

D15 PAR PROJECT REPORT

Abridged Copy

D15 PAR Team

Esther Fesale, Ashley Hammarth, Carolyn Loughran, Vanessa McKnight, Nancy Randall, Natasha Rossi, Marcie Roth, Crystal Vega, Jeanette Torres, and Madeline Fox

District 15 PAR Project Abridged Report

Madeline Fox, Brooklyn College CUNY, City University of New York
with

Vanessa McKnight

Nancy Randall

Natasha Rossi

Esther Fesale

Ashley Hammarth

Carolyn Loughran

Marcie Roth

Jeanette Torres

and

Crystal Vega

The D15 PAR Project was a critical participatory action research project conducted by members of the D15 PAR Team in joint effort with the New York City Department of Education and funded by Brooklyn District 15.

For more information and for full report contact:

district15parproject@gmail.com or
Maddy Fox at:

madelinefox@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Brooklyn College | Center for the
Study of Brooklyn

D15 PAR Team Acknowledgements

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:

District 15, (former) Superintendent Anita Skop, and the School Leaders of PS 676, PS 15, PS 29, PS 38, PS 58, and PS 261

CEC 15, especially PAR liaisons

Edwin Pacheco

Marie Hueston

Catherine McBride, Michel'le Thomas, and the Red Hook Initiative

Amina Hassen, Chris Rice, Nathalie Kauz, Adam Lubinsky at WXY for graphic support

Nyah Berg and David Tipson, New York Appleseed

Matt Gonzales and Barbara Gross, NYU Metro Center

Maria Bautista, Alliance for Quality Education

Emