TEAC. The other 50% of the evaluation could include, but was not limited to: review of prior evaluations, personal conferences, and observations, including a written assessment. Finally, the TEAC was to determine an overall effectiveness rating for the evaluation. The effect of the mandates outlined by the legislation was a set of parameters that simultaneously restricted the scope of the committee's recommendations as well as offered broader license for some elements of the new system.

Political Context

The favorable political context surrounding the committee as they embarked on this task also helps forecast the politics likely to develop. Symbolically, once Tennessee was declared a winner – one of only two winners in the first round – there was a sense that this was an opportunity to make a difference for children in Tennessee, and objecting to the evaluation system would be perceived as challenging this goal. Finally, one can discern a psychological motivation for the committee's composition: The educators on the committee were selected by high-ranking elected

officials, including the governor, and their acceptance of the position was voluntary. Thus, it seemed an honor to be asked to serve. If they had truly objected to an evaluation system, they could have refused to serve on the TEAC. The remaining members, bureaucrats and legislators, had a vested interest in helping the legislation they had supported be successfully enacted.

Forecast

All of these conditions, legislation adopted with widespread support, education governance by a diverse committee of stakeholders, Tennessee's success in Race to the Top, and voluntary participants, forecast a successful, though perhaps not easy, outcome for the TEAC, with less resistance than one might expect, given that educators are powerful policy targets (McDonnell, 2009). Though such a committee cannot be expected to reach consensus without conflict, an open forum for such debate is at the heart of democratic endeavors.

Structures and Rules

After scrutinizing the characteristics of the instigating policy, McDonnell (2009) considers how policies affect institutional structures and rules. While McDonnell's model considers how existing institutions are altered by a policy, in my application of this framework, I examine how the legislation created a new institution, the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee and the structures and rules that guided their work.

Specifically, I consider how the committee's leadership and time constraints created discord and tension among members. First to the Top dictated the members of the TEAC, but did not detail how the committee would operate beyond identifying the commissioner of education as the chair. This ambiguity resulted in the TEAC devoting time at several early meetings to figuring out "what we were doing," as described by four members. This struggle to establish structures and rules to guide the TEAC's work would be further complicated by the change in commissioners – four in all – and the decision to hire an outside consulting firm to facilitate the process.

Meeting logistics

Minutes from the meeting are publicly available on the internet and detail the date, topics, and participants at each meeting. In total, the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee met 20 times between March 18, 2010 and April 6, 2011; eight of these meetings were conference calls. Although five members lived in the Nashville area, the remaining ten traveled from across the state, from Memphis and Knoxville, and one teacher reported traveling six hours each way. Attendance ranged from a low of 25 percent to a high of 92 percent, with the median rate of 80%. Accordingly, while 13 members attended over half the meetings, one member attended only eight meetings and another just five. Two members remarked that attendance at meetings was a problem because meeting dates were changed unexpectedly.

Leadership Difficulties

The legislation identified the commissioner of education as the chair for the committee. Though arguably the intent of this provision was to provide leadership for the committee, an unanticipated development challenged this purpose: the resignation of the first commissioner. The commissioner's resignation, due to health reasons, was announced at the October 7, 2011 committee meeting. The second commissioner chaired the committee until his retirement in January (for a total of four meetings). At this time, an interim commissioner was appointed to serve until the new Governor, Bill Haslam, appointed a new commissioner. This individual chaired one meeting; the final meeting was chaired by the new commissioner. This "revolving door of commissioners" as one participant termed it, left the committee without clear leadership, and led to discord among members. I will return to this issue in a subsequent section, but first I will explore how the decisions made by the first commissioner regarding his approach to leading the committee impacted their work.

Reflecting on his role in the initial meetings, the first commissioner explained:

> At first it was enormously difficult and that is a typical thing. You know, trying to figure out whose role was what and that kind of thing. It was tough. I mean, when you're trying to deal with a committee of that many people you have to figure out what the leadership is going to look like and whether anyone would have the right to veto and deal with that kind of thing. So that's what I did. I was trying, first and foremost, to make sure that everybody was heard. It was tough.

This individual acknowledged the "growing pains" the committee experienced in trying to decide how to operate, and also emphasized the goal of gathering input from all the

participants, mirroring earlier statements by others about the rationale for establishing such a diverse committee.

One committee member spoke positively about the chair's role in listening to everyone's perspective. "When we first started out, the then-commissioner of education was the chair of the committee, and we were very open around the table about what we thought and how we felt." However, two members representing the business community, objected to this style of leadership, or more specifically, criticized the commissioner for his *lack* of leadership. Both of these members expressed frustration with the process of listening to all ideas, and they spoke directly about these concerns.

According to one of these members, "in the private sector, this change would have been made sooner and this change would have been made without regard of how other people felt. The change would have been made to drive the result, not to make everybody happy." For this member, good leadership is paramount to the success of any endeavor, and he denounced the chair's approach to hearing all voices:

> I think organizations sink or swim based on leadership. And the leadership for that committee is the commissioner. I would expect him to have driven this process, not be an innocent…not to be a facilitator of the process but to lead the process. There's a difference between facilitating and leading.

This expectation for strong leadership from the commissioner was echoed by a third participant who stated that even though there was ambiguity surrounding the TEAC's work, it is precisely in those circumstances that "a commissioner should make a decision…no doubt about it" and he did not.

While the commissioner expressed his goal of hearing all voices, he also expressed some regret about this position, and seems to agree with these individuals' assertions that the TEAC needed different leadership. The commissioner spoke of the challenges the committee faced, including resistance to changes in the evaluation system that were expressed by some on the committee and members of the audience. When asked if he believed the approach of hearing all voices was a good one, he responded, "I think so, yeah. I think it was the right approach but I think it was not managed the way it should have been. And that's on me." Instead, he reflected, "I probably should have been more of a dictator." This member seemed conflicted; part of him truly wanted to listen to everyone, but he also acknowledged the challenges this created for the TEAC's work.

Although members representing the business community seemed at odds with the commissioner, this remark tells a more nuanced story. Their shared conviction that the changes to the evaluation system are a necessary means to improve children's education are not as far apart as one might have expected by only considering the differences in leadership styles. In fact, the commissioner himself acknowledged the valuable role the members from the business community played.

Referring to the contributions of the business members, he says:

> I will tell you, they're real. They're hardcore, but they're right, they're exactly right. You know, they were concerned with the outcomes and the actual product that we were trying to produce. I mean, they were obnoxious at some point, but they were really right.

Thus, while suggesting that there may have been some tensions among members, the commissioner applauds the members who criticized him for their dedication to helping children. Another development that prompted concerns from members was the hiring of an external consulting firm to assist the TEAC with their work.

Technical Restart

At the May 13, 2010 meeting of the TEAC, the consulting firm Education First was introduced. According to the meeting minutes, Education First explained its role in this process to "help things happen" by providing "support for the decisions of the committee, facilitate conversations, and support work overall." Previously, Education First had helped the state prepare its Race to the Top application, and the firm described its work with the TEAC "as very similar to the roles they played" previously in this process; "stating that 'Tennessee makes decisions for Tennessee' while Ed First does the underlying work, facilitates bringing forward best practice so that Tennessee can be successful," (May 13, 2010). In spite of this explanation, there was confusion among members regarding how and why Education First was selected and the parameters of their role.

One educator on the committee recalls spending time "entertaining folks who wanted to be paid to facilitate our meetings," and stated that, "the Department of Education was the one who chose Education First. We were told 'This is the group that we're going with.'" But another educator expressed confusion about how Education First came to facilitate the meetings:

> I don't know. I think they took bids, like they did an RFP or something. I know they had worked with them. I think they maybe helped the write the Race to the Top grant, and so then they selected them because of that? I really don't know.

In contrast to these uncertain understandings about the circumstances surrounding Education First's selection, another member seemed more aware. Speaking about the decision to hire a consultant, he says:

> So what became clear to us was that we needed someone to be able to step back, who was not part of the process, and to be able to look at what we were assuming and make suggestions and really just tell us what had been said. So that's how it happened.

The minutes for the two meetings prior to the May meeting do not reveal enough information to corroborate any of these interpretations, but one facilitator clarified that Education First was hired by the Governor's Office of State Policy and Planning. Still, there is evidence that suggests most TEAC members were not aware of this decision prior to the May meeting.

One committee member who was privy to some of the behind-the-scenes work says he "had been briefed, so I knew what to expect," but Education First's involvement was an unexpected development for others. The minutes from the May meeting support this assertion and record one member's "dissatisfaction at not being informed." This member wondered whether this meeting was a "re-start" to the work of the TEAC and sated it made him feel that the previous time they had devoted to the meetings "had been a waste." The commissioner conceded that it "was technically a 're-start' but not completely;" rather it was more of " a partial reconstruction." This discord among members' perceptions about the circumstances surrounding Education First's

participation in the TEAC's work extends into the committee members' misunderstandings about the leadership for the meetings.

Collective Confusion

During our interviews, TEAC members discussed their perceptions about the leadership structure in the meetings. Their answers varied considerably and suggested that ambiguity about who was in charge persisted throughout their work. Three main actors were identified in leadership roles but members' definitions of these roles were frequently divergent.

The most straightforward explanation, provided by one of the legislators, identified the Department of Education as a "catalyst, and their staff kind of helped up begin organizing our thoughts and organize our meetings and sort of laid out a plan of action." He further expounded that "the meeting was chaired by the commissioner," and "Education First was an organization that was contracted to just help kind of guide us through" by raising "the questions that would begin to kind of clarify your position." Even though other members identified these same actors, they offered contrasting perceptions of their roles.

Eight committee members identified the commissioner as being "in charge" of the meetings, because he was the chair. However, they did not offer much elaboration on what this meant, although one member said the role was "more perfunctory" than anything, with the chair basically "calling the meeting to order and pretty much that was it."

Two educators felt the commissioner's role changed when Education First began participating. One of these members described the confusion of the first two meetings, saying, "we didn't really know what we were doing," and "then Education First took over." Another member also seemed confused about whether the commissioner or Education First was in charge. Initially he states that Education First "really led the committee. We would, within the parameters of their agendas, offer ideas and thoughts…" But, later he contradicts himself when he states that "the commissioner was in charge of the committee," and Education First was not "in charge so much as they just, sometimes you need somebody to take your thoughts and put it in a cogent idea…"

In the first statement, this member unequivocally identifies Education First as leading the meeting when he explains that the committee would respond to agenda items determined by the consulting firm. Yet, in the second statement, he describes Education First's role as more of unbiased outsider, a depiction echoed by others.

Four other members, all educators (though two of these members also represented other perspectives) defined Education First's role in a way that reflects a more traditional understanding of a facilitator. Collectively, they identified Education First as the "manager of the process," whose job it was to "keep us on task and keep our work focused." However, four different members did not perceive Education First to be the "independent third party" one member termed them to be. These members, three educators and one representative of the business community, acknowledged that Education First was a contractor, and, thus, in some ways, had to respond to their client, the Department of Education.

The effect of endeavoring to "hear all voices" appears to have created confusion regarding the leadership for the committee. While some members criticized the commissioner for a lack of leadership, the vast majority identified him as the person in charge of the meetings. Nonetheless, one member who joined the meetings in October sensed "a little bit of friction because no one knew whose role was what." Further still, members' perceptions about the role of Education First ranged from complimentary to highly negative. While some stated the consulting group provided them with an outside perspective and helped them maintain focus, others suggested that the Department of Education was controlling the process through the facilitators. According to one participant, this discord regarding leadership was exacerbated by the replacement of commissioners and the lack of strong management. The time constraints the committee faced increased the pressure for members.

Committee timeline

All participants, save one legislator, commented that the work was rushed because of the timeframe the committee faced, describing it as "challenging" and "very tough." Five members said they might have made some different decisions if they had had more time, but three members, all representing a variety of stakeholders, also conceded that the timeframe forced them to take action and not prolong the process, because as this educator explains:

> while what we're doing is painful, it's a step forward, instead of waiting and waiting and waiting. We can't wait much longer. Our kids are really struggling and we've got to shine a light on achievement, we've got to shine a light on high expectations, and shine light on the kind of support our educators need.

One commissioner perceived the effect of the pressure the TEAC felt to meet the deadlines and reminded them:

> you've got to get this thing to the point where we can get it started. It's not in concrete. Statutes can be revised, can be amended, can be changed, and we're going to make mistakes and we've got to feel comfortable enough with what we proposed to get it started and then obviously this process can be tweaked and refined as this process is implemented and we see things that need to be changed.

This sense of urgency to "get this thing to the point where we can get it started" was real. The Race to the Top application promised to fully implement the new system at the start of the 2011-2012 school year. The committee had less than 18 months to develop the guidelines.

Changing commissioners, lack of strong leadership, and the addition of external consultants to facilitate the process led to confusion among members regarding who was in charge. Members' opinions about the leadership approach of the first commissioner varied as did their assessment about Education First's role. The strict and quick deadline for developing the policy recommendations for the new evaluation system added pressure to the committee's work. These dynamics shaped how committee members worked toward their goal.

Mobilization of Interests

Policy feedback is concerned with understanding the politics generated during the policymaking process. Both the characteristics of an instigating policy, in this case First to the Top, as well as the institutional structures and rules that guide the process produce

a political dynamic that is manifested in how individuals respond to these elements. In this case, the politics produced are apparent in how members reached decisions and understood their mission.

Reaching Decisions

After engaging in a "review of the issues" members voted on major aspects of the policy. Study participants commented on the process of discussing the issues, sometimes over the course of several meetings, and occasionally with input from invited speakers who represented different groups – the teachers' union, Department of Education, principal organizations, etc. Committee members talked about various elements of the evaluation system, and three members identified the discussions regarding the language for the overall effectiveness rating as particularly salient. Their interviews, along with the comments from other members captured in the meeting minutes on this topic, provide an illustrative example of how the committee conducted discussion around a topic, concluding with a vote.

The overall effectiveness rating for the evaluation system is the final score an educator receives based upon all elements of the system. Minutes from the meetings indicate the TEAC first considered this issue at the July 22, 2010 meeting. Conversation about the effectiveness rating covered three topics that day: the number and names for the categories, as well as the importance of this piece of the policy for human capital decisions. At the conclusion of this meeting, there was a tentative preference for a four versus five point scale because it forced principals to make a clear distinction between

effective and ineffective rather than defaulting to a more neutral, middle, option. The minutes also note that a member of the audience makes a suggestion for a five point system, including category headings.

The TEAC returned to this issue at the August 19, 2010 meeting. The minutes indicate members spent time discussing both the number of categories (four or five), as well as the terms for each level with "most members agree(ing) with the 4-point scale." Then, a former president of the TEA who was attending the meeting as a guest expressed his concern about the terms for the levels because he anticipated that the newspapers would want to publish this information for individual teachers.

One member recalls this as a particularly contentious moment. While she felt "it was beyond our scope" to worry about what the media might do with the information, she was struck by how angry another member, a non-educator, became by this matter. According to her, "he was really upset about the notion that the public shouldn't have access to how the teachers in a public school system perform." The minutes reflect his consternation, while an educator describes the incident as "comical" because "the consensus of the group was that we did not want to use verbage that would offend someone."

This incident raises several important issues, including the opportunity for audience members to offer opinion regarding policy decisions, the tension among members about the role of the committee, and the different perspectives of educators and non-educators. The issue remained unresolved at the end of the meeting.

Changing opinions

The committee was expected to make initial recommendations, including proposals for the overall effectiveness rating to the State Board of Education during the Fall 2010. At the September meeting, the TEAC resumes its discussions about the effectiveness rating, and a member who initially supported the use of a 4-point scale because "it pushes the envelope and forces decisions to be made between the 2 and 3" appears to have completely reversed his position. This educator expresses a preference for the 5-point scale because "it has a natural breaking point."

The minutes do not provide any additional explanation about his revised position, but following this, three members who explicitly stated a preference for a 4-point system at the August meeting, also endorse the 5-point scale. One of these members, another educator, states that she initially favored the 4-point scale but has changed her mind as a result of the 'breaking point' explanation.

One educator who strongly endorsed the 4-point scale at both earlier meetings did not change her mind. She explained her stance on this:

> The other thing that I was pushing for and I failed was that I was pushing for four, a rating scale of four instead of five, and I really pushed on that one. Because whenever there's five there's always that middle. There's always a three or a C. So I'm just afraid that so many teachers are going to get that middle of the road score of a three. And when you have the even numbers, a principal has to make a decision. Either they're a three or a four or they're a one or a two. Either they are satisfactory or they're not. Having that odd number in the middle does not push the principal to make that hard decision.

This member, with experience in schools and classrooms, believed principals needed to clearly identify teachers as effective or ineffective and feared they would not do this if

there was another option. She felt so strongly about this that not only did she vote against this aspect of the policy, but the minutes indicate she was the sole member to oppose that the set of policy recommendations decided at this meeting be sent to the State Board of Education. She remarks that she does this because of the effectiveness scale.

Voting

Following a discussion about the terms for the scale (in contrast to TEA's request to eliminate them), the committee voted on a motion to recommend a 5-point scale, with terms of Significantly Above Expectations, Above Expectations, At Expectations, Below Expectations, and Significantly Below Expectations. The motion passed with seven members, including all non-educators and four educators, voting in favor of the motion[5]. In addition to the educator quoted above, three other members voted against the plan; one appears to have disagreed with the terms rather than the use of a 5point scale.

The commissioner abstained from voting on this, and all other issues for which a vote was taken at this meeting. According to a facilitator, the TEAC was following Robert's Rule of Order, an operational guide for meetings, which indicates the chair only votes when a tie-breaker is necessary.

The process of deciding the overall effectiveness rating component is illustrative of how the TEAC worked through many of the components of the policy. From interviews and meeting minutes, it appears that the TEAC engaged in a process of discussion amongst themselves, hearing from external stakeholders, and finally, voting

[5] Two members were absent.

for most aspects of the policy. This process of continuously revisiting issues before voting supports the goal for the committee as a forum for ensuring multiple voices are heard. This example of developing the effectiveness ratings illustrates that members brought different opinions to the table and changed their minds during the process, and also that there were winners and losers. My data also reveal that the TEAC struggled to understand the scope of their mission throughout this process.

Mission Misunderstandings

All of the study participants commented that they devoted time during the meetings to clarifying their mission and goals as a committee. According to the statute, the TEAC was to make recommendations to the State Board of Education for the annual educator evaluation system. Specifically, the TEAC had to: 1) recommend how to evaluate teachers without student growth data; 2) develop a list of measures for evaluating teachers on the 15% achievement component; 3) decide what elements should be included in the 50% non-data component; and 4) determine an overall effectiveness rating for the evaluation. Members, like this legislator, commented on the need for understanding the level of detail they were supposed to include in their recommendations: "We had some discussions just as to what kind of level of detail, whether it was just going to be a broad concept and then the Board would take it and develop the details, kind of along those lines."

'How' versus 'what'

One way the TEAC, guided by the facilitators, tried to understand their mission was to review the statute, both in its entirety and specifically, the areas relevant to each component of the system. An illustrative example of the dissonance among members on this point comes from two members of the committee, both representing different education stakeholders. One member describes the process of reviewing the statute as restricting the TEAC's role. She explains:

> …there were several times at the start of the meetings where they (Education First) put the statute up there. And they gave their interpretation of the statute, and basically their point was that this is a statute that says that you can make a recommendation to the State Board of Education, but that's all you can do. It was just a very clear message that, as a committee, our role was quite limited.

This educator disagreed with Education First's understanding of the legislation and instead argued that "it really depends how you interpret the statute." Further, "(t)he goals of the committee were to figure how the teacher evaluation should…what were the parameters for it? How was it going to work?" Her use of the word 'how' to describe the responsibilities of the TEAC is antithetical to how another member explained their task.

This member carefully articulated her understanding of the statute, as well as the concerns she had in the way others interpreted it:

> We were to recommend, and we had to keep that in the forefront, that we were not setting the policy, we were recommending policy to the state board on how to fulfill the obligations and qualifications of the law, the First to the Top law. So we were to establish due policy, what the new evaluation system would look like, and that policy. And so there were some back and forth at times, I remember, on our role, because we were trying to establish policies, not processes. Which is

> different, you know. You establish policy and the administration is supposed to put the meat behind it and say, "Here's the policy and here's how you are supposed to make it happen." I thought, at some times, "I think we're exerting a power that we don't have sometimes.

This interpretation suggests the intended outcome was a broader set of policy recommendations that did not include micro-detail. Instead, that responsibility belonged to the Department of Education. Interestingly, this member also explicitly stated that the TEAC was not responsible for developing the 'how' of the system, just the 'what'. "We're here to determine 'what'. And the State Board is going to adopt the 'what' that guides the Department's how'." Another educator echoed this member's belief that the Department would interpret the TEAC's recommendations and "then develop the process," as did a member who represented the business community.

Discord among educators

The three members who felt the policy should include a higher level of detail than the other members were all local-level educators. They each spoke about how the end product of their work was not as specific as they initially understood it would be. One member recalls:

> At first, and I'll be very blunt with you, at first I felt like the committee was going to make a change, that what we were doing as a committee was going to have an effect on the teacher evaluation model. As time went on, it became…it was apparent that we were only to make recommendations, that we were not going to affect policy at all, except just to discuss and make recommendations.

This member also commented that she believed the Department had a plan and the TEAC was just going to make suggestions to, rather than generate, the plan. Making suggestions is not what she and two other educators initially understood the charge of the committee to be.

However, another teacher disagreed with this interpretation, and her statement more closely mirrors what the members who distinguished between the 'what' and 'how' expressed:

> Well, because we were an advisory committee…the TEAC stood for Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee. We had to remember that. Anything that we…we made suggestions. We advised the state. We made no decisions. We made no final decisions as committee members. The media has taken some of that and it's out in the media that we had made those decisions. No. TEAC advised the state. So we were in an advisory position, not making the decisions.

This educator is very clear in her understanding that the TEAC was responsible for making broad recommendations, and unlike the educators who felt the need to incorporate a greater level of detail in the policy, she does not indicate that her understanding was challenged as the process unfolded.

According to one commissioner, this tension between recommending a broad versus detailed policy arose partly because, "there was a whole lot of misunderstanding of the role of the state board versus the committee versus the legislature. Finally the whole thing was just new ground. We were all working on new ground and it was kind of tough." This was a new form of education governance, so his explanation is understandable, but the impact of leadership instability is another explanation.

Another reason for the ambiguity regarding the level of detail was offered by an educator. "When the new administration came over, we suddenly were not going to be as specific as we all thought." A facilitator acknowledged this shift, stating that it was not until the end of the process that the TEAC's mission was clarified. According to her, "lack of clarity around the direction of the TEAC definitely stemmed from the revolving door of commissioners." In total, five participants, including the two just mentioned, identified the change in commissioners as contributing to the confusion regarding the TEAC's role. The remaining seven indicated this was not much of a problem, in part because of Education First's constant presence.

Similar to the confusion among members concerning the leadership for the TEAC meetings, members also disagreed on the goals and outcomes for their work. Despite attention to the statute's stipulations, some members, particularly local-level educators, felt their role was more limited than they initially anticipated. A minority of participants attributed this confusion to the changing commissioners, and one commissioner credited the new form of governance as part of the problem.

Finally, a third explanation was offered by a participant speculated that some of the "uneasiness" among members regarding their role was due to the fact that the plan had to be developed and implemented by July 1, 2011. Typically, development and implementation would not have occurred simultaneously, but rather, planning would have preceded implementation. The effect of this deadline was an overlap in the planning and implementing stages whereby the state needed to conduct the pilot for the system before the TEAC finished its work.

Consequently, the committee was able to see how the Department planned to implement their guidelines before the guidelines were finalized. And, in some case, this implementation did not match the way the members had envisioned it. For one educator, this certainly rang true: she stated, "we kind of ran out of time at the end" because the Department needed to begin training educators on the model but she continued to say, "…we will modify and adjust, just like a good educator does, as we go along." From these remarks, it is apparent that the timeframe the TEAC faced was another contributing factor to the tensions that arose.

In the account of how the committee worked to create the effectiveness rating and the description of the disagreement regarding the level of detail, I find, as McDonnell (2009) maintains, that the instigating policy characteristics and the institutional structures and rules shape the political dynamics that emerges. Policy feedback considers one remaining element: how policy targets, in this case educators, understand and respond to the instigating policy (First to the Top). This next section addresses this element.

Interpretive Effects

Interpretive effects, how policy targets understand a policy also depend on the instigating policy characteristics and institutional structures and rules (McDonnell, 2009). In this study, educators are the policy targets, and here I analyze opportunities for educators to participate in the process of developing the new teacher and principal evaluation system. Specifically, I examine how TEA, an integral participant in the First to the Top process, contributed to the TEAC's work.

Voices around the room

The TEAC meetings were open to the public, and according to committee members, there were "a multitude of different people" attending these meetings, including the media, the TEA, vendors, education Foundations, representatives from the Department, principals' groups, and superintendents. Members' estimates of the number of visitors at the meetings ranged from 20-50.

There were multiple opportunities for the public to give input. Frequently (14 out of 18 meetings) different groups were invited to speak; one member stated that audience members could pass comments and questions to the members, and there were spontaneous (and uninvited) remarks from "the gallery" recorded in the minutes. The locations of the meetings are symbolic of the desire to gather all voices as well. The TEA, SCORE, Department of Education, and Tennessee School Boards Association all hosted meetings.

Tennessee Education Association

One voice that lacked a formal role in this process was TEA. This was surprising, given their role in Tennessee's Race to the Top application process. Although they attended, hosted, and were even formally invited to speak at several meetings (three), TEA lacked a formal seat on the committee. Yet, while there is no evidence that their input affected the TEAC's recommendations, a comparison of the minutes and the TEAC's final recommendations permits an analysis of whether TEA's preferences were

reflected in the committee's decisions. (Appendix F contains a copy of the TEAC's final policy recommendations.)

Student growth

At the June 10, 2010 meeting, the TEA president shared feedback from meetings the Association conducted with its members across the state. TEA members expressed their preferences for different elements of the evaluation system. Regarding the 35% of the evaluation that was to measure student growth, TEA recommended the use of portfolios, pre- and post-tests, and IEP goals for teachers in subjects and grades without value-added data.

In their final recommendations, the TEAC indicated that these educators would choose from a list of state-approved options, and until such time as these measures were developed, the school-wide value-added data would be used. At the start of the 2011-2012 school year (the first year of implementation), measures had not been developed, although there were statewide committees working on them. For the first year of the new system, these teachers were evaluated using the school-wide data, even in some instances when their school configuration did not include tested grades. In those cases, the data from the schools into which those students subsequently enrolled was used. Thus, while these measures might one day reflect TEA's preferences, the timeframe for implementing the system precluded their use this year.

Other achievement data

TEA members also suggested measures for the 15% other achievement data component. Their recommendations included performance on tests such as Advanced Placement exams and the ACT, the use of portfolios and exit exams, and performance in student competitions like Model UN and debate teams. In this area, the TEAC recommended a menu of options, approved by the Department, including, but not limited to, graduation rates and the percentage of students proficient on the TCAP (statewide assessment). Principals and teachers were to use the menu to collaboratively select the measure to be used.

In the final model, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model, the Department outlines a list of approved measures that included the tests mentioned by TEA members and added postsecondary matriculation, completion of advanced coursework, and ninth grade promotion/retention rates, as well as school-wide value-added data, to the menu. It is not possible to conclude whether or not TEA recommendations actually impacted the final model, but it does reflect their preferences, at least giving the impression that their voices were heard.

Qualitative component

A final area of input from TEA at this meeting concerned the 50% qualitative component. TEA asked members to offer suggestions for how this component should be evaluated and members' responses ranged from Professional Learning Communities, to National Board certification to communication with parents. As noted emphatically by

the TEA president, no one said observations. The meeting minutes show that teachers felt this way "because observations have not been conducted well/consistently in the past," (June 10, 2010). Given the TEAC's final recommendations that the criteria for this component include a review of prior evaluations, personal conferences, and classroom or school observations (and the TEAM model follows this), one can conclude that the TEA's preferences are not reflected in this component.

Summarizing the Voices

The process of engaging multiple stakeholders in the conversation over the new evaluation system was motivated by the goal of ensuring the process was open and transparent. This was made manifest in several ways: a committee composed of representatives from the education and private sectors, meetings open to the public, and stakeholders invited to give input. Meetings were even held in different locations to further facilitate opportunities for public involvement. Despite this, however, committee members did not feel that the policy recommendations they made were influenced by the guest attendants. Two members commented that it was "helpful" to hear their perspectives, and another said it was "fine" because "after all, it's the state of Tennessee's education system…we're all involved." Beyond that, however, members did not identify specific instances when the audience or invited guests affected their decisions.

An analysis of committee meeting minutes sheds some light on how one group, TEA, offered their input to the process, and a comparison of their preferences to the final

product reveals the extent to which these preferences are reflected in the new evaluation system. However, it is not possible to make assertions about the level of influence they had. Thus, while McDonnell's (2009) model suggests that how policy targets interpret a policy impacts the development of subsequent policies, this study does not find evidence that educators', and particularly TEA's, preferences directly influenced the development of the evaluation system.

Reflections

The distinction between hearing all voices and responding to them was addressed by one educator who contends that the TEAC structure was a good approach because regardless of the level of influence the committee or audience members had, "it was a good thing to have there, to hear us." In all, over two-thirds (n= 9) of study participants reflected positively on the overall experience of serving on the TEAC. While they also used the words "challenging," "frustrating" and "aggravating" to describe the process, members reported being "honored" to have served on the committee. A comment from one of the commissioners embodies this dichotomy, "…You look back on it now and you think, 'boy, that was a lot of fun'. For those two or three days it wasn't that much fun, but you know, it was a challenge, and I'm kind of proud of the role I had in it."

The two members who remained dissatisfied with the process expressed reasons that were similar, but not identical, to each other. Both of these members felt that the process had been poorly handled. But, while one educator criticized the organization of the meetings and the way in which she felt the committee's role had been limited, a

recurrent theme in the other member's interview was that the process was too "bureaucratic" to be effective. For this member, hearing from people who are "already part of the problem" was an ineffective use of time. He lamented that the process did not better reflect the private sector's way of operating. Another distinction between these members is that the educator says she "was glad to be a part of it…" and, "I felt really honored to be a part of it and to have been selected and I just felt responsible for making sure we did a good job." But, the other member who criticized the process concluded our interview by saying, "it was a miserable process."

Ultimately, the diversity among members' perceptions and reflections of their work with the TEAC is reflective of the divergent perspectives they brought to the table. For just over a year, a committee of public and private citizens – legislators, educators, and businesspeople – worked to establish policy guidelines for a new statewide evaluation system for educators. Some members reflected on the process more positively than others. It was messy and complicated, involving long hours, and for several members, long commutes, but in the end, they met their charge and delivered their recommendations to the State Board of Education.

Chapter Summary

This chapter applied a policy feedback framework (McDonnell, 2009) to understand the political dynamic that resulted from the TEAC's work. The First to the Top legislation created a new form of education governance with the TEAC, a volunteer committee of diverse stakeholders. My analysis shows how conditions set by First to the

Top as well as the structures and rules that guided the committee's work impacted the development of the new educator evaluation system. Further, my analysis finds that despite numerous opportunities for public input, the committee members did not think this had an effect on their work.

Tennessee embarked upon an unusual venture when it charged a 15-member committee, comprised of public and private citizens representing education, business, and parent stakeholders, with developing policy recommendations for the annual evaluation of educators. A principle reason for this approach was a desire to have all voices represented at the table. This sentiment was echoed by the commissioner of education who served as the committee's chair. However, though the policy characteristics of the First to the Top bill, as well as the circumstances surrounding its successful passage, would suggest favorable conditions for the TEAC's work, weak structures within the committee provided challenges.

For 13 months the TEAC and other participants met to work on the policy recommendations. They devoted time to clarifying their mission and carefully examined each element of the plan with which they were charged with recommending guidelines. They struggled with a lack of leadership stemming from a "revolving door" of commissioners responsible for chairing the committee's work. The effect of this was made manifest in the many discussions the committee held trying to understand the parameters of their role as well as the role of Education First, the Department of Education, and the State Board of Education. Add to this ambiguity an ambitious agenda in a short timeframe, and members' remarks that the process was "frustrating" and "challenging" are not surprising.

The politics that developed from these circumstances reflect a fragmented committee. However, this sense of dissonance did not appear to divide members according to the stakeholders they represented. For example, although both members of the business community objected to the leadership of the committee, the commissioner agreed that he probably should have taken a stronger approach. And, while two educators perceived that Education First, or the Department of Education, were guiding the committee to make certain decisions, other educator members disagreed.

Finally, while two members remained dissatisfied with the process, feeling that it was poorly managed and too concerned with how individuals who were resistant to change felt, the majority contended that conversation and collaboration were the strengths of the committee's work. No one characterized the process as easy, but most spoke positively about the overall experience.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The prior chapters have framed this study within the parameters of the extant literature and the context of current events, outlined the specific research questions and methodology guiding this study, and presented a thorough narrative of the results. In Chapter Seven, I synthesize the previous chapters, briefly summarizing the results and discussing the contribution and implications for this study. To begin, I present a summary of the results for each of my research questions. I then situate the results from this study within the current literature, both with specific references to the theoretical frameworks that shepherded this study as well as the broader scholarship around policymaking in a democratic society. Limitations of this study are addressed in the subsequent section. The chapter concludes with implications for implementation and further research.

Summary of Study Development

Education policymaking in a federalist system is complex. The challenges presented by this form of governance include a struggle to allocate power among the various levels of government and the need to balance mandates with supports (Brady, 2009; Cohen & Spillane, 1992). Conversely, attention to an issue from multiple levels

can offer opportunities to leverage support for a policy (Manna, 2006). The dominant preference for local control in education was heavily challenged by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Though best known for its efforts to equalize educational opportunities for all children, the funding the ESEA provided to states to build capacity for education reform at the state level was also important. In the decades following ESEA, both the federal and state levels of government increased their role in education governance and shifted their focus from equality of opportunity to excellence in achievement (or from inputs to outputs).

Research on education reform during these years often emphasized the increasing role of the federal government and the impact on states. A flurry of state-led initiatives also drew attention from scholars (see Brady, 2009; Furhman, 1987; McDermott, 2009; Pipho, 1986; Timpane & McNeil, 1991). Their research addressed the efforts states were making to ensure equitable school finance, strengthen curriculum standards, and regulate teacher qualifications. Nevertheless, Mazzoni (1994) criticized the extant literature on state policymaking in education for its limitations, particularly pertaining to generalizability. State politics in education remained a bit of a mystery. Following the passage of No Child Left Behind, studies of state policymaking have tended to be replaced by research that explores the impact of the federal legislation on the states.

Current context

Race to the Top is the first major education policy initiative advanced by the federal government in several years. It departs from previous federal involvement in

several ways, most notably in that it is a competitive program that invites, rather than mandates, states' participation. And though the competition included specific parameters, states were expected to respond to these criteria in context-specific ways. This unusual policy environment offers an opportunity to return our attention to state-led education initiatives. To that end, this study endeavored to analyze the policymaking process in one state, Tennessee, as it responded to this new policy instrument. Because the state's efforts did not end with its successful bid, this study also sought to understand how a committee of diverse stakeholders, symbolizing a new type of education governance, developed policy recommendations for the new statewide educator evaluation system.

Study design

Both because case study methodology is strengthened when it is rooted in theory (Yin, 2009) and because of Fowler's (2006) critique that the literature on state policymaking tends to be atheoretical, this study is undergirded by two political science frameworks: Mazzoni's (1991) arena models and McDonnell's (2009) policy feedback theorizing. The first research question of this study asks how Race to the Top evolved politically in Tennessee, paying particular attention to the external forces that opened a window for policy innovation and how the political arena contributed to the legislation's successful passage. Mazzoni's (1991) model is particularly salient because it examines the influence of the site, or the arena, in policymaking, including the actors, bargaining strategies, and level of visibility present during the policy innovation process. My second

research question asks how the TEAC worked to implement the Tennessee legislation concerning annual evaluations for educators. As the policy recommendations the committee developed were guided by the legislation, McDonnell's (2009) policy feedback model provides a useful framework for exploring the politics created as new policies are generated from instigating policies, or (in short) the turned-on-its-head process of policy into politics.

This emphasis in this study on 'how' questions led to an emergent research design using qualitative methods. The primary data for each component of this study were individual interviews supplemented by archival documents. Study participants included 21 state legislators, four former members of Governor Bredesen's staff, two officials from the TEA, one Tennessee Department of Education official, and 12 of the 16 members of the TEAC, along with one of the facilitators. Data collection and analyses occurred simultaneously, facilitating revisions to my protocol and the inclusion of additional participants recommended during interviews. My analytic strategy blended grounded theory and theory-driven approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2002) that allowed me to consider themes and patterns suggested by my data but not anticipated by theory. I recorded my process through field notes and memos. Conversations with my advisor helped guide my analysis and suggested additional areas of investigation.

Summary of Research Question One

How did Race to the Top Evolve Politically in Tennessee?

Two decades of intermittent education policy innovation left the Volunteer State lagging behind other states, according to a report from the Institute for a Competitive Workforce (2007). Governor Bredesen confronted Tennessee's tribulations with a multifaceted approach: He joined forces with a national reform organization to increase Tennessee's high school graduation rate; persuaded the State Board of Education to adopt new curriculum standards by holding meetings across the state that addressed the business community's concerns regarding Tennessee's schools; advanced legislation to increase the cap on charter schools; and reached out to traditional and non-traditional stakeholders. The end result of this persistent attention to education was a statewide perspective that education reform was both imperative and incomplete.

Thus, the Race to the Top competition did not propel education reform onto the policy agenda in Tennessee, but rather provided an additional stimulus to further the state's own pre-Race efforts. Tennessee was well positioned to succeed in the competition because of its recent reform-mindedness, yet it lacked policies in three crucial areas: teacher evaluations, intervention in failing schools, and STEM priorities. Among these, removing the statutes that restricted the use of Tennessee's longitudinal value-added data was the linchpin for the state's application. Compelled by a combination of factors, including a proactive and popular governor who brought prolonged attention to education; the introduction of new revenue, and the opportunity to

leverage license for innovation from other levels of government, Tennessee entered the Race.

The Bredesen administration began formally strategizing about how to win in the summer of 2009. Initially, a kitchen cabinet comprised primarily of the governor's staff outlined the necessary steps for the state to take in order to submit a competitive application. Gradually though, other stakeholders were invited to join this group. This strategy of maintaining low visibility while quietly expanding the inner circle of elite participants resulted in a strong cadre of support for the governor's plan before it was publicly announced. When the Special Session commenced in January 2010, proponents could claim the support of all school districts, an endorsement, albeit cautious, from TEA, and the backing of both Republican and Democratic leadership in the legislature.

The subsequent success of the First to the Top bill is characterized not only by its supporters, but by the lack of organized opposition. This too, was strategic. Although confident the legislation would pass regardless of TEA's support, the governor's team sought their cooperation to reduce the likelihood that organized opposition would disrupt the process. What accounts for TEA's support in Tennessee when unions in other states mounted such vehement opposition that it severely weakened applications? Two factors: trust and political reality.

Governor Bredesen's reputation for reaching out to stakeholders and working to improve education created a positive relationship between the two parties. Even then, the Association remained reluctant to endorse a plan requiring the annual evaluation of teachers and linking half of the criteria to student achievement data. However, the

Association's position believed the bill likely to pass and thought it better to work with the governor to protect their interests rather than oppose his plan and suffer the political fall-out. In particular, TEA did not want to be viewed as the reason Tennessee lost out on an opportunity for money to improve education.

It is reasonable to conclude that Tennessee's successful enactment of the First to the Top legislation can be attributed to several factors: a proactive leader with access to additional resources, the closed venue in which the kitchen cabinet worked, widespread support for innovation, and lack of organized opposition. Two other factors are notable: the nature of the Special Session (one of the governor's resources) and the timing of the events. Whereas study participants declared the decision to hold a Special Session to address the First to the Top bill was born more out of logistic necessity than strategy, its ability to focus lawmakers' attention on one specific topic in a constrained amount of time cannot be underestimated. Further, because of the competition deadline, legislators had barely a week to learn about the bill, including hearing from constituents and other stakeholders. There just was not enough time to seriously challenge the legislation, and since opposing the bill in the face of so much support was politically risky, it would have been difficult to find legislators willing to speak against the bill. Although a small number of lawmakers did vote against the act, more noticeable was the overwhelming bipartisan support for ideals typically championed by Republicans but in this instance, initiated by a Democratic governor. The legislation was enacted, and Tennessee saw its efforts realized just two months later when it was declared a winner in the Race to the Top competition.

Summary of Research Question Two

How did the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee work to implement the Tennessee legislation with regard to annual evaluations for educators?

The success of First to the Top was just the beginning of Tennessee's education policy changes. The legislation established a new form of education governance: a volunteer committee of 15 members to develop formal policy recommendations for the evaluation system. The diverse backgrounds of the committee members (educators, legislators, and business leaders) reflected the overall desire to gather input from different stakeholders. Several conditions - establishing a representative committee, overwhelming support in the General Assembly, winning Race to the Top, and voluntary participants – forecast a successful outcome for the TEAC's work. Yet, ambiguity in the committee's structure and rules threatened the goal of wanting to hear all voices.

According to the legislation, the commissioner of education would serve as the committee's chair. The commissioner also espoused the ideal of giving everyone a chance to speak, but he was criticized by some for this approach because it suggested a lack of leadership. Two members on the committee who represented the business community in particular commented on this, and the commissioner also expressed regret for this decision. This lack of clear leadership on the part of the first commissioner resulted in confusion and disagreement that was further exacerbated by the addition of Education First as facilitators for the TEAC and the subsequent "revolving door" of commissioners.

The operational issues that vexed the committee cultivated misunderstandings about the mission of the TEAC. Study participants described their attempts to distinguish between the 'what' and 'how' of policymaking and to define their role within these parameters. Some members expected to address the 'how' component; this revealed misunderstandings about the distinct responsibilities of the committee, the State Board of Education, and the Tennessee Department of Education. Other members spoke assuredly about their understanding that the TEAC was to focus on making recommendations (the 'what') and leave to implementation decisions (the 'how') to the Department.

Another factor that impacted the TEAC's work was their deadline for completion. The state had promised to fully implement this system at the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year in its Race to the Top application. Consequently, it had just a little over a year to develop the recommendations, design a model from the policy, conduct a field test of the plan, and train educators across the state in how to use the model. The effect of this strict time limit was that policy development and implementation occurred simultaneously. Whereas typically implementation would *follow* policy, circumstances dictated that this was not the case in Tennessee, and this was disconcerting for some members.

Another structure of the committee that influenced their work was how they reached decisions. For each aspect of the policy, members engaged in discussions among themselves as well as with invited speakers regarding different options. At the conclusion of these conversations, members voted on their recommendation. Portrayals of the TEAC's work in several areas illustrate this decision-making process, and also show that input was not restricted to committee members and invited speakers.

All meetings were open to the public, and again, in an attempt to gather input from a variety of stakeholders, the locations for the meetings also varied. Local districts, education Foundations, and organizations representing teachers, principals, and school boards attended the meetings. Audience members offered their opinions (at times, unsolicited) to the committee as they observed the proceedings. A comparison of these opinions to the final policy recommendations indicates that some of their preferences are reflected in the new system, although the degree of influence the audience had is unclear.

The politics that developed from these conditions reflect a fragmented committee. However, the dissonance did not appear to divide members according to the stakeholders they represented. Agreement on certain details and policy decisions often came from a mix of educators, legislators, and business leaders. In moments of disagreement, a perspective of one member could be contradicted by another member from the same association, political, or professional background. In spite of the conflict that clouded this process, all but one member indicated they were pleased to have had the opportunity to participate.

Situating this Study within the Literature

The purpose of the first part of this study was to understand the change in education policy in Tennessee as the state prepared its application for Race to the Top. I selected a political science framework about state policymaking to undergird this study. The arena model considers the role of the actors and the contextual influence of specific

sites in provoking major innovation (Mazzoni, 1991). This study provided an opportunity to explore how well the arena model explains the events in Tennessee.

Mazzoni's arena in Tennessee

In accordance with Mazzoni's (1991) revised model, I find support for policy innovation initiated in the leadership arena. Specifically, I find that the education policy environment in Tennessee had been dominated by the leadership arena for several years due to Governor Bredesen's prolonged attention. However, the new context presented by an invitational competition extended by the federal government also suggests implications for Mazzoni's (1991) model. Table 8 (p.165) summarizes the comparison of Mazzoni's and Fowler's (1994) findings to this study that I detail here.

Table 8. Comparison of Arena Model According to Mazzoni, Fowler, and Finch

	Sample	Environmental Stimuli for Innovation			Arenas	Conditions	Policy Innovation
Mazzoni's hypothesized model	Based on theory.	Pressure: Crisis event, mass media & public opinion, policy entrepreneurs.	Revenue: Additional revenue source necessary.	Opportunity: N/A	Subsystem Macro		
Mazzoni's revised model	MN elected leaders and non-elected policymakers, their staff, and representatives of interest groups. N=105.	Pressure: Includes original pressures and gives greater attention to role of organized elites.	Revenue: No change.	Opportunity: N/A	Subsystem Macro Commission Leadership	1) Leader with additional resources. 2) Low visibility. 3) Widespread support. 4) Weak opposition.	Leadership arena.
Fowler's critique	OH elected leaders and non-elected policymakers, their staff, and representatives of interest groups. N=20.	Pressure: Calls for expansion of this condition to include the role of national pressure sources.	Revenue: Additional revenue source not necessary.	Opportunity: N/A	Subsystem Macro Commission Leadership	Meets Mazzoni's conditions.	Leadership arena.
Finch's findings	TN elected leaders and non-elected policymakers, their staff, and representatives of interest groups. N=28	Pressure: Crisis event, protracted focus on education reform led by political elite (governor) with public support.	Revenue: Additional revenue source necessary, provided by Race to the Top.	Opportunity: Race to the Top criteria and local initiative offered opportunity to "borrow strength" (Manna, 2006) for policy innovation.	Dominated for several years by Leadership arena.	Meets Mazzoni's conditions. Suggests an additional benefit of closed arena in competitive context. Adds Special Session to list of resources.	Leadership arena.

Mazzoni's conceptualization of environmental factors that provoke policy change include pressures and additional revenue. Like Mazzoni's findings in Minnesota, the events in Tennessee suggest the presence of a crisis event that focused attention on education policy and was enhanced by the efforts of a political elite, the governor. Whereas Fowler (1994) does not find evidence that additional revenues are necessary precursors to innovation as the arena model suggests, my results indicate Race to the Top's promise of money was important, particularly given the financial problems Tennessee was facing.

The arena model assumes that pressure is primarily located within the state (Mazzoni, 1991), but Fowler (1991) argues for an expansion of this definition to include national pressure. This study suggests another explanation. Drawing from Manna's (2006) theory of borrowing strength, external influence for policy change can take the form of opportunity rather than just pressure. Governor Bredesen was able to use the Race to the Top competition, and specifically, its parameters regarding teacher evaluations, to advance an ambitious and controversial plan. In addition to leveraging license from Race to the Top competition, he was also able to borrow strength from the local level by pointing to the efforts underway in Memphis to improve teacher effectiveness. This implies a more interdependent dynamic between the state and other levels of government than Mazzoni (1991) allows. From this perspective, state policymaking does not simply respond to pressure, but benefits from expanded license at other levels.

Mazzoni (1991) identifies four essential criteria for successful policy innovation in the leadership arena: proactive leader with additional resources, a closed venue that affords low visibility, unity among members within the arena, and weak opposition. All four criteria were met in Tennessee. In particular, the governor's ability to call a Special Session proved to be a powerful way to focus legislators' attention and expedite the policy process. The low visibility of the leadership arena served a dual purpose in Tennessee: it allowed the kitchen cabinet to build support for the legislation without alerting opponents and, importantly, it kept the state's plans hidden from competing states. Accordingly, while Mazzoni's model focuses on the within-state advantages of a closed venue, my study shows another political necessity given the current policy context.

