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Exiting Gracefully? Lessons on De-Implementing State-Appointed Governance from Literature and Stakeholder Perspectives in Missouri

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Summary

The state of Missouri will soon consider transitioning back from state-appointed governance to locally elected boards in two districts in the St. Louis metropolitan area, having already done so in another. The PRiME Center reviewed the literature to find evidence-based strategies for successful transitions to local governance, as well as conducted an empirical study investigating stakeholders' perspectives on appropriate strategies to exit state-appointed governance in Missouri school districts. The data were collected via interviews and focus groups from diverse stakeholder groups, including appointed and elected board members, administrators, educators, and parents (n=33). Thematic, emergent analysis revealed several main takeaways.

Key Findings

- Our deep review of the existing evidence uncovered no clear guidelines from research or practice on how to successfully exit a state intervention.
- State intervention has often led to improved financial stability in affected districts but has rarely led to sustained academic improvement in these districts.
- Setting reasonable expectations for exit conditions, ideally aligned with the rationale for entry, can ease the transition back to local governance (ideally aligned with the rationale for entry).
- More generally, early outreach and robust community engagement with clear and consistent communication between state officials and local community members is necessary for a smooth transition back to local governance.
- Sudden transitions between appointed to elected boards are problematic.
- There is a need for targeted and on-going training of board members.
- Cultivating a culture of high-quality candidates for school boards may ease exit strategy concerns and may prevent future intervention.

In this Report

I. Introduction & Context

School governance is vital for the overall direction of schools. Each state has a unique approach to school governance, often including language in the state constitution detailing the authorities and duties of legislative and governing bodies in education (Education Commission of the States, 2020). While local school boards are entrusted with overseeing the operation of districts and schools, extreme circumstances can lead to the dissolution of elected boards and the installation of state-appointed governance models.

State appointed governance often includes the reduction or complete removal of powers of an elected board as a new board or district leader assumes the powers and duties of the elected school officials. This approach often aims to alter the district's performance quickly and dramatically through increased accountability and actions that change the leadership in struggling school districts (Wong & Shen, 2003). However, these changes to governance are often criticized for decreasing community and educator autonomy and for being too narrowly focused on student test performance (Wong & Shen, 2003). Additionally, with state intervention being more likely to occur in school districts serving predominantly Black communities, there is an evident racial equity concern around these governance decisions (Morel, 2018).

To fully grasp the lessons to be gleaned from the existing literature and from stakeholder experiences in Missouri, it is necessary to understand the background on Missouri's legislative background on governance intervention, the different models that have been used, and the existing process on returning to a locally elected board. This contextual background provides the groundwork for applying lessons from the literature to Missouri's current considerations of returning to local control in two districts and how that potentially informs the experiences of local stakeholders.

A) School Governance in Missouri

Among the states that have implemented appointed governance models in districts over the last three decades, Missouri is relatively late using state-appointed governance as a school improvement intervention. Missouri's approach to school district governance is constitutionally established, giving the governor the authority to appoint members of the state board of education, who select the state's commissioner of education. Along with the state board, traditional public school districts within the state have elected school boards responsible for overseeing district operations. Like other states, Missouri allows the state board to intervene and alter local school board governance in extreme circumstances. The state did not intervene in a school district until the mid-2000s following years of legislative debate and policy change.

During the legislative session of 1998, senators proposed and passed SB 781. This bill establishes state interventions for academically deficient schools, financially stressed districts, and provisionally accredited or unaccredited districts. Schools classified as academically deficient may take steps to dramatically alter staffing, including suspending or terminating contracts of certified staff, principals, and other administrators and reconstitute the school or sponsor a charter school. Additionally, districts that are unaccredited for two consecutive years may be lapsed, after which the State Board of Education may appoint a three-member special administrative board. This appointed board must "supervise the assets, financial operations, educational programs and any other provisions in the best interest of the education of children in the district" (HB 602, 2011). The number of board members serving on an appointed board has since been changed be no less than five members, with the majority of members being residents of the district and reflective of the district's population (RSMO, 162.081, 2019). A recent change to the statute allowing for the implementation of a state-appointed board includes the appointment of members of the elected board to the Special Administrative board, so long as elected members do not comprise more than 49 percent of the appointed board (RSMO, 162.081, 2019). When a state-appointed governance model—often referred to as a Special Administrative Board in Missouri—is implemented, the appointed board is vested with the same powers to operate as that of an elected board of education (RSMO, 162.081, 2019).

The State Board's approach to altered governance varies in each instance, as shown in the three St. Louis-area districts that have entered state-appointed governance. To date, three existing school districts in

Missouri have entered a state-appointed governance model: St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS), the Normandy Schools Collaborative (NSC), and Riverview Gardens School District (RGSD). While SLPS is the only district that has transitioned back to a locally elected board, RGSD's current extension continues through 2022.

B) Missouri Districts Experiencing State-Appointed Governance

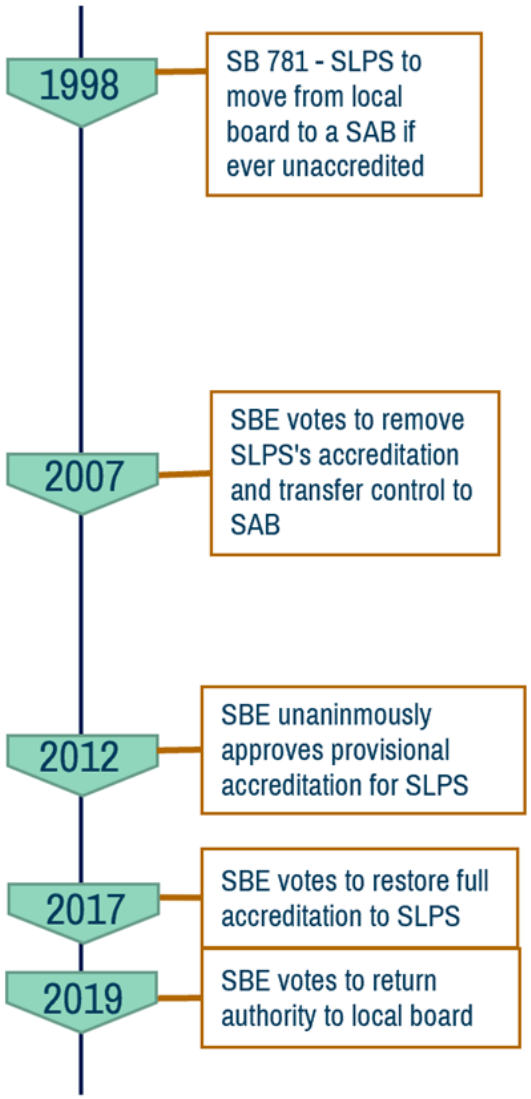
While three districts in the St. Louis region have experienced altered governance, the approach implemented in each has varied substantially, the most obvious of which was the composition of the appointed boards. While the approach varied, the goal in each was similar: intervene with an appointed board to improve the academic and financial well-being of the district. Here, we describe the three interventions in the St. Louis region

1. St. Louis Public Schools: Special Administrative Board (SAB) of the St. Louis Transitional School District

SLPS's elected board was removed in 2007 following a hearing with the State Board of Education and loss of district accreditation. The approach used in SLPS was to appoint a three-member board with one member appointed by the governor, one appointed by the mayor of St. Louis, and one by the president of the St. Louis Board of Aldermen to guide the St. Louis Transitional School District (Nichols, Preis, & Rhinesmith, 2019). The Transitional School District was renewed 4 separate times between 2007 and 2019, with the final renewal remaining in effect until June 30, 2019 when the locally elected board was reinstated and the district St. Louis Transitional School District returned to St. Louis Public Schools (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). During this time, school board elections continued, but the elected board held no power.

In a slight contradiction with results of state-appointed governance interventions nationally, SLPS did observe some slight improvements in academic as well as financial outcomes. At the time the State Board determined it necessary to intervene, SLPS held a financial deficit of nearly $25 million, had been unaccredited and failed to reach the accredited level in the 5 years prior to losing accreditation, district performance was well below state average on a host

Figure 1 : Timeline of SLPS Appointed Board



of metrics, and the district had experienced six superintendents in the 5 preceding years (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). During the years of the SAB, SLPS made incremental progress that included improvement from unaccredited in 2007, provisionally accredited in 2012, and fully accredited in 2017; improved financial health; as well as stable, consistent leadership at the superintendent level. These improvements included an increased graduation rate from 55% in 2011 to 78% in 2018, as well as an improved rate of students attending 90% of the school year from 70% in 2011 to 80% in 2018 (Nichols et al., 2019). The board consisted of three appointed members, only one of whom was replaced during the entire 12 years of state-appointed governance. Citing these reasons, the

state determined the district had shown viable progress that had inspired confidence in transitioning back to the locally elected board.

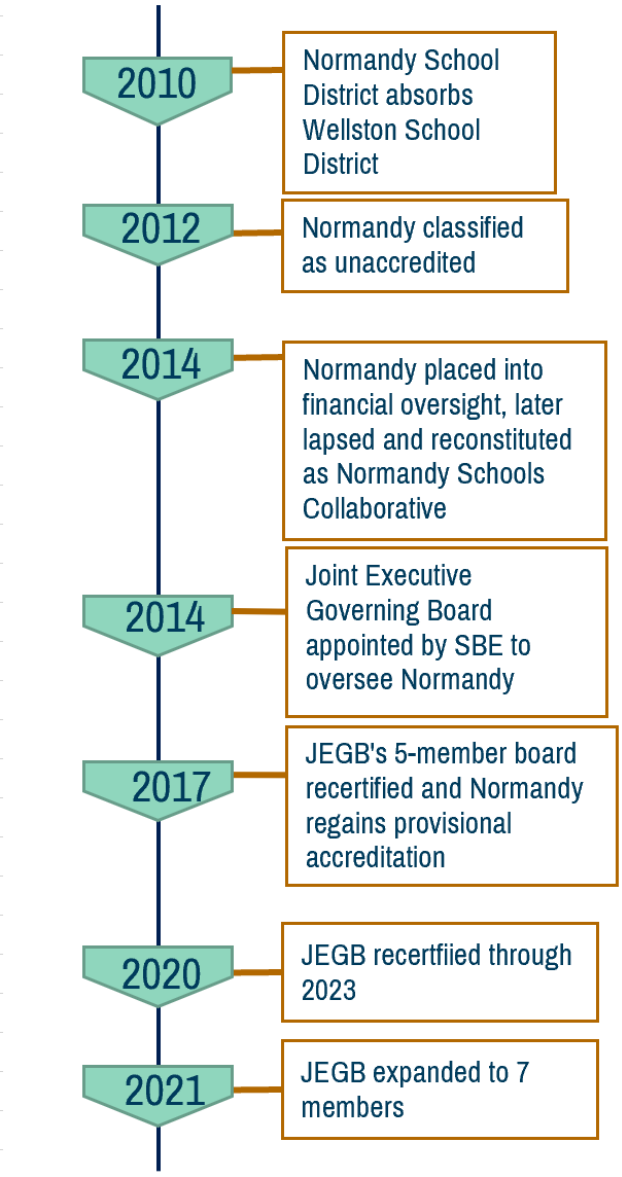
2. Normandy Schools Collaborative: Joint Executive Governing Board

The process of implementing the Special Administrative Board as allowed by state statute in Normandy was markedly different from that of SLPS, including the absorption of a neighboring district, subsequent restructuring of the district, and the appointment of a unique Special Administrative Board known as the Joint Executive Governing Board (JEGB).

The Normandy School District had experienced academic and financial hardship for years, a history brought into sharp focus in 2010, when Normandy absorbed neighboring Wellston School District (Rhinesmith & Shelton, 2019). Two years later, in 2012, the Normandy School District was classified as unaccredited, soon after being placed into financial oversight in February of 2014. Later in 2014, the Normandy School District was lapsed and came under the direct guidance of the State Board of Education to devise a plan for district governance structures, community partnerships, and altered policies and practice to serve the needs of students in the district (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). A few months later, the state lapsed the Normandy School District and reconstituted as the Normandy Schools Collaborative with a Special Administrative Board model called the JEGB (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

Implementing the JEGB was gradual to prepare appointed members to take on the role. During this time, the State Board of Education continued its oversight of the district (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). During this time of transition from State to JEGB, the first step was to outline a program of improvement with goals that were "rigorous and realistic" to primarily regain accreditation (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). This gradual transition of governance could potentially serve as a model for future transitions when they arise.

Figure 2 : Timeline of Normandy Joint Executive Governing Board



The JEGB originally consisted of five members appointed by the State Board of Education, with explicit language stating the JEGB would carry out the duties of a seven-director district (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). The JEGB was recertified in 2017 and 2020, with the district regaining provisional accreditation in 2017 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021a). In the spring of 2021, the JEGB expanded the board to seven members, all of whom continue to be appointed by the State Board of Education (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021a). The Joint

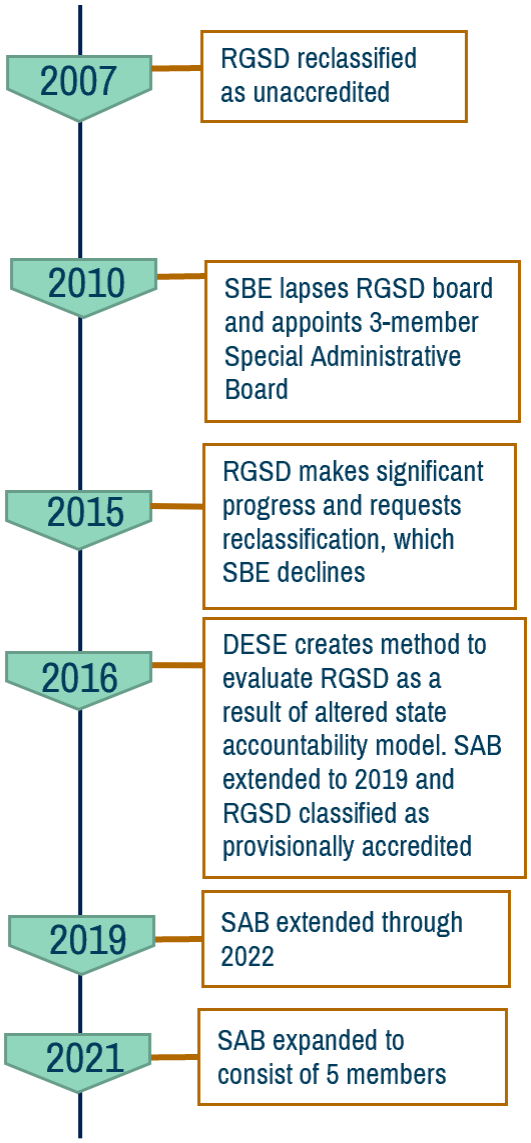
Executive Governing Board is set to serve until June of 2023, with presentations on progress ongoing to inform decisions around recertification or de-implementation.

3. Riverview Gardens School District: Special Administrative Board

The Riverview Gardens School District (RGSD) has had a history of academic struggles, bouncing between accredited, unaccredited, and provisionally accredited as far back as 1993 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021b). RGSD was classified as provisionally accredited in 2005 but lost its accreditation in 2007 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021b). State law required the district to regain accreditation within two years or be faced with lapsing the elected school board. In 2010, the State Board of Education opted to lapse the elected board and appointed a Special Administrative Board. The State Board cited poor test score performance and a state audit which found a dwindling fund balance (Rhinesmith & Shelton, 2019).

During its initial year, the State Board appointed three members to serve in Riverview Gardens. Over the next five years, RGSD made "significant progress" and requested reclassification in the fall of 2015, which the state declined as the district had not reached the provisional level or above in the state's accountability system over multiple years (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016b). At the request of the State Board of Education, DESE was tasked with creating a method of evaluating progress in RGSD for potential reclassification in June of 2016 that would include existing accountability systems and metrics around student performance, a move that would have been off cycle for reclassification because of changes to the state assessment system that year (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016b). After thorough review of district performance using these metrics, the state opted to maintain the SAB in RGSD to "maintain consistency and stability while working toward higher education standards" (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016c). The 2016 renewal extended the SAB to 2019. Later in 2016, RGSD reached the provisionally accredited level, the first time the district had reached such a level since being unaccredited six years prior (Rhinesmith & Shelton, 2019).

Figure 3 : Timeline of Riverview Gardens Special Administrative Board



During the hearings around district progress and discussions around potential reclassification in 2019, the state opted to extend the SAB through 2022 to maintain consistency in leadership and positive progress within the district. In October of 2021, the State Board determined the SAB should expand to include five appointed members instead of the current three (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021b). Currently, RGSD is under the guidance of the five-member SAB, continuing to make efforts to meet the expectations of reaching full accreditation and improved outcomes for students. The SAB continue to present on

progress in order to provide as much relevant information as possible to inform the decision on extending the SAB in 2022 or begin the process of transitioning back to a locally elected board.

C) Transitioning Back to Local Governance in Missouri

Missouri's approach to state-appointed governance and intervening in a school district appears relatively straightforward, districts struggle academically and lose their accreditation or experience financial distress that spurs an audit. The state subsequently steps in to change the district's direction and, ideally, improve student performance or make the district financially viable. In both cases, a district's situation reaches a point where drastic improvements must occur. However, once districts enter state-appointed governance, it is unclear what metrics a district must meet to regain local board control. This is partially the case in Missouri, where statute establishes criteria for which the state may intervene in the governance of a locally elected board but does not provide clear guidance in statute to transition back. Instead, statute states, the transitional district "shall be terminated by the State Board of Education upon a determination that the transitional district has accomplished the purposes for which it was established and is no longer needed" (RSMO, 162.1100, 2003).

In recognizing this shortcoming of the existing model, the State Board of Education conducted a series of meetings to determine the process by which they could fairly judge whether a district under the governance of a Special Administrative Board could begin to transition back to a locally elected board (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). The purpose is to provide standards to measure actions and progress under the Special Administrative Board that would signal confidence in transitioning from a Special Administrative Board to a locally elected board (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016a).

As presented in the spring of 2016, the conditions fell into five broad categories including leadership, finance, effective teaching and learning, climate/culture, and parents and community (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016a). As shown in board meeting minutes considering the recertification of the Joint Executive Governing Board members in NSC, the state has applied these standards when considering progress made by a district under the guidance of a Special Administrative Board model (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

The proposed metrics to establish a governance transition in Missouri provide a more holistic approach to determine when it is appropriate to transition back, considering more than students' academic improvement. This is likely a better approach, given Missouri's accreditation and school accountability model are directly connected (Preis & Rhinesmith, 2019). Also, the accountability model heavily incentivizes the percentage of students achieving Proficient or Advanced on the state achievement test. As we show in our review of the literature, state-appointed governance models rarely yield dramatic changes in students' academic performance. Therefore, tying regaining local governance to improved academic performance may be an unrealistic expectation for improvement and including multiple metrics could aid districts in understanding how they can regain a locally elected board.

With this legislative context in mind, the rest of this reports applies this information to describe the results of our review of the existing literature focused on the effects of state-appointed governance models, to understand the lessons provided by local stakeholders who experienced a state-appointed board in Missouri, and to provide a list implications and lessons that might inform Missouri's approach to reinstating local governance in the two districts that remain under the guidance of state-appointed boards.

II. The Existing Evidence on State-Appointed Governance

Improving chronically low-performing schools and districts has long been a point of contention and is a growing area of education reseach. Commonly referred to as turnarounds and takeovers, states often intervene to overhaul governance structures in those schools and districts that are identified as chronically underperforming. While early takeover efforts were often due to financial mismanagement, academic struggles and failures have emerged as justification for removing elected boards and replacing with a state-appointed board or district manager (Welsh, 2019). Approaches to altering governance have evolved over time to a more common approach of curtailing or fully removing an elected board and appointing new board members (Welsh, 2019). In this section, we briefly describe the national landscape of appointed governance and offer the results of our review of existing literature on the effects of these takeovers on financial and academic performance in these districts.

A) Why and Where State Takeover Occur, In Brief

In 2001, school districts had entered appointed governance in 18 states and the District of Columbia (Wong & Shen, 2001). Over the next two decades, states continued to implement these interventions with legislative backing to do so. Evidence of lagging student performance is often cited as a main reason for entering altered governance in the first place. To date, 34 states have "explicit authority to take over the management of schools, districts, or both" (Jochim, 2016). As the number of large, urban—often, high-profile—districts entering state-appointed governance has increased over the past few decades, the body of literature examining the effects of state-appointed models has also increased. Existing research often focuses on whether and the extent to which these interventions affect student outcomes and district finances. Yet, the existing research evaluating the effects of altered governance finds little evidence these governance interventions lead to improved academic outcomes and research on how to effectively "de-implement" state-appointed governance has remained scarce.

Despite nearly all the existing research on state interventions focusing on the overall effects, we can apply these results and uncover lessons for a potentially successful exit. Broadly, these lessons include working with local leaders and the affected community before and throughout the governance change process. We also find that setting realistic expectations on what the intervention can accomplish is essential in returning to local control. We describe these lessons in greater detail below.

B) Existing Research on State-Appointed Governance Interventions

As the number of schools and districts entering state-appointed governance interventions has increased in tandem with improved data availability, so too has research looking to examine whether these governance interventions have had their intended effect. Because of this, we provide a review of literature pertaining to state-appointed governance to provide a list of lessons and implications We begin our review of literature describing studies of school governance intervention in multiple sites, often examining large scale, high-profile interventions. We then describe research focusing on individual states, districts, or schools by offering a brief description of the intervention approach used, the effects of the intervention, and reporting any implications offered by the authors.

1. Research with a National Focus

One of the earliest comprehensive examinations of the effects of state-appointed governance came in 2003 from Wong and Shen, who analyzed the effects of these interventions in fourteen districts that had undergone this "comprehensive takeovers" in the form of mayoral takeovers (Chicago, IL, Boston, MA, Cleveland, OH, Baltimore, MD, Detroit, MI, Washington, DC, Oakland, CA, and Harrisburg, PA) and state takeovers (Compton, CA, Newark, NJ, Jersey City, NJ, Hartford, CT, and Lawrence, MA). In Boston, Chicago, Lawrence, and Compton, the authors use student test score data from before and after the governance change occurred to analyze whether this intervention led to improved academic outcomes, as well as federal and state data to see if the intervention impacted financial and labor outcomes in each of the districts of interest (Wong & Shen, 2003). They find that, overall, mayoral takeovers appear to be "more productive in terms of academic improvement" (pg. 117), may also yield improved management, and bring a heavy emphasis

on accountability (Wong & Shen, 2003). The authors do caution that they were unable to determine if these findings were sustained over the long-term, which we discuss in more detail from other studies. Finally, the authors offer a list of intervention characteristics that they believe were related to successful interventions, namely: having clear and attainable goals, collaborating with existing administration, and holding the individual in charge of the intervention (i.e., the mayor) accountable alongside the education stakeholders (Wong & Shen, 2003). Additionally, they add that turmoil can hinder any progress in the districts of interest.

Since the seminal work from Wong and Shen (2003), there have been multiple high profile district governance and management interventions, including those studied by Marsh et al. (2021). Using robust qualitative data, the authors analyze these interventions in Los Angeles, New Orleans, and Denver to understand how these changes vary by context and how these changes are often initiated. Each of the cities studied had moved away from the traditional governance model in some form or another, which the authors described as leading to "deep structural change in school systems" (Marsh et al, 2021). For example, in Denver, policymakers attempted to restructure traditional public schools to increase innovation and charter schools. However, in voicing concerns about bias in the process, the community members "questioned the underlying values of a system run by stakeholders who they believed did not represent the true interests of the diverse community" (Marsh et al., 2021). Resistance to governance change was not uncommon in the cities, especially when communities perceived the changes to organizational structure would "perpetuate inequities related to race and power" (Marsh et al, 2021).

In perhaps the most comprehensive evaluation of governance interventions, Schueler and Bleiberg (2021) track all takeover nationwide from the 1980s through 2016 to measure whether these governance interventions had any impact on student achievement. This includes a description of what districts characteristics are more related to an intervention occurring. Using district-level data from the Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA) and an author-created dataset, they find that, while these districts experiencing takeover were low-performing, serving higher concentrations of Black students was more predictive of a district entering into takeover than their prior performance (Schueler & Bleiberg, 2021). Contrary to the early findings from Wong and Shen, the authors find no evidence that these interventions yield academic benefits, were highly disruptive in the early years, and were most harmful in districts with higher achievement levels prior to takeover (Schueler & Bleiberg, 2021). Because of this, the authors suggest caution when considering these approaches and to be sure there is clear understanding of local contexts.

2. Single Site Studies

While state-appointed governance interventions have occurred across the country, there have been several high-profile districts that have occurred and received a great deal of focus in the body of research. Here we discuss a few of these settings including, the Achievement School District in Tennessee, the Opportunity School District in Georgia, Detroit (MI) Public Schools Community District, and the Recovery School District of New Orleans. We also include studies of some other districts to offer additional lessons and implications for policymakers.

a. Tennessee – Achievement School District and iZone

Tennessee's approach to improving its lowest achieving schools through the Achievement School District (ASD) and Innovation Zones (iZone) with support from Race to the Top funds. Local boards lost control of schools placed in the ASD, with the state either directly managing or placing under the guidance of a charter management organization. iZone schools stayed under the governance of the local district with greater autonomy and financial support.

In the initial years, iZone schools showed improved achievement, while ASD schools performed no different than comparison schools (Zimmer, Henry, & Kho, 2017; Zimmer et al., 2015). In an examination of the effects of these reforms after 5 years, Pham et al. (2018) found continued improvement among iZone schools across multiple subjects, while ASD schools continued to show no significant difference compared to similar schools. In an update one year later, Pham et al. (2019) found that, while iZone's approach yielded positive results in aggregate, later years showed negative impacts of the iZone

intervention. Additionally, ASD interventions—those schools whose governance was completely removed from the local board—performed no different from comparison schools (Pham et al., 2019). The authors provide some evidence that shows these negative effects in later years for iZone schools may have been driven by high teacher turnover linked to the intervention itself (Pham et al., 2019). As Welsh (2019) notes in a comparison of intervention approaches in Tennessee and Louisiana, these intensive state-appointed governance has been followed by an increase in teacher mobility and overall destabilization of the Black middle-class in these communities. Following this extensive evaluation in Tennessee, the research team concluded the interventions were not having their desired effect (Aldrich & Bauman, 2019).

b. New Orleans – Recovery School District and the Orleans Parish School Board

Hurricane Katrina created a unique scenario that resulted in the sudden transition of the authority of New Orleans Public Schools. The rapid change from local governance to state-appointed governance for the New Orleans Public Schools generated community members' perception that the state was working against them rather than with them (Burns, 2010). The state-appointed governance in New Orleans heavily affected the political-minority, Black community members whose political representations are not strong enough to voice their concerns against the state-appointed control (Burns, 2010). Morel & Nuamah (2020) noted that, following the state-appointed governance, White residents in the city had more positive perceptions of the city's public schools, while the loss of political power for Black residents led to decreased support and worsened perceptions of schools in the city.

c. Detroit's Multiple Attempts at Intervention

In Michigan, one of the main reasons for state intervention is financial insecurity, a policy that was strengthened following the financial crisis of the mid-2000s (Steel, 2019). Detroit Public Schools have had decades of financial struggles, including a $150 million deficit in the late 1980s (Steel, 2019). Numerous efforts of state-appointed governance over Detroit Public Schools have failed to improve the district's finances (Steel, 2019). Multiple factors, such as changes in district's state funding and changes in enrollment due to school choice and special education, led to financial instability (Steel, 2019). To date, none of the state-appointed superintendents in Detroit has improved the district's finances without additional financial support from the state (Arsen & Mason, 2013; Arsen & DeLuca, 2016)

Along with the highly publicized financial challenges in Detroit, the political environment has also received a great deal of attention. Detroit Public Schools were under the control of an emergency manager starting in 2009 because of the financial deficit (Mason & Reckhow, 2017). As noted, Detroit had entered state-appointed governance multiple times, including between 1999 and 2005. Despite this, the accumulated deficit for the district in 2016 was projected to be $515 million (Mason & Reckhow, 2017). As the financial situation continued to deteriorate, stakeholders in Detroit become more and more skeptical of the reform approaches being implemented. Eventually, the lack of coordination with local leadership compromised the sustainability of state-led reform and supporters of the initiative eventually went silent (Reckhow & Mason, 2017).

d. Lawrence, Massachusetts

Lawrence, Massachusetts serves as one of the few instances of a state-appointed governance intervention yielding improved outcomes and meeting little resistance to the intervention from the local community. Lawrence Public Schools had been one of the lowest performing districts in the state of Massachusetts, resulting in the district being placed under a state-appointed receiver as part of the state's Achievement Gap Act of 2011 (Schueler, 2019). An analysis of Lawrence Public Schools intervention finds substantial improvements in both English language arts and math achievement in the year immediately following intervention and sustained improvements through the second year (Schueler, Goodman, & Deming, 2017). The authors find no compelling evidence that the intervention improved attendance or graduation but do find suggestive evidence that the intervention helped with grade progression (Schueler, Goodman, & Deming, 2017). Schueler (2017) finds that the state-appointed leaders were able to keep local stakeholders heavily involved in the intervention process, empower community members to partake in the effort, and grant high levels of autonomy and authority to school leaders. In

doing so, Lawrence was able to implement an intervention that yielded desired results and improved performance. However, Schueler (2017) does caution that this approach may not be replicable in other settings.

e. Other Interventions of Note

Along with these notable interventions, there has been a wide array of research in other settings as well the highlight the importance of communication, coalition-building, and trust in order to implement a governance intervention. In the case of Georgia's ballot initiative to implement the state-run Opportunity School District, coalition leaders successfully defeated the initiative by communicating with local Black students and families as well as by supporting the voices of local Black leaders who understood the context of the affected community (Welsh & Graham, 2021). By contrast, community leaders of the Union City (NJ) Schools collaborated effectively with the state to improve without losing locally elected governance, and they avoided state-appointed governance (Morel, 2021).

In the case of Indianapolis, the state opted to intervene in a few schools rather than across the entirety of Indianapolis (IN) Public Schools (IPS). Three schools in IPS entered state-appointed control for nearly a decade before returning to the Indianapolis Public School Board after what many in the state considered to be a failed intervention (McCoy & Fittes, 2020). In Indiana, the state board partnered with charter management organizations in-state and out to improve school performance. Unfortunately, the intervention effort had started to unravel as the state's charter school board rejected the charter application, eventually opting for a return to local control (McCoy & Fittes, 2020).

C) Experiences and Lessons from Prior State Interventions

As we have shown, there are consistent themes appearing in the literature pertaining to governance interventions. These themes provide important lessons and implications for stakeholders and policymakers considering these governance options. Here, we provide our interpretations of the literature and offer six research-based insights for policymakers considering both the implementation of and exit from state-appointed governance interventions.

1. There is no direct guidance provided in the existing literature on how to exit such an intervention.

As state-appointed governance interventions reach their end, research has mostly stayed focused on whether these interventions have led to improved academics or financial outcomes in districts. This is clear from the body of literature we have described here, showing how these governance interventions are as unique as the districts themselves. Still, as more districts that have entered into state-appointed governance begin to move back to local control, there remains a clear gap in the existing literature describing when and how the state can gracefully return governing power to the local board.

2. There is little compelling evidence that these interventions can yield marked academic improvement except in certain specific circumstances.

While early analyses of these interventions offered some optimism about the locally based takeovers (Wong & Shen, 2003), these results have tempered with improved data. As Schueler and Bleiberg (2021) note because of the lack of compelling evidence on improving academics, these interventions should be implemented with caution and only with a strong understanding of local contexts. While most research finds little overall impact of state-appointed governance, there are some examples of slight improvement due to these interventions. For example, several of the lowest-performing districts in California that implemented dramatic staff turnover policies because of School Improvement Grant funds made more significant improvements in the test-based performance of schools (Dee, 2012). Results from Newark, New Jersey, one of the first districts in the nation to enter state-appointed governance, also show an increase in ELA achievement but no change in math achievement. However, this improved achievement is attributed to shifting enrollment from low performing to higher performing district and charter schools (Chin et al., 2019).

While some isolated districts have experienced moderate improvements in student achievement while undergoing governance-focused interventions, these results are not consistent and are difficult to replicate across contexts. For example, the strategy used in the School District of Philadelphia (PA) during its governance intervention was to allow for public-

charter partnerships, with education management organizations stepping in to restructure a portion of the city's schools as public charter schools. While this strategy showed some positive results in the short term for Philadelphia's schools, this approach did not work when Baltimore City (MD) Public Schools attempted to replicate it (Brandt, 2007). Baltimore's effort had a poorly designed contract that failed to achieve similar results as Philadelphia (Brandt, 2007). Boston and Chicago Public Schools that operated under the mayoral-appointed governance were correlated with academic improvements only for elementary students, since years of poor schooling middle- and high-school students received are a challenge to overcome (Wong & Shen, 2003).

3. However, there is evidence that, if done well, this can steady a district's financial situation.

Existing research on state-appointed governance models nationwide has shown that districts' financial mismanagement was a more frequently cited reason for intervention over academic performance (Schueler et al., 2017; Schueler & West, 2019; Wong & Shen, 2001; Wong & Shen, 2003; Seder, 2000; Hammer, 2005; Ziebarth, 2002). For example, Logan County Schools in West Virginia faced state-appointed governance in 1992 in response to financial instability and student achievement. The district regained local control in 1996 following collaborative efforts by local district stakeholders and state-appointed officials to improve district standing (Steiner et al., 2005). Stakeholders cite the state's efforts to collaborate with, rather than replace, the existing board as one of the reasons the state-appointed governance model was successful (Steiner et al., 2005). Because of this, it is important for policymakers to consider the metrics by which the intervention is considered successful and to consider the political cost of intervening in these districts in relation to the gains that can reasonably be expected.

4. Reasonable expectations on what can be accomplished and clear timelines in which to accomplish these goals can support positive outcomes.

As we have shown here, state-appointed governance rarely yields changes to student achievement. Those that have experienced such improvement have struggled to maintain this progress (Pham et al., 2019; Zimmer et al., 2017). Instead, the clearest change as a result of these interventions occurs in district's financial health (see recommendation 2). While states should not ignore academics altogether, closely tying regaining local control to academic outcomes or doing so in the absence of other measurable improvements can turn the intervention into a quagmire. This would likely lead to extended timelines and increase mistrust of the state and its approach. Instead, state-appointed officials should communicate a reasonable timeline to transition to local leadership. Unreasonable timelines can contribute to failures of change efforts (Rettig, 1992). Rettig (1992) states that the lack of clarity on goals brought implementation problems, and a lack of consistent communication between the appointed officials and local officials created the "climate of insider-outsider conflict".

Additionally, there is not a "one size fits all" approach to state-appointed governance, making plans for exiting a state-appointed governance model unique to each context as well. State intervention in local districts can be emotionally charged for all stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, students, and community members. Without building mutual trust and respect within the community, the efforts to improve achievement and finances may not have the support to succeed, as all stakeholders need to embrace reform efforts to enact positive change (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008). By bridging the gap between policymakers and community members, including current teachers and administrators, leaders of state-appointed governance will have a greater understanding of school culture, local demographics, and community challenges. With this understanding, the proposed solutions put in place are more likely to effectively address the root causes of low achievement and financial performance (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008).

5. There is often a great disconnect between local and state actors that can cause many problems of design and implementation, as well as gaps in communication and trust.

Being far removed from the intervention can lead to problems of implementation and can lead to greater issues that can derail the intervention. The research from Tennessee serves as compelling evidence for this, as the Achievement School District schools that were completely removed from local governance

performed worse than those who maintained some level of local connection. As Zimmer et al. (2017) noted, districts with greater autonomy over governance and distribution of resources made meaningful achievement gains, while districts under full state-appointed governance did not observe any statistically significant improvement. Similarly, state- and mayoral-appointed governance in Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, and Newark decreased the democratic representation of Black community members, thereby increasing community resistance to interventions to improve each cities' schools (Brandt, 2007). Without efforts to earn trust from the local community members and invest in local political efforts, approaches to reform and intervention can become unsustainable (Mason & Reckhow, 2017).

6. The rare examples of successful interventions have hinged upon intentional collaboration and clear communication between state and local stakeholders throughout the process.

Wong and Shen (2001) suggest that state-appointed governance models that are not implemented based on trust cause administrative and political resistance from the community members and decrease student achievement. The general public supports a more significant role for state and local governments to turn around schools but will oppose when they do not feel included in the process (Schueler & West, 2019). In the case of Lawrence, the state-appointed governance model met minimal resistance due to the collaborative work between the state and local stakeholders like the teachers' union (Schueler, 2019). Less resistance reinforced by collaboration with local leaders made the process of state-appointed governance easier for Denver and Lawrence.

III. Stakeholders' Perspectives on state-appointed Governance in Missouri

In this section we describe the results of our in-depth qualitative analysis that included interviews and focus groups with individuals in both Missouri and with both state and national stakeholders.

A) Strategies to Address Research Questions

The project focused on stakeholders from the three districts that have experienced state-appointed governance: Saint Louis Public Schools, Normandy Schools Collaborative, and Riverview Gardens School District. In addition, a select number of stakeholders from other contexts were invited, with particular attention to urban districts in other states who had experienced state governance intervention and a full return to local control. Within these contexts, four stakeholder groups were invited to interview for the project: (1) current and former board members (appointed or elected), (2) current and former central district administrators, (3) current building-level educators (principals and teachers), and (4) families and caregivers in the districts. The final sample includes the interviews or focus groups with thirty-three individuals (n=33). This response rate for invited interviews was lower than anticipated, likely because of COVID-related obligations in the districts and schools and/or the politically charged nature of the topic of school board governance. However, the corpus of interviews still approaches thematic saturation for many takeaways, which is a key indicator of quality in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2018).

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to elicit responses to the major topics of the research study. Participants were either invited for an interview or a focus group, depending on the stakeholder group. The interviews were conducted by a team of researchers, all of which followed the semi-structured interview guide. In order to analyze the data, rapid qualitative data analysis strategies were used (McNall & Foster-Fisherman, 2007; Gale et al., 2019; Lewinski et al., 2021).

All data collection, analysis, storage, and reporting follow the ethical and legal standards of all universities' Institutional Review Boards.

B) Findings Generated by Stakeholder Interviews

These interviews and focus group responses provide essential perspectives on the experiences of stakeholders experiencing state-appointed governance interventions in Missouri. We describe the themes and findings below.

1. Lessons Related to Socioeconomic Context

While most of the takeaways can be organized by their relevance to the state intervention itself or the relevance to potential exit strategies, one primary theme emerged from the interviews that was salient to all aspects of the research project. Interviewees spoke overwhelmingly about the relevance of the socioeconomic context. Over 90% of interviewees brought up how economic and demographic patterns within their communities impacted the intervention or potential exit strategies. Most commonly, interviewees discussed the influence of high-poverty student populations. For example, one elected board member said, "Saint Louis Public Schools is a large urban school district, and most of the students are at poverty level, and so considering that when making decisions [about governance interventions]...With any school district, just making sure that to truly consider what resources are at the table, what resources are not at the table, [and] the audience in which you're making that decision." Interviewees also brought up sociodemographic trends related to but distinct from poverty. For example, one appointed board member discussed the impact of the 2008 mortgage crisis and its impact on student mobility in the district, even calling Riverview Gardens School District (RGSD) "ground zero" of the mortgage crisis. Another elected board member pointed out the impact of crime, violence, and racialized policing on the students: "[Consider] the crime rates. A lot of our kids deal with shootings, they see killings and are racially profiled."