Finally, my study addresses an element not considered in the arena model (Mazzoni, 1991): the effect of time constraints on weakening opposition. Because Tennessee (like other Race to the Top applicants) wanted to maintain a competitive advantage by keeping the details of the state's plan confidential, Governor Bredesen did not announce the Special Session until December 2009. Although the kitchen cabinet had been working on the state's application, and importantly, building support for it, since the summer, opponents had less than two months to voice their objections. Not only was it difficult to find dissenters among such widespread support, the deadline for the Special Session and the Race to the Top application further diminished the likelihood of blocking the legislation.

In sum, this study generally provides support for Mazzoni's (1991) revised arena model, which suggests a greater likelihood for policy innovation originating in the

leadership arena. It also proposes a few revisions to the model by adding *opportunity* for change as an environmental factor, suggests an additional benefit to the closed venue of the leadership arena, and identifies an additional resource of a political elite. In addition to this contribution, this study also takes its place among the scholarship regarding state policymaking, broadly, and specifically, among the literature that considers the role of the governor in state-led education reform.

State policymaking and Tennessee

Scholarship examining the role of the state in education reform typically focuses on the 1980s and early 1990s (Firestone & Fuhrman, 1991; Kirst, 1988; Pipho, 1986). During this time, a number of studies specifically examined the role of the governor in instigating major education policy change (e.g. Karper & Boyd, 1988; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1994; Mazzoni, 1989, 1991). These studies identified the challenges governors faced and the advantages they enjoyed in successfully promoting school reforms. Two of the advantages articulated in this literature which this study echoes are the strategic decision to hold a Special Session (Hatic & LaBrecque (1989) and the effect of a governor's proactive leadership in reducing opposition by placing adversaries in a reactive and weakened position (Karper & Boyd, 1988).

These studies explore the role of the state in a political climate very different from today. During the Reagan administration, states were encouraged to take a more active role in education policy as the federal government reduced its role (Sunderman, 2009). Race to the Top also encourages state-led policymaking, but the federal government

retains its leadership by stipulating criteria for states to follow in order to receive funding. Thus, this study makes an initial contribution to a revised understanding of state policymaking when provoked by a federal competition. It highlights changes to the policy environment that potentially alter theories of state policymaking. In particular, it draws attention to the effects of competitive and invitational policy instruments.

The first part of this study also offers an opportunity to compare the recent policy innovation in Tennessee with previous policymaking events. In 1984, Tennessee passed the Comprehensive Education Reform Act. Among other things, it established a career ladder for teachers, tying salary to performance evaluations. At this time, the state, along with Florida, was considered a model for other states implementing career ladders (Pipho, 1986). Now, Tennessee is the first state to implement an annual evaluation system of educators.

An analysis of the events in 1984 suggests there are other similarities between the two episodes (Achilles, Lansford & Payne, 1986). Then-Governor Lamar Alexander, a Republican, emphasized the relationship between the state's economy and school system, as did Governor Bredesen. Alexander also reached out to Democrats and enjoyed bipartisan support in a Democratic-controlled legislature. Further, Alexander's staff was considered an important factor in the bill's success (Achilles et al., 1986), as was Bredesen's kitchen cabinet. This analysis also makes note of the open communication between the governor and TEA (Achilles et al., 1986). This tradition of collaboration between the state and the Association deepens our understanding of TEA's 2009 decision to work with Governor Bredesen rather than to actively oppose his proposed changes. These factors notwithstanding, the analysis of the 1984 events concludes, as does this

study that, "it seems the energy and commitment of the governor provided the sparkplug to start and drive the machinery of education reform in Tennessee, (Achilles et al., 1986, p. 242)."

McDonnell's policy feedback and Tennessee

The second part of this study examined how the Tennessee Evaluation Advisory Committee worked to develop policy recommendations for the statewide educator evaluation system. Policy feedback (McDonnell, 2009) provides a useful tool for examining the political dynamics that permeated the TEAC's work. I adapted the model to better analyze the process begun by First to the Top and culminating in the new statewide educator evaluation system. This framework offers a structure for examining how the characteristics of an instigating policy (First to the Top) forecasted the politics that emerge. While McDonnell utilizes the framework to consider how a policy alters existing institutions, I analyze the institution created by First to the Top: the TEAC, and how the structures and rules of this institution also shaped the political dynamics. Finally, this framework permits an examination of how these factors interacted with committee members' understanding of their mission and public input to produce the new evaluation policy.

McDonnell (2009) argues that policy feedback analyses can inform subsequent policies through attention to the characteristics of an instigating policy and the institutional effects. The policy context set by First to the Top forecasted positive conditions for the TEAC's work. However, a lack of clear leadership revealed discord

among the members as to the committee's mission, and their voting decisions reflect this lack of consensus. This suggests the importance of a leader who will unequivocally clarify a committee's mission. However, the intention of the legislation to gather input from a variety of stakeholders presents a formidable challenge to strong leadership. How does one balance these two distinct approaches? A partial answer lies in how the committee made decisions.

For each aspect of the policy, the committee engaged in lengthy discussions. They heard from different stakeholders – invited and impromptu – and they considered a variety of options, including approaches being implemented in local districts. A strong leader could have clarified the TEAC's charge to concentrate on policy guidelines as opposed to designing the specific model for the system, and focused conversations around this goal. This would have ensured that different stakeholders still had the opportunity to provide input, while focusing their suggestions in a constructive way. Allowing the committee members to vote on the policy recommendations did give them a sense of ownership in the process, and the chair's nonparticipation in this element mitigated the appearance that he was leading the committee in a certain direction.

The time constraints the committee faced also exacerbated the tension they encountered. Policy feedback (McDonnell, 2009) illustrates how this deadline affected the policy development. Because the evaluation system had to be operationalized so rapidly the work of the TEAC in developing the policy overlapped with the Department's efforts at implementation. This resulted in the perception among members that their role was curtailed and the evaluation system did not reflect their intentions.

Finally, although there were multiple opportunities for public input, committee members did not consider this helpful. Although McDonnell (2009) suggests that how policy targets (in this case teachers and principals) respond to a policy influences the development of subsequent policies, this study cannot find strong support for this. This is an area that deserves future attention because this structure for education governance aimed to include stakeholders' voices as it developed these recommendations.

To summarize, in applying policy feedback to this study, I illustrate how a fledgling political-science framework can help develop our understanding of an emerging form of education governance: policymaking by a volunteer committee of stakeholders. The conclusions from this research suggest that similar future policy contexts would benefit from a better balance between strong leadership and diverse representation. While this practical rationale for policy feedback is important, McDonnell (2009) also argues in favor of a more noble pursuit: democratic governance of education. Thus, it is important to attend the contribution this study makes in that area as well.

Democracy in Tennessee

The education policy environment is often described as "turbulent" (Crowson, 2003) due to the contentious struggle for authority amongst the various levels of government. Embedded in this struggle, however, is another vital, and less considered, element: Who participates in governing education? At all levels, bureaucracy, and the individuals who serve these institutions, plays a dominant role. Education policies like No Child Left Behind and state assessment programs trickle down to the classroom, and

their implementation is often threatened because of the disconnect between those who develop them and those who implement them (Lipsky, 1976). But, what if the people affected by the policy were invited to participate in its development?

Who participates in education governance is the subject of Amy Guttman's book *Democratic Education*. In her view, the imperfections of democratic politics do not diminish its value because:

> Without the tumult of democratic politics, our education institutions would not be governed by common values. We discover our common values partly through processes of democratic deliberation by which we agree upon the laws that govern our educational institutions. Take away the educational institutions, and the processes that remain cannot function democratically. (Guttman, 1987, p. 287)

In Tennessee, the decisions to invite practitioners and business leaders to the policymaking table, to hold these meetings on stakeholders' "home turf," and make the meetings open to the public strengthened the notion of participatory democracy. Though the process was marked by discord and, at times, dissatisfaction, the process was open to public scrutiny and its proceedings are archived in the meeting minutes. This messiness is precisely what we should expect, what we should want, when people with diverse perspectives come together to make decisions. All voices should be represented. All voices deserve an opportunity to be heard. Ultimately, one side will win but, according to one legislator, "that's the way democracy is supposed to work." The result in Tennessee is an evaluation policy guided by many stakeholders, including practitioners. It is not a perfect system, but the process that created it aims at the heart of democratic ideals.

Limitations

The broad purpose of this study to explain the policymaking process in Tennessee should be kept in perspective. It is not without limitations. To begin with, the study relied primarily on interviews with key actors in this process. Although the sampling methods employed were intended to allow me to reach saturation, "the point when all the concepts are well defined and explained" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 145), such data is subjective and could reflect the biases of the participants. However, the corroboration among participants, particularly for the first part of the study, suggests that any biases are likely to be in the same direction. Further, several participants made specific mention that their responses reflected their perspectives and they encouraged me to speak with others to see if there were differences or similarities.

Second, this is a study of a single state and thus, generalizing to policymaking in other states is constrained. Three factors temper this limitation. With qualitative methods, the researcher should provide thick descriptions of both the methodology and results to allow others to determine the extent to which findings in similar contexts under similar conditions might correspond. Throughout this study, I endeavored to provide a detailed account of my process. Second, this study is guided by theoretical frameworks that have been applied in other contexts. Adding to this literature strengthens external validity. Finally, Tennessee was not the only state to make significant policy changes in response to Race to the Top, and many of the topics – teacher evaluations, use of student data, and failing schools – were addressed in other legislatures. This study is an initial contribution to understanding recent state activity in education reform. Future research will allow us to examine the parallels between Tennessee and other states.

Implications for Policy

Race to the Top has provoked robust activity in state policymaking, providing both financial support and license for furthering education reform. Moreover, the strict deadlines states imposed in an effort to win the competition have presented additional challenges. As such, implications for policy are not confined to Tennessee but have broader reach to education policymaking in an evolving federalist system

An immediate issue is the changing policy context in light of the new policy instrument introduced with Race to the Top. While mandates are criticized for provoking only the minimal response necessary, a competition elicits a different response: applicants want to do all they can to win. Further, because states are not required to participate, this instrument is unlikely to exacerbate tensions between the federal and state levels. In fact, by awarding points for LEA participation, an invitational competition seems to encourage cooperation across all levels of government and to ameliorate issues of will and capacity that frequently challenge policy implementation.

The introduction of funding for some states but not others could restrict the exchange of ideas between states and result in more furtive policymaking at the state level. If this is the case, it suggests a dominance of the leadership arena, at least for education policy innovation, both because of the low visibility this venue affords and the additional resources accessible only to the political elite. Both of these conditions are necessary for states to maintain a competitive advantage over other states. The extent to

which an invitational competition alters the policy environment over time remains to be seen, but if Tennessee is any indication, these changes seem likely.

This study also suggests a renewed focus for state policymaking in education. Although the criteria for Race to the Top were prescriptive, states were encouraged to propose reforms that met their specific needs. The effect of this design is a greater degree of standardization across participating states in several reform areas including curriculum standards, more frequent evaluations of teachers, use of student data, and state intervention in failing schools. If their efforts prove to be successful in raising student achievement, non-participating states may feel pressure to adopt similar reforms.

Additionally this study shows new participants in the policymaking process are emerging. This expansion of educational governance to nontraditional policymakers adds yet another dimension to the "marble cake" (Bailey & Mosher, 1968) metaphor of a federalist system. Other states have imitated Tennessee's model of inviting a variety of stakeholders to help shape their own educator evaluation systems. Although typically these committees are connected to either the State Board of Education or the Department of Education, their members are voluntarily serving in this capacity. If the experience in Tennessee is any indication, these states are likely to encounter many of the same challenges.

Finally, this study highlights the tensions that are likely to develop when policy development and implementation occur concurrently. Particularly in contexts similar to Tennessee where stakeholders were invited to participate in the policymaking process, it is important to consider the consequences of this outcome. If the intention is to reduce

implementation challenges, including resistance to reforms by giving policy targets an opportunity to shape policy, then efforts should be made to ensure clear communication regarding the different responsibilities for all participants.

Research Forward

This study aimed to make an initial contribution towards revitalizing scholarship on state policymaking. The dynamic events of the past few years suggest many avenues for further research. Below I present a few of the possibilities:

1) A reconsideration of state policymaking theory to understand the extent to which revisions are necessary given this new policy environment. Specifically, scholars should investigate the effect voluntary and competitive elements and strict deadlines have on the policymaking process.
2) An exploration of trends in state education policy changes surrounding the Race to the Top competition. Scholarship in this area could examine similarities and differences between the states' approaches to the Race to the Top criteria. It could also explore differences between states like Tennessee, that were successful in passing innovative legislation, and states like Colorado, where reforms initially failed.
3) An investigation into the new participants in the policymaking process. Such studies could identify states that have invited participation from nontraditional policymakers, the stakeholders they represent, differences among their perspectives, and the perceptions about the policymaking process.

4) Further applications of policy feedback to examine the extent to which policy targets directly influence policy development.
5) An analysis of the connections between the policymaking process and implementation efforts. Of particular interest here is understanding whether the context surrounding the policymaking process (consensus or contention) forecasted the trials or triumphs of implementation.
6) Finally, Tennessee's policy innovation is notable in part because of the high level of cooperation from TEA. More frequently, unions hampered states' application efforts. The 2012 legislative session challenged collective bargaining rights in many states, and in at least one state, union membership has fallen since Race to the Top (The Associated Press, 2011). Scholars should explore this area to understand the extent to which this traditionally powerful organization finds its role changing. To what extent are unions losing their voice in the education policymaking process? And, importantly, what accounts for this loss of power? Is it a change in their own philosophy of protecting teachers or is it provoked by strong-armed elected leaders?

Conclusion

This study examined the changes in one state's education policy in response to Race to the Top. Through interviews with a multitude of voices, I examined how Tennessee is striving to improve schools. Though not without limitations, this study, guided by political science frameworks, makes an initial contribution to revising our

understanding of education governance in a federalist system. It is hoped that results from this study will illuminate the role of the state in education reform, and particularly how new participants in this process are emerging. This study suggests implications for policy and practice as states engage in implementing their ambitious policies. Finally, this study sought to share a portrayal, however fleeting, of concerned citizens working in a democracy to make a better system for the youngest members of our society.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

First to the Top Legislation

PUBLIC CHAPTER NO. 2

FIRST EXTRAORDINARY SESSION

SENATE BILL NO. 7005

By Kyle, Woodson, Gresham, McNally, Berke, Kelsey, Tate

Substituted for: House Bill No. 7010

By Michael Turner, Lois DeBerry, Harry Brooks, Naifeh, Fitzhugh, Maddox, Williams, Dunn

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5, relative to education.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010".

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-602(f)(1)(C)(ii), is amended by deleting the existing language and by substituting instead the following language:

> Removing the school from the jurisdiction of the LEA and placing the school under the jurisdiction of the "achievement school district" established by the Commissioner of Education pursuant to § 49-1-614.

SECTION 3. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-602(f)(1)(C), is further amended by adding the following language as newly designated subdivision (v):

> Notwithstanding any provision of the law to the contrary, the commissioner shall have the authority to choose for the school the plan of alternative governance to be developed and implemented.

SECTION 4. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-602(g), is amended by deleting the following language:

> If the school does not meet the performance standards of the state board by the end of the fourth year of improvement status, the school may be placed in the fifth year of improvement status (Restructuring 2 — Alternative Governance). During the fifth year of improvement status:

and by substituting instead the following language:

> If the school does not meet the performance standards of the state board by the end of the fourth year of improvement status, the school may be placed in the fifth year of improvement status (Restructuring 2 — Alternative Governance).

During the fifth year of improvement status or at any time a Title I school meets the U.S. Department of Education's definition of "persistently lowest achieving schools":

SECTION 5. Tennessee Code Annotated, 49-1-602(g)(2)(E), is amended by deleting the existing language and by substituting instead the following language:

Implementation of the plan for governance, selected from options provided by the commissioner or the specific plan chosen by the commissioner; provided, however, that in the case where the plan for alternative governance is implemented, the LEA shall continue to be accountable for the match required by the funding formula for students served. In addition, the LEA shall continue to provide such support services as identified by the commissioner or designee.

SECTION 6. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-602(l)(1)(A), is amended by deleting the existing language and by substituting instead the following language:

Assume any or all powers of governance for the LEA, including, but not limited to, assigning the LEA, or individual schools within the LEA, to the achievement school district. However, in the case of the commissioner assuming governance, the LEA shall continue to be accountable for the match required by the BEP funding formula for students served.

SECTION 7. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-606(a), is amended by deleting the second sentence of the subsection in its entirety.

SECTION 8. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-606(b), is amended by adding the following sentence at the end of the subsection:

The estimates of specific teacher effects may also be made available to the state board approved teacher preparation programs of individual teachers. The estimates made available to the preparation programs shall not be personally identifiable with a particular teacher.

SECTION 9. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 6, is amended by adding the following language as a new § 49-1-614:

(a) For the purposes of this title, the "achievement school district" is an organizational unit of the Department of Education, established by the commissioner for the purpose of providing oversight for the operation of the total program for individual schools or LEAs, pursuant to § 49-1-602.

(b) The commissioner shall have the authority to contract with one or more individuals, governmental entities or nonprofit entities to manage the day-to-day operations of any or all schools or LEAs placed in the achievement school district, including, but not limited to, providing direct services to students.

(c) The individual, governmental entity or nonprofit entity contracted with to manage schools or LEAs that have been placed in the achievement school district may apply to the commissioner for a waiver of any state board rule that inhibits or hinders the ability of the school or LEA to achieve the required

adequate yearly progress benchmarks. Notwithstanding the provisions of this subsection (c), the commissioner shall not waive rules related to the following:

(1) Federal and state civil rights;

(2) Federal, state, and local health and safety;

(3) Federal and state public records;

(4) Immunizations;

(5) Possession of weapons on school grounds;

(6) Background checks and fingerprinting of personnel;

(7) Federal and state special education services;

(8) Student due process;

(9) Parental rights;

(10) Federal and state student assessment and accountability;

(11) Open meetings; and

(12) At least the same equivalent time of instruction as required in regular public schools.

(d)(1) The individual, governmental entity or nonprofit entity contracted with to manage schools that have been placed in the achievement school district shall have the authority to determine whether any teacher who was previously assigned to such school shall have the option of continuing to teach at that school as an employee of the managing entity. Any teacher not given that option shall remain an employee of the LEA, subject to the provisions of § 49-5-511. Moreover, any teacher who accepts that option shall have the right to return to the employ of the LEA should the managing entity later determine not to continue to employ such teacher, subject to the provisions of § 49-5-511.

(2) With the exception of the provisions protecting teachers' rights to accumulated sick leave, retirement benefits, pension and tenure status within an LEA, the provisions of Tennessee Code Annotated, § 49-5-203, and the Education Professional Negotiations Act, compiled in Title 49, Chapter 5, Part 6, shall not apply to teachers who accept the option of continuing to teach at a school placed in the achievement school district.

(e) After a school or LEA that has been placed in the achievement school district achieves the required adequate yearly progress benchmarks for two consecutive years, the commissioner shall develop a transition plan for the purpose of planning the school's or LEA's return to the jurisdiction of the local board of education. Implementation of this plan shall begin after the school or

LEA achieves the required adequate yearly progress benchmarks for three consecutive years. The plan must be fully implemented and the transition must be completed after a school or LEA achieves adequate yearly progress benchmarks for five consecutive years.

(f) Notwithstanding the provisions of any law to the contrary, the commissioner shall have the authority to remove any school or LEA from the jurisdiction of the achievement school district at any time.

(g)(1) Absent other funding, the achievement school district shall use state and local funding identified above to operate a school placed in alternative governance and to implement new initiatives and programs as appropriate. Such state and local funding may be used to implement new initiatives and programs to the extent that any increase in recurring expenditures are funded additionally so as not to create a financial burden on the LEA when the school or LEA is removed from the achievement school district.

(2) To the extent that such state funds are not used to support a school or LEA in the achievement school district, they shall be allocated to a state reserve fund to be distributed to an LEA only upon approval of the commissioner.

(3) To the extent that such local funds are not used to support a school or LEA in the achievement school district, the LEA shall allocate such funds to a special BEP reserve account until the school or LEA is placed back under the jurisdiction of the LEA. It is the legislative intent that such funds be used only for non-recurring purposes.

(h) Any individuals, governmental entities, or nonprofit entities contracting with the commissioner to manage the operation of any school under this section shall provide timely information to the LEA and director of schools regarding its operation of such schools, including, but not limited to, matters relating to employment of personnel at the school as provided for in subsection (d). The LEA may continue to support the educational improvement of the school under the direction and guidance of the commissioner and in accordance with any contracts entered into in accordance with this section. In addition, any individuals, governmental entities, or nonprofit entities contracting with the commissioner may voluntarily work with the LEA in providing to the schools professional development or technical assistance, instructional and administrative support, and facilitating any other support that may be beneficial to academic progress of the school.

(i) Any contracts to manage schools or LEAs that have been placed in the achievement school district shall require expenditure reports for funds received and expended pursuant to such contracts. Such reports shall be provided to the Department of Education and comptroller of the treasury for review.

(j) No state funds, other than funds held within the special reserve account pursuant to subsection (g)(2), shall be expended on schools or LEAs

placed in the achievement school district unless specifically appropriated in a General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 10. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-302(d)(1) and (2), are amended by deleting those subdivisions in their entirety and by substituting instead the following:

(d)(1) There is hereby created the "teacher evaluation advisory committee". The committee shall consist of fifteen (15) members. The Commissioner of Education, the executive director of the State Board of Education and the chairpersons of the Education Committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives shall be members. One (1) member shall be a K-12 public school teacher appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and one (1) member shall be a K-12 public school teacher appointed by the Speaker of the Senate. The remaining nine (9) members shall be appointed by the governor and shall consist of three (3) public school teachers, two (2) public school principals, one (1) director of a school district, and three (3) members representing other stake-holders interests; provided, that at least one (1) member of the committee shall be a parent of a currently enrolled public school student. The membership of the committee shall appropriately reflect the racial and geographic diversity of this state. The Commissioner of Education shall serve as the chairperson of the committee. All appointments to the teacher evaluation advisory committee shall be made within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this act.

(2) The committee shall develop and recommend to the board, guidelines and criteria for the annual evaluation of all teachers and principals employed by LEAs, including a local-level evaluation grievance procedure. This grievance procedure shall provide a means for evaluated teachers and principals to challenge only the accuracy of the data used in the evaluation and the adherence to the evaluation policies adopted pursuant to this subdivision. Following the development of these guidelines and criteria, the board shall adopt guidelines and criteria. The evaluations shall be a factor in employment decisions, including, but not necessarily limited to, promotion, retention, termination, compensation and the attainment of tenure status.

(A) Fifty percent (50%) of the evaluation criteria developed pursuant to this subdivision (2) shall be comprised of student achievement data.

(i) Thirty-five percent (35%) of the evaluation criteria shall be student achievement data based on student growth data as represented by the TVAAS, developed pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 6, or some other comparable measure of student growth, if no such TVAAS data is available.

(ii) Fifteen percent (15%) shall be based on other measures of student achievement selected from a list of

such measures developed by the teacher evaluation advisory committee and adopted by the board. For each evaluation, the teacher or principal being evaluated shall mutually agree with the person or persons responsible for conducting the evaluation on which such measures are employed. If the teacher or principal being evaluated does not agree with the measures used, the person or persons responsible for conducting the evaluation shall choose the evaluation measures.

(iii) Notwithstanding subdivisions (i) and (ii) above, if a particular teacher's or principal's student growth data, as described in subdivision (i) above, reflects attainment of a specific achievement level, to be recommended by the teacher evaluation advisory committee and adopted by the board, then such student growth data may, at the choice of the individual being evaluated, comprise fifty percent (50%) of their evaluation.