Some interviewees also discussed hyper-local forces and histories specific to the local community and district. For example, interviewees from the Normandy School Collaborative (referred to in this report as NSC) brought up the failed intervention in Wellston Public Schools and its impact on the district. Participants from NSC viewed the Wellston merger as a critical piece of history that impacted the quality of NSC schools, thus their accreditation points which were intimately tied to the state's decision to

intervene. Similarly, NSC stakeholders also brought up the transfer program arising from *Clayton v. Turner* decision and its implication for both the financial stability of NSC and the student mobility rate within NSC schools (see Rhinesmith & Shelton, 2019). Those in Saint Louis City often brought up specific political actors and forces, which is expanded on in Section 2a (Concerns over ethics of the intervention). One stakeholder from Saint Louis Public Schools (SLPS) discussed the racialized gentrification and erasure of historically African American neighborhoods as relevant to the current state of the schools.

The contextual factors that interviewees brought up also highlight the many assets and resources that the communities bring with them. For example, most interviewees from NSC mentioned the strength of the alumni network and pride in the NSC name. Half of interviewees from the RGSD brought up the recent passing of a proposition to raise taxes for the school system, arguing that it was the sign of an invested community. Interviewees from all three communities mentioned the high-quality, caring educators in the buildings. For example, one administrator said, "You are always going to have those teachers in the district that are going to provide the best education." Another administrator from another state said, "there are individual principals, individual teachers that are doing the right thing for children."

Regardless of recognizing the structural constraints or the assets and resources of the local communities, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees (>90%) in this project did not feel that the story of the state intervention or of potential exit strategies could be accurately represented without a deep understanding of the socioeconomic context. While this deep understanding must include a sociological understanding of the relationship between poverty, racialized patterns of residence, crime, and mobility, it also must consider hyper-local histories (e.g., the dedication of the alumni network in NSC or RGSD as "ground zero" of the 2008 mortgage crisis). The implications for the relevance of socioeconomic contexts relates intimately to Section 3a (Systematic and intentional community outreach plan), which will be expanded in a later section.

2. Lessons Related to the Intervention

While most of the takeaways focus specifically on community perspectives around how to return to local control after a state intervention, over the course of the data collection, some patterns emerged about interviewees' perspectives on the implementation of an appointed board itself. The two most relevant ones focus on the community opinions on the ethics of the intervention and on the concerns about appointed boards' compliance with the Sunshine law.

a. Concerns Over Ethics of the Intervention

There was variation in how interviewees viewed the ethics of the intervention. While they were not asked specifically about the appropriateness of the intervention itself, some interviewees organically brought up the topic. A subset of stakeholders reported that the state intervention of school boards was unethical or traumatic, while others viewed it as a rational and legitimate response to school district needs.

Of those that viewed it as unethical, some interviewees found the racial implications of the intervention insurmountable. As aligned with Section 1 (Lessons related to socioeconomic context), a small number of participants specifically recognized race as a motivating factor for the intervention or the racialized impacts of the initial intervention. Because state intervention has only occurred in predominantly African American and Black districts, some interviewees viewed the intervention as inherently flawed. For example, one administrator from another state context said of their state's policy: "the very concept of an emergency manager is rooted in systemic historic and current racism." Missouri stakeholders also echoed similar ideas about the racialized nature of the intervention. One appointed board member said of the appointed board, "there are so many reasons why Missouri is just weird around [racial inequality] going back to the civil war and the police department and everything. So I think it's coming to terms and admitting the racialized nature of some of the past decisions and how to rectify those." Another elected board member claimed that the intervention caused many of the teachers of color to leave the district: "we also lost many of our teachers of color [after the appointed board came to power]. We were just devastated. Many of them left because they complained about the environment, the hostile environment of the school district. Now we have a district that's predominately not African

American anymore, when it comes to our teaching staff." This finding about the racial implications of the intervention aligns with much of national literature on state interventions on school boards (e.g., Burns, 2019; Welsh, 2019; Wright et al., 2020).

In addition, some interviewees recognized the "trauma" associated with intervention. The out-of-town administrator, whose district experienced both state intervention and a return to local control, said, "districts that have been under emergency management like ours, there is a lot of trauma and baggage and hurt because we were being run by someone from the outside who didn't understand education. Was not running the district in a way that affirmed the work [that was being done successfully]." This out-of-town administrator was not the only one to use the term of 'trauma' in their interview. One interviewee from NSC used the term ten times. For example, they said:

> *The one thing nobody took into account was the trauma to the school district based on the takeover. There are many staff that are still in the district that were there not only during the state dissolving the school district, but they were also there during the transfer program. ... There's lots of organizational trauma that people are still living with that nobody really took full consideration of.*

This NSC interviewee goes on to say that the trauma that occurred by the state to the district has practical implications for the students themselves, specifically referring to the loss of teacher relationships and the high rate of mobility amongst their peers as a result of the transfer program: "that's the trauma laid at the foot of students."

Finally, among those that questioned the ethics of the intervention, four individuals cited political motivations of local leaders as an influence on the intervention. All four interviewees who mention this come from SLPS. For example, one elected board member specifically cited Mayor Francis Slay's education agenda as creating "dysfunction" within the SLPS Board of Education. They conclude, "most of the dysfunction came from political people." Another elected board member said, "if that mayor and the district are at odds...then that doesn't benefit anyone at all. And I think that was all part of what led to some of the chaos with the St. Louis Public Schools to begin with."

On the other hand, a subset of interviewees did not question the ethics of the intervention, instead implying it was a rational and legitimate response. Some interviewees cited unstable district finances or loss of accreditation points. Two from RGSD identified the mismanagement of a previous superintendent as the primary motivation for the state intervention. Two in the SLPS context recognized in-fighting among elected board members as an influence on the decision of the state to intervene (though that may coincide with the ethical concerns about the "dysfunction" fostered by the former mayor). While there was some overlap, most who saw the intervention as a rational and legitimate response to contextual district forces did not explicitly question the ethics or appropriateness of state involvement in local boards.

b. Legal Compliance and Lack of Transparency

Another important pattern that emerged in the interviews was a concern about lack of appointed board transparency and specifically a lack of compliance with the Sunshine law (Chapter 610 of the Revised Missouri Statutes) which stakeholders felt facilitated the erosion of public trust. The Sunshine law pertains to the boards' transparency and communication with the citizenry and is representative of the state's commitment to openness and transparency. Any meetings of public governmental bodies where a quorum is present must be open to the public and are subject to Sunshine Law requirements. With the small size of the Special Appointed Boards (SAB), compliance with the Sunshine Law was noted as a challenge, given that quorum in some cases was any meeting, email exchange, or phone conversation concerning district business with only two SAB members.

Three interviewees in three separate contexts brought up this concern directly. One elected board member noted, "the fact that it was a small board essentially, I think, made it really difficult for them to be transparent...if you have a quorum talking, essentially it's a public meeting. And so if they were talking to each other, then they were breaking [the] Sunshine law." Importantly, this stakeholder soon after noted related the SAB's violations of the Sunshine law to their perception of a lack of connection with the SAB

and a source of mistrust. They said, "That breaks that connection with the public and works against that relationship piece or trust-building piece, because you don't understand what went into the discussions or decision-making process if it happened behind closed doors or in private conversation." Similarly, an administrator felt this inconsistency created undue tension and mistrust with both the community and administration. Several other stakeholders referenced a lack of transparency on the part of the appointed boards, which created a lack of connection and trust with the community.

One non-partisan stakeholder cited the Sunshine law violations as a discrepancy between elected and appointed board guidance and requirements, suggesting potential political influence. This stakeholder noted the following:

> *They didn't comply with a lot of the laws that our elected board has to comply with. And so that created resistance and resentment...Like Sunshine law...and just some very basic things that the appointed board took liberties with. Because they had the luxury of having the support of the mayor, the governor, they were appointed by those individuals.*
>
> - *St. Louis-area stakeholder*

This differential compliance with the state laws undermine some community members' confidence in the appointed board, the state board, and the intervention. Larger appointed boards, which would facilitate a stronger compliance with the Sunshine law, may help facilitate the transparency of the SABs.