(B) Other mandatory criteria for the evaluations shall include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following:

(i) Review of prior evaluations; and

(ii) Personal conferences to include discussion of strengths, weaknesses and remediation; and

(iii) Relative to teachers only, classroom or position observation followed by written assessment; and

(iv) Relative to principals only, additional criteria pursuant to § 49-2-303(a)(1).

(3) The policies adopted pursuant to subdivision (2) shall be effective no later than July 1, 2011, in order to be implemented prior to the 2011-2012 academic year. Prior to the implementation of these policies, the existing guidelines and criteria for the evaluation of certificated persons employed by LEAs shall continue to be utilized.

(4) The evaluation procedure created by this subsection shall not apply to teachers who are employed under contracts of duration of one hundred twenty (120) days per school year or less or who are not employed full-time.

(5) The committee shall be subject to the governmental entity review law, compiled in Title 4, Chapter 29, and shall terminate on July 1, 2011, unless continued or extended by the general assembly.

SECTION 11. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-2-303(a)(1), is amended by deleting the subdivision in its entirety and by substituting instead the following language:

> Each director of schools shall employ principals for the public schools. The employment contract with each principal shall be in writing, shall not exceed the contract term of the current director of schools, and may be renewed. The contract shall specify duties other than those prescribed by statute and shall contain performance standards including the requirement that the principal's annual evaluation be based on student achievement data, with a significant portion, as defined by the guidelines and criteria adopted by the board in accordance with § 49-1-302(d)(2), being student growth data as reflected in teacher effect data and TVAAS data, as such data is developed pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 6. Other standards that may be considered in the evaluation shall include, but not be limited to, other benchmarks for student proficiency, graduation rates, ACT scores where applicable and student attendance. The contract shall provide for consequences when the standards are not met. The performance contract may provide for bonuses beyond base salary, if performance standards are met or exceeded. Reasons for the nonrenewal of a contract may include, but are not limited to, inadequate performance as determined by the evaluations. A principal who has tenure as a teacher shall retain all rights of such status, expressly including those specified in § 49-5-510.

SECTION 12. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-3-306(a)(1), is amended by adding the following language at the end of the subdivision:

> In the alternative, an LEA may submit to the commissioner its own proposed salary schedule, subject to collective bargaining where applicable. Implementation of such a salary schedule shall be subject to approval by the commissioner and the state board. In no case shall a salary schedule adopted pursuant to this subdivision (1) result in the reduction of the salary of a teacher employed by the LEA at the time of the adoption of the salary schedule. Any additional expenditure incurred as a result of any such salary schedule shall be subject to appropriation by the governing body empowered to appropriate the funds.

SECTION 13. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-5-512, is amended by deleting the existing language in its entirety and by substituting instead the following language:

> (a) A tenured teacher, who receives notification of charges pursuant to § 49-5-511, may, within thirty (30) days after receipt of the notice, demand a full and complete hearing on the charges before an impartial hearing officer selected by the board, as follows:
>
> (1) The teacher shall give written notice to the director of schools of the teacher's request for a hearing;
>
> (2) The director of schools shall, within five (5) days after receipt of the request, name an impartial hearing officer who shall be responsible

for notifying the parties of the hearing officer's assignment. The hearing officer shall direct the parties or the attorneys for the parties, or both, to appear before the hearing officer for simplification of issues and the scheduling of the hearing, which in no event shall be set later than thirty (30) days following receipt of notice demanding a hearing. In the discretion of the hearing officer, all or part of any prehearing conference may be conducted by telephone if each participant has an opportunity to participate, be heard, and to address proof and evidentiary concerns. The hearing officer is empowered to issue appropriate orders and to regulate the conduct of the proceedings;

(3) For the purposes of this part, "impartial" means that the selected hearing officer shall have no history of employment with the board or director of schools, no relationship with any board member and no relationship with the teacher or representatives of the teacher;

(4) All parties shall have the right to be represented by counsel, the opportunity to call and subpoena witnesses, the opportunity to examine all witnesses, the right to require that all testimony be given under oath and the right to have evidence deemed relevant by the submitting party included in the record of the hearing, even if objected to by the opposing party;

(5) All witnesses shall be entitled to the witness fees and mileage provided by law, which fees and mileage shall be paid by the party issuing a subpoena or calling the witnesses to testify;

(6) The impartial hearing officer shall administer oaths to witnesses, who testify under oath;

(7) A record of the hearing, either by transcript, recording, or as is otherwise agreed by the parties shall be prepared if the decision of the hearing officer is appealed, and all decisions of the hearing officer shall be reduced to writing and included in the record, together with all evidence otherwise submitted;

(8) On request of either party to the hearing, witnesses may be barred from the hearing except as they are called to testify. The hearing may be private at the request of the teacher or in the discretion of the hearing officer; and

(9) At appropriate stages of the hearing, the hearing officer may give the parties the full opportunity to file briefs, proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law, and proposed initial or final orders. The hearing officer shall within ten (10) days of closing the hearing, decide what disposition to make of the case and shall immediately thereafter give the board and the teacher written findings of fact, conclusions of law and a concise and explicit statement of the outcome of the decision.

(b) The director of schools or other school officials shall not be held liable, personally or officially, when performing their duties in prosecuting charges against any teacher or teachers under this part.

(c)(1) If the affected teacher desires to appeal from a decision rendered in whole or in part in favor of the school system, the teacher shall first exhaust the administrative remedy of appealing the decision to the board of education within ten (10) working days of the hearing officer's delivery of the written findings of fact, conclusions and decision to the affected employee.

(2) Upon written notice of appeal, the director of schools shall prepare a copy of the proceedings, transcript, documentary and other evidence presented, and transmit the copy to the board within twenty (20) working days of receipt of notice of appeal.

(3) The board shall hear the appeal on the record and no new evidence shall be introduced. The affected employee may appear in person or by counsel and argue why the decision should be modified or reversed. The board may sustain the decision, send the record back if additional evidence is necessary, revise the penalty or reverse the decision. Before any findings and decision are sustained or punishment inflicted, a majority of the membership of the board shall concur in sustaining the charges and decision. The board shall render its decision on the appeal within ten (10) working days after the conclusion of the hearing.

(4) Any party dissatisfied with the decision rendered by the board shall have the right to appeal to the chancery court in the county where the school system is located within twenty (20) working days after receipt of the dated notice of the decision of the board. It shall be the duty of the board to cause the entire record and other evidence in the case to be transmitted to the court. The review of the court shall be de novo on the record of the hearing held by the hearing officer and reviewed by the board.

(5) The director of schools shall also have the right to appeal any adverse ruling by the hearing officer to the board under the same conditions as set out in this subsection (c).

SECTION 14. The Teacher Professional Development Fund is established, into which only federal monies shall be deposited, for the purposes of improved teaching, pedagogical skills, and classroom instruction.

SECTION 15. The Department of Education shall annually report to the general assembly the amount of Race to the Top funds awarded to each local education agency and achievement school district.

SECTION 16. If any provision of this act or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or

applications of the act which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to that end the provisions of this act are declared to be severable.

SECTION 17. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

PASSED: January 15, 2010

RON RAMSEY
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

KENT WILLIAMS, SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROVED this 16th day of January 2010

PHIL BREDESEN, GOVERNOR

Appendix B

Interview Protocol: Legislators

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As I explained to your assistant, I am a PhD student at Vanderbilt conducting a research project about how legislators gather information on proposed bills and legislation. Today I'd like to talk with you about that process generally, and also specifically regarding the Tennessee First to the Top Act, HB7010/SB7005. I would like to record the interview, and all information will remain confidential. I will use pseudonyms when reporting my results.

Speaking into recorder today is _____ and this is my interview with subject _____.

1. What kind of work did you do before becoming a legislator for _____?
    a. Did you have any experience with the public schools or education policy?

2. Do you have a specific role in education legislation? (involved in any committees, etc.)

Information-gathering and decision-making in general

3. If you aren't familiar with proposed legislation, what do you do to gather information? (listen for sequencing cues)

    a. Probe to see if any of the following people are involved in this process. (Ask about people not previously mentioned. Format should be yes/no answer.)
        i. Staffers
        ii. Lobbyists
        iii. Fellow legislators
        iv. Constituents
        v. Other _____

    b. How would you characterize the nature of this process? Formal/informal, what is the setting?

c. Of the different sources of information you've just mentioned, which are the top one or two upon whom you rely? Why do you value those sources above others?

4. Tell me about the decision-making process – after you've gathered information, what happens next? (listen for sequencing cues)

5. Does research have a role in the information gathering process? Why/why not?

    a. How?

    b. Which, if any, of these sources for education research do you rely on? (Ask all sources not previously mentioned. Format should be yes/no answers.
        i. Databases
        ii. Journals
        iii. Researchers/Experts
        iv. Research Institutions
        v. Universities and colleges
        vi. Newspapers
        vii. NCSL, SREB, ALEC, ECS, Council of State Governments, etc.
        viii. Comptroller's Reports
        ix. Information provided by legislature
        x. Other _____

    c. How do you decide which research is the best to use?

Information-gathering and decision-making specific to HB7010/SB7005

We've talked a little about the general process you use to gather information and learn about proposed legislation, now I'd like to talk more specifically about the recent Special Session where Tennessee First to the Top Act, HB7010/SB7005 was enacted. I know the bill covered a variety of education topics including the establishment of an achievement school district and the procedure for restructuring schools, but I am primarily interested in the changes to teacher evaluations using student achievement data, so I'd like to focus our conversation around that piece.

6. I understand that during Special Session, the only issue considered is the focus of the session; in January it was education.

    a. What was your role in the January special session?

b. Did you attend any of the education committee meetings? Why/why not?
    i. What is your role when you attend these meetings/purpose for going?

7. What led you to vote _____?

    a. If relevant, ask if the section about teacher evaluations influenced the legislator's vote?

8. How much did you know about the pros, cons, and logistics, and rationale about linking teacher evaluations with student achievement?

9. Did you use the information provided by the governor to learn about this issue? (Ask probes judiciously depending on answer to major question.)

    a. How would you characterize the nature of that information?

    b. How did you decide whether it was valuable information or not?

10. Did you seek out information other than what was provided to you by the governor?

    a. Probe to see if any of the following people are involved in this process. (Ask about people not previously mentioned. Format should be yes/no.)
        i. Staffers
        ii. Lobbyists
        iii. Fellow legislators
        iv. Constituents
        v. Other _____

    b. Of the different sources of information you've just mentioned, which are the top one or two upon whom you relied for this session? Why did you value those sources above others?

11. Did you use education research to learn about this issue? (Ask probes judiciously depending on answer to major question.)

    a. Which, if any, of these sources for education research do you rely on? (Ask all sources not previously mentioned. Format should be yes/no answers.
        i. Databases

ii. Journals
iii. Researchers/Experts
iv. Research Institutions
v. Universities and colleges
vi. Newspapers
vii. NCSL, ALEC, ECS, SREB, Council of State Governments
viii. Comptroller's Reports
ix. Information provided by legislature
x. Other _____

b. How did you decide which research was the best to use?

12. Did you receive unsolicited information in the mail, via email, phone calls, etc.?

    a. How did you use that information?

13. In thinking about the part of the bill regarding teacher evaluations using student achievement data, how did the information you gathered impact your voting decision?

14. Thinking back to all the information you used to make this decision, what was the most influential piece? The second most?

Closing

15. Why do you think this bill passed now?

16. Is there anything else about this process that we haven't discussed that you feel is important for me to know?

Thank you again for your time today. I really appreciate your willingness to speak with me. Can you suggest another legislator with whom I should meet?
_____ *Would it be okay to mention your name when I contact their office?*

Appendix C

Interview Protocol: Individuals involved in First to the Top legislation (not legislators)

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As I explained in our previous conversation, I am a PhD student at Vanderbilt University working on my dissertation about how Race to the Top has affected education policy in Tennessee. Today I'd like to talk with you about your role in the First to the Top legislative process. I would like to record the interview, and all information will remain confidential.

Explain consent form and ask participant to sign it.

I am going to ask you questions about the First to the Top legislation. Please feel free to stop me at any time if you have any questions.

Speaking into recorder: Today is _____ and this is my interview with subject _____.