3. Lessons Related to De-Implementation of the Intervention

In addition to these takeaways about the intervention itself, certain takeaways emerged about community members' perspectives on how to exit from appointed school governance. Interviewees discussed the need for the following factors during a return to local control: (1) a systematic and intentional community outreach plan, (2) the cultivation of high-quality candidates for election, (3) training for all board members, and (4) staggered transition period between appointed and elected boards. The fifth and final takeaway captures the (4) debate over the appropriate timing for an exit.

a. Systematic and Intentional Community Outreach Plan

An overwhelming majority of educators, board members, and administrators mentioned the importance of community outreach in preparation for the return to local control. For example, one elected board member suggested, "You need to come in and have [an] honest conversation about what is possible and to listen for some takeaways...then develop next steps." An appointed board member said, "communication always works best when it is used." Over 90% of board members and educators mentioned this theme. When asked about their hopes for a locally elected board, parents included in the study also mentioned they hoped for increased communication with the community.

According to one elected board member, the purpose of the strategic and intentional community outreach plan is twofold. First--which was echoed by the majority of those interviewed--the purpose of community outreach is to elicit feedback from the community that will be formative to the exit strategy itself. This purpose goes beyond just listening for listening's sake but instead uses the community engagement meetings to shape and reshape the proposed exit strategy. As an elected board member reflected on the initial intervention, he said, "there was no community involvement in it at all--it was just done...There were no recommendations that the community put forth that [were] incorporated into the decision to my knowledge." The exit strategy could be a chance to correct some of the damage about how community voice was included in the initial intervention. Second, the elected board member recommended using outreach as both "education sessions" and "PR campaigns." In addition to eliciting formative feedback for the exit itself, the community outreach events can be used to educate the citizenry on the current status of the proposed exit. This is particularly important given a secondary finding that very few of the parents (all from SLPS) felt knowledgeable about the school board political maneuverings. A strategic community outreach plan could ameliorate some of the alienation that the parents reported.

Many interviewees cited specific stakeholder groups that should be engaged through community outreach during exit planning. Across all three districts, the most cited groups were municipal leaders, business

leaders, and religious leaders. Other commonly mentioned stakeholder groups include teachers and other educators, parents, and other voting citizens of the school district. In NSC specifically, all of those interviewed mentioned the 23:1 collaborative (formerly 24:1) organized by Beyond Housing as an important place to begin community outreach. Any strategic community outreach plan should include the voices of the widest swath of individuals.

The exact structure of a community outreach plan was not specified in most of the interviewees. One appointed board member recommended meeting "one-on-one" with people, while another elected board member recommended group "listening sessions." That said, the general consensus was that a community outreach plan must be designed and implemented months to years in advance of an actual exit. One out-of-town administrator recommended "a year of just planning." While this might feel slow-moving to some educators and policymakers, the recommendation to plan months to years in advance aligns with the improvement science framework articulated by Bryk et al. (2015). Missouri policymakers may consider hiring a consulting firm that specializes in community outreach.

b. Cultivation of High-Quality Candidates for Elected Boards

Some stakeholders mentioned the importance of intentionally cultivating high-quality candidates for elected school boards. Four stakeholders including administrators and appointed board members suggested that identifying school board candidates with the right qualities and experience was key to a successful school board. One person suggested that it is important to have different stakeholder groups represented on the school board, saying "well, my concern is that you elect the right people to board…I truly believe there need[s] to be past educators on the board…You also want to have a business leader…You also want to have a parent on the school board." Another stakeholder also noted that balance across stakeholder groups is important, saying the following:

> *I think the best boards are balanced boards. They offer an element of your organic parents, your unions, your faith-based, even an administrator, but they have to be balanced. … I don't think boards work if they're overly business orientated or union orientated. You need to be balanced. I would recommend a lot of thoughtfulness on selecting a board that...clearly represents the community, but also is balanced in just stakeholder self-interested groups.*
>
> - *St. Louis-area stakeholder*

Stakeholders noted varying motivations and considerations involved in the school board election process. Two stakeholders identified elected school boards as an entry point for political careers. While one stakeholder found this to be a positive opportunity for civic engagement for communities (that is disrupted with the implementation of state-appointed boards), another stakeholder felt that school board elections can be used as a steppingstone by people who are not interested in supporting the district.

Overall, stakeholders from multiple groups recognized the importance in thinking about qualities, characteristics, and experiences for school board members. discussing several strategies about how to cultivate high-quality candidates. An administrator remarked that it is not just personality but also knowledge and specific skill sets:

> *There has to be a lot of thought, intentionality about who's going to run for the school board. A lot of involvement and that's tricky because you want it to be organic, you want it to be authentic with people that are from the city who know the school system, know the residents, that naturally come forward to run. But natural school board elections do not always yield the most reform-minded school board members. You have to be very careful with who's running and that you have candidates that authentically can represent the community, but that really understand the importance of boardmanship and proper governance through local elected school boards because it can get completely out of control. And you will go back to wherever you were as far as the challenges...It's really easy to run for school board as a community activist and not understand budget, not understand policy, not understand that you can't do everything that you want to do with the restrictions that come with a budget and laws and regulations.*
>
> - *Administrator*

This administrator communicated the delicate balance necessary in a board and the difficulties in cultivating a balanced and 'organic' board.

How to cultivate high-quality candidates was less commonly discussed. One stakeholder suggested engaging community members to identify criteria for school board candidates. They recommended, "hav[ing] a focus group of people in the community…come together and say what criteria do we want to be elected on the school board." That said, there were inconsistencies in how stakeholders felt potential board members should be vetted. One stakeholder lacked confidence in the community to vet potential board members, and felt this was best done through the state board:

> *I just wish that anybody that ran for a school district, to be on the board, I just wish that there was a vetting process that they had to go through. 'Do you have your taxes paid? What committees have you served on within the district? How often did you attend a board meeting virtually?'...That's the types of things that I think should be added, and I think that there should be some type of approval from the state board of education, for individuals who want to serve on the school board.*
>
> - *St. Louis-area stakeholder*

This was in part due to this stakeholders concern that the school board was used as a stepping stone for other political positions, but also out of a desire for consistency and ensuring school board members are actively engaged before running for election. (Please note: the legality of a state vetting process for candidates is unclear and would need to be verified before exploring this potential option.)

3. Consistent Training for All Board Members

Another consistent theme was the importance of board member training both as a unique need during the transition back to local control and as a continued permanent feature for all board members. (Please note: some interviewees did recognize a pre-existing requirement that Missouri school board members have a certain number of hours of training). Roughly a third of all interviewees explicitly mentioned the importance of professional development. For example, one administrator mentioned the following:

> *[The school board members] could certainly partner with a functioning board and go visit at those meetings and see how that's working, because you need to know what a functioning board looks like in order to emulate it. I think that would be a healthy thing to do. It can be a district that has similar demographics to their district. There are districts with similar demographics that function fairly well.*
>
> - *St. Louis-area administrator*

They emphasize collaborating with other boards in the area to see best practices. Additionally, two appointed board members recommended a state consultant stay in close contact with a newly-empowered local board for additional support and training.

The collaboration between the non-partisan, non-profit Missouri School Board Association (MSBA) and the SLPS elected board was spoken of positively by those who mentioned it (n=8, though an additional two SLPS elected board members referred vaguely to recent training, likely referring to MSBA training). According to one knowledgeable interviewee, MSBA offered training to SLPS's returning elected board on the responsibilities of a school board, effective relationship with the superintendent, connection with constituents, and media training, among other topics. MSBA also continues to provide on-demand support during board meetings. While one interviewee mentioned that while the first trainings had full engagement of the elected board, "there were a couple of board members, who have since left the board, who didn't engage the way...they needed to", however according to this interviewee, MSBA followed up with a training on how to "own your own...how to call each other out in a professional way."

Please note, the theme around professional development did not only apply to elected board members. Some interviewees mentioned the importance of training appointed members as well. As one interviewee said, "I think the SAB should have had a coach. They didn't have any requirement to my knowledge in terms of having board training and understanding their role. So, these appointed boards, what is their required training? And who's coaching them?" This insight applies to potential exit strategies, because a better trained appointed board may engage in a better transition process with the elected board (and have fewer complaints about Sunshine law violations, re: Section 2b).

d. Staggered Transition Period Between Appointed and Elected Boards

Related to the importance of professional development for incoming board members, some interviewees mentioned the importance of a probationary period or staggered transition to local control, where incoming elected board members would have extra support from the state and out-going appointed board members. For example, an out-of-town administrator recommended a three-year probationary period for the elected board, during which they would receive extra resources and support from the state. At least four local interviewees recommended staggering the transition back to local control, so there is a temporary hybrid board. A staggered transition would allow for extra support for incoming elected board members and preservation of any institutional memory gained under the appointed board.

One stakeholder described a staggered transition as providing "enough runway" for success. Staggering transition of appointed members out and elected members in provides this runway to allow time for training. A stakeholder suggested beginning with a public hearing to announce the transition and explain the process so that people have time to prepare to engage (i.e., run for office, etc.). Stakeholders described the importance of consistency and stability in the school board. Many emphasized that frequent transitions in and out of the appointed board and transition of an entire board at once have the potential to halt and reverse any potential progress. They said, "any time you have multiple people changing in and out, there's always a question about what is the quality of the infrastructure that you're putting in place from an accountability and a governance standpoint, when you got that many moving parts...it does not provide for stability of your governance leadership when you got that many people moving in and out."

e. Debate Over Appropriate Timing for Exit

The final main takeaway from the interview data pertains to timing a potential exit from state-appointed governance. Participants were specifically asked about the ideal timing for a return to local control. The recommendations were mixed. Broadly, they fell into one of two major categories: while most recommended an exit based on criteria set at the start of the intervention, a minority recommended immediate exit because the intervention itself was flawed or unethical.

Of those who recommended specific criteria to catalyze a return to local control, the recommendations varied. Four interviewees recommended specific time periods: "3 years," "a cycle of 2-5 years," "three years after COVID,", or "a balanced budget for three to five years." All of those who recommended specific time periods recommended under five years.

Other stakeholders recommended that specific quantitative markers of transition readiness should catalyze the return, such as accreditation scores, achievement scores, and a balanced budget or other marker of financial stability. Interestingly, three interviewees, all from NSC, mentioned that quantitative markers of transition readiness may never be perfect. One appointed board member even suggested that, "if school district metrics are the marker, you may never transition." This pushback against quantitative data markers aligns with the overwhelming theme that socioeconomic context of the district matters (see Section 1 Lessons related to socioeconomic context for further explanation). One administrator said,

> *[S]ometimes we have to look at progress...some people start below the grave. And if you have enough gumption...to get above ground...don't compare me to the district that is above ground and halfway up a tree.*

Because quantitative markers of school success always reflect economic and social trends in the local communities, certain quantitative data points will not represent the quality of education occurring within the schools. This takeaway also aligns with literature showing that state-appointed governance rarely has an effect on achievement in a district (Schueler & Bleiberg, 2021), as sociodemographic factors will always have a stronger influence. It is worth noting that two interviewees specifically mentioned that any exit from state-appointed governance should occur immediately, because the intervention itself is flawed or unethical. For example, when asked when the optimal timing for a return to local control would be, one elected board member said, "Now is always a good time," while an administrator said, "they [should] get out right away." An out-of-town administrator, while not calling for an immediate withdrawal of the state, suggested, "To a state board, the first thing I would say is...look at what's happening and where it's happening, because if you transition back to local control and you don't acknowledge that the existence of the [intervention] is rooted in these systems of inequity, you're transitioning back to local control without being honest." While two local interviewees specifically are cited here, others discussed the intervention as 'traumatic' or racialized (see Section 2a, Concerns about the ethics of the intervention, for further explanation), though they did not mention it when asked about a recommended timeline for return to local control.

C) Discussion & Findings

While the response rate to recruitment emails was the most significant limitation of the study, the interview data corpus (consisting of diverse perspectives from various stakeholder groups in various district communities) revealed several persistent themes and some important recommendations for exit strategies. They are:

1. the relevance of socioeconomic context in telling the story of the intervention and planning potential exit strategies;

2. a debate about the ethics of the intervention;

3. concerns about the appointed boards' compliance to the Sunshine law;

4. recommendations for a systematic and intentional community outreach plan for a exit;

5. recommendations for the cultivation of high-quality elected board candidates;

6. recommendations and emphasis on the importance of training for all board members;

7. recommendations for a staggered transition period between appointed and elected board;

8. and finally, a debate over appropriate timing for the exit.

Despite differences in opinions about the intervention and potential exit strategies, all stakeholders appeared motivated by a desire to provide the highest quality school experience for the children of their districts. Centering the voices of those historically excluded from state-level policymaking in Missouri will ensure the fairest and most equitable governance structure for school districts in St. Louis.

IV. Implications, Lessons, and Conclusions

The preceding chapters covered both a review of national literature and a review of an empirical interview study conducted about the Missouri context. While the deep review of the national evidence uncovered no previous research-based models on how to successfully exit a state intervention, both chapters have led to some practical recommendations for Missouri state officials and policymakers. They are included below.

A) Our deep review of the existing evidence uncovered no clear guidelines from research or practice on how to successfully exit a state intervention.

While there is a robust and growing literature base covering the effects of these interventions on student achievement and district or school finances, we uncovered no studies that offer guidance on how and when state should exit a district.

B) State intervention has often led to improved financial stability in affected districts but has rarely led to sustained academic improvement in these districts.

Early research into the effects of state-appointed governance interventions showed some promise in improving chronically underperforming districts (Wong & Shen, 2003). However, more recent research has shown that these interventions rarely have sustained positive impacts on student achievement but have shown improved financial health for these districts. As the justification for these interventions has shifted to improved academic achievement, this lack of impact is important to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions.

C) Setting reasonable expectations for exit conditions, ideally aligned with the rationale for entry, can ease the transition back to local governance.

Setting reasonable expectations for exit conditions, ideally aligned with the rationale for entry, can ease the transition back to local governance. Potential reasonable expectations may include a specific time frame (local stakeholders indicated less than five years) or specific markers of financial stability. The literature shows a strong consensus that these interventions can improve financial well-being in districts. Markers of academic achievement should only be judiciously used as an expectation for exit conditions, as both national literature and local stakeholders point out their potential problems. At most, improved academic achievement should be considered as an added layer, rather than a metric on its own. Ideally, the expectations for exit should be aligned with the rationale for intervention.

D) More generally, early outreach and robust community engagement with clear and consistent communication between state officials and local community members is necessary for a smooth transition back to local governance.

Early outreach, robust community engagement, and consistent communication between state officials and local community members are necessary for a smooth transition back to local governance. Meaningful community engagement around exit strategies may remedy some of the harm felt in the communities by the initial intervention. Indeed, the paragon of successful state intervention of Lawrence (MA) Public Schools shows that community involvement in all phases of the intervention, including the design were cited as meaningful and useful steps in meeting the intervention's goal of improving district performance. It may be facilitated by a third-party consulting firm.

E) Sudden transitions between appointed and elected board members are problematic.

Specifically, sudden transitions between appointed to elected boards cause disruption and risk losing some of the institutional memory accumulated under the appointed boards. Smoother transitions, perhaps facilitated by hybrid boards composed of some elected and some appointed members, may have a better chance of success.

F) There is a need for targeted and ongoing training of board members.

Given the importance of board members in this transition, our empirical work highlights the need for targeted and on-going training of board members. Local stakeholders indicated that training appointed board members on the smooth transfer of power would set up the elected boards for more success. Local stakeholders also indicated that continuous on-going training, similar to what MSBA provided for the SLPS elected board, would increase the effectiveness and professionalism of the elected board

G) Cultivating a culture of high-quality candidates for school boards may ease exit strategy concerns and may prevent future intervention.

Local stakeholders indicated that cultivating a culture of high-quality candidates for school boards in all communities is important. National research literature supports the idea that low voter turn-out influences school board elections in most states. While stakeholders disagreed on the best methods with which to accomplish this recommendation, the quality of board members remained one of the highest concerns of stakeholders.

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Images

Pg. 13 - Photo by Yan Krukov from Pexels

Pg. 21 – Photo c/o Pixabay