1. Can you tell me a little about your career as _____?

2. Tell me about Race to the Top in Tennessee.
   (Possible probes if not mentioned by subject.)

   a. What do you remember about the process?

   b. Can you say more about _____? (Could ask about people mentioned, particular aspects of process, etc.)

3. What was your involvement in Race to the Top?

   a. If not mentioned, ask about specific involvement with First to the Top legislation.

4. Why did Tennessee decide to pursue Race to the Top, and why was this legislation considered necessary?

5. What/whose support did you have in promoting RTTT and the legislation?

6. What challenges did you face? From whom?

7. How was the final version of the bill different from the one originally proposed by the governor?

    a. What do you remember about the negotiations to the bill?
        i. Why were those aspects more objectionable than others?

    b. Who else participated in the revision process?

    c. Do you recall where these negotiations occurred?

8. How did you gather support for the bill?

    a. Were any materials distributed to legislators or other individuals?
        i. What do you remember about them?

    b. Where were conversations about the bill likely to occur? (Legislators' offices, Governor's office, committee meetings, etc.)

9. How were the education committees in the legislature involved?

10. How did the media give attention to RTTT and the legislation?

11. Why do you think the legislation was successful?

12. Is there anything else about this process we haven't discussed that you feel is important for me to know?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol: Follow up with selection of legislators

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As I explained in our previous conversation, I am a PhD student at Vanderbilt University working on my dissertation about how Race to the Top has affected education policy in Tennessee. Today I'd like to talk with you about your role in the First to the Top legislative process. I would like to record the interview, and all information will remain confidential.

Explain consent form and ask participant to sign it.

I am going to ask you questions about the First to the Top legislation. Please feel free to stop me at any time if you have any questions.

Speaking into recorder: Today is _____ and this is my interview with subject _____.

1. According to my notes from last year, you told me that your involvement in the First to the Top legislative process was _____. Is my understanding correct? Is there anything you would change or add to that description?

2. What else do you remember from the special session, when the First to the Top legislation was passed?

    a. Can you tell me more about _____? (Could ask about people mentioned, particular aspects of process, etc.)

3. Why did Tennessee decide to pursue Race to the Top and why was this legislation considered necessary?

4. What/whose support did you have in promoting RTTT and the legislation?

5. What challenges did you face? From whom? Who were the key figures in this process? What were their roles?

6. How was the final version of the bill different from the one originally proposed by the governor?

a. What do you remember about the negotiations to the bill?
    i. Why were those aspects more objectionable than others?

b. Who else participated in the revision process?

c. Do you recall where these negotiations occurred?

7. How did you gather support for the bill?

    a. Were any materials distributed to legislators or other individuals?
        i. What do you remember about them?

    b. Where were conversations about the bill likely to occur? (Legislators' offices, Governor's office, committee meetings, etc.)

8. How were the education committees in the legislature involved?

9. How did the media give attention to RTTT and the legislation?

10. Is there anything else about this process we haven't discussed that you feel is important for me to know?

Appendix E

Interview Protocol: Teacher Educator Advisory Committee

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As I explained in our previous conversation, I am a PhD student at Vanderbilt University working on my dissertation about how Race to the Top has affected education policy in Tennessee. Today I'd like to talk with you about your role in the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee, specifically the development of the new educator evaluations. I would like to record the interview, and all information will remain confidential.

Explain consent form and ask participant to sign it.

I am going to ask you questions about the work you did to implement the educator evaluation system. Please feel free to stop me at any time if you have questions. I want to let you know that in preparation for our meeting today, I have read the minutes and other materials from the advisory committee meetings, and I might have some specific questions about them.

Speaking into recorder: Today is _____ and this is my interview with subject _____. Subject is _____ and was on _____.

1. Tell me a little about your work in education.

2. How did you become involved with the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee?

3. What did you know/think about evaluation linked to student achievement before you began working on the committee?

4. What would you like me to know about the work of the committee?

    a. Was someone in charge at the meetings? Did that stay the same at all meetings?

    b. Can you say more about _____? (Could ask about people mentioned, specific aspects of process, etc.)

5. What were the goals of the committee?

a. Committee was supposed to recommend guidelines, then what happened?

b. From reading the minutes, it sounds as though there was some confusion about the level of specificity for the recommendations. Can you tell me about that?

6. The consulting agency, Education First, facilitated these meetings, how did they come to do this?

7. What were the most enjoyable aspects of the work you did?

    a. Several components of TEAC's work, was any of it easier? (35% growth, 15% other, 50% teacher qualitative, principal evaluation.

8. What challenges did you face?

    a. How did you deal with these challenges?

    b. How did the timeline affect the work?

9. Did you have any priorities or special interests you wanted to see included in the recommendations?

10. How did the committee reach decisions?

    a. Did the voting options represent ideas that TEAC generated or that Education First presented?

11. Did the change in commissioners affect the work?

12. Did the change in governor affect the work?

13. At the April meeting, there was a conversation about the importance of getting public input, was the committee successful in doing that?

APPENDIX F

Coding Frameworks

Part 1: How did Race to the Top evolve politically in Tennessee in 2010?

A. Emergent themes:

1. Comparison between General Assembly in 2010 and 2011
2. Remarks about evaluating teachers
3. Precursors to Race to the Top in Tennessee
4. Post-Special Session
5. Tennessee policy and Race to the Top focal areas

B. Themes suggested by theory:

1. Leadership arena
    a. Participants
    b. Resources
2. Pressure for change
    a. Competition
    b. Borrowing strength
3. Additional resources
4. Softening the system
5. Supporters and opponents
6. Policy innovation explained
    a. Proactive leadership
    b. Closed venue
    c. Consensus
    d. Lack of opposition

7. Politics

8. Problems

Part 2: How did the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee work to implement the Tennessee legislation with regard to annual evaluations for educators?

A. Emergent Themes:

1. Positive aspects of TEAC's work

2. Communication among members

3. Concerns about evaluation system

4. Relevant prior knowledge/experience

5. Resources

6. Subcommittees

7. Thought about evaluating teachers

B. Themes suggested by theory:

1. Institutional structures and rules
    a) Change in leadership
    b) Committee formation
    c) Timeframe
    d) Leadership for TEAC
2. Mobilization of interests
    a) Decision-making
    b) Goals of committee
3. Interpretive effects
    a) Public input

Appendix G

Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee Policy Recommendations

Part 1: Overarching Perspectives on Educator Evaluation

The State Board will adopt policies and rules for teacher and principal evaluation, which will be the basis for the model plan for all educators in Tennessee developed by the Department of Education. However, local boards of education may develop evaluation procedures, to be approved by the Department of Education, in accordance with the policies and rules adopted by the State Board of Education.

The primary purpose of annual teacher and principal evaluations is to identify and support instruction that will lead to high levels of student achievement. Evaluations will be used to inform human capital decisions, including but not limited to individual and group professional development plans, hiring, assignment and promotion, tenure and dismissal, and compensation.

Annual evaluations will differentiate teacher and principal performance into five effectiveness groups according to the individual educator's evaluation results. The five effectiveness groups are: significantly above expectations, above expectations, at expectations, below expectations, significantly below expectations.

Part 2: Criteria for the Evaluations

Fifty percent of the evaluation criteria is based on student achievement data, including thirty-five percent based on student growth data as represented by Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) or another comparable measure of student growth, if TVAAS data is unavailable, and fifteen percent based on other measures of student achievement, selected by the individual being evaluated and his/her evaluator from a list of such measures approved by the Department of Education.

The remaining fifty percent of the evaluation criteria will be based on the educator's summative rating against a qualitative appraisal instrument approved by the Department of Education, as determined through observations, surveys or other methods.

Part 3: Guidelines for the Evaluations

This portion of the evaluation system will use multiple data sources to evaluate educators' effectiveness in affecting student learning growth:

Thirty-five percent student growth measures

For teachers with individual value-added scores, the student growth measures are TVAAS scores as required by Public Acts, 2010, Public Chapter 2. The Department of Education will continually monitor the evaluation process and use of TVAAS data.

For teachers, librarians, counselors and other groups of educators who do not have individual TVAAS scores, LEAs will choose from a list of options that have been shown capable of measuring student growth. The list of options will be approved by the Department of Education prior to the start of each school year. The Department of Education will continually monitor and revise the list of options under this category based on increasing availability of higher-quality measures of performance. Additionally,

the Department of Education will work to develop valid and reliable student growth measures for those areas that do not currently have them. LEAs must provide training to evaluators to assess whether the students instructed by the educator being evaluated have demonstrated sufficient growth for the chosen measure. LEAs must implement the state's multiple rating categories to measure levels of performance for the chosen measure.

In lieu of the availability of growth measures for all educators without individual TVAAS scores, school-level value-added scores will be the standard student growth measure while other growth measures are in development.

For principals and assistant principals who spend 50 percent or more of their time on administrative duties, the student growth measure will be school-wide TVAAS scores.

Fifteen percent other measures of student achievement

For principals and assistant principals, classroom teachers, librarians and all other educators in grades K-8 and 9-12, the educator being evaluated will select, in collaboration with his/her evaluator, from a list of acceptable measures. The list of acceptable measures includes, but is not be limited to, graduation rate, percent proficient on TCAP assessments, percent proficient on state-approved district assessments, and other measures approved by the Department of Education. The list of acceptable measures will be refined and approved by the Department of Education prior to the start of each school year. If the two parties do not agree on a measure, the evaluator will select a measure.

Principals and teachers in the top three quintiles for student growth may elect to use their growth scores for fifty percent of their evaluation in lieu of selecting another achievement measure for the fifteen percent.

Fifty percent other mandatory criteria

This portion of the evaluation system will use multiple data sources to evaluate educator practice against a predetermined qualitative appraisal instrument, which shall include but are not limited to:

- Review of prior evaluations
- Personal conferences to discuss strengths, weaknesses and remediation
- Classroom or school observation visits

For all classroom teachers and non-instructional, certified staff other than principals and assistant principals who spend at least 50 percent of their time on administrative duties, the Department of Education, in consultation with the State Board of Education, will approve a qualitative appraisal instrument by which to evaluate all educators' effectiveness. In lieu of the approved appraisal instrument, LEAs may select a qualitative appraisal instrument from a list of approved options. The qualitative appraisal instruments will be based on appropriate standards for each category of educators and determined by the Department of Education in consultation with the State Board of Education. The

standard qualitative appraisal instrument and additional qualitative appraisal instruments will be approved by the Department of Education prior to the start of each school year.

Qualitative appraisal instruments must address the following domains: Planning, Environment, Professionalism, and Instruction.

Principals and assistant principals who spend 50 percent or more of their time on administrative duties will be evaluated according to a qualitative appraisal instrument based on the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) and approved by the Department of Education. The evaluation process will also include a review of the quality of the principals' teacher evaluations.

Principal and assistant principal qualitative appraisals should include school climate and/or teaching and learning conditions surveys. The Department of Education will develop a list of approved surveys that LEAs can use.

All educators, other than apprentice teachers and administrators, will have a minimum of four observations, with at least two observations in each semester, for a minimum total of at least 60 minutes each school year. At least half of all observations will be unannounced. Apprentice teachers will have at least six observations, with three in each semester, for a minimum total of at least 90 minutes each school year.

Principals will have at least two onsite observations annually, conducted by the director of schools or his/her designee.

The Department of Education will provide user friendly, manageable standardized forms to document observation visits and/or personal conferences. The approved forms will provide space for feedback in enough detail to allow the teacher or principal to understand specific areas of strength and areas for development. LEAs that elect to use an alternative appraisal instrument for evaluation must submit the observation recording forms to the Department of Education for approval.

Evaluators will provide written feedback within one week of each observation visit to the educator, and schedule an in-person debrief with the educator within one week of each observation visit. At the end of each school year, evaluators will rate educators based on the selected qualitative appraisal instrument, using notes collected through observation visits, conferences, a review of progress made in relation to the prior year's evaluation (when available) and other means.

Part 4: Putting It All Together

For the 50 percent achievement and 50 percent other components, educators will receive a rating based on a 5-point system developed by the Department of Education. A second system developed by the Department of Education will help the evaluators combine the student growth and teacher practice components into a single rating.

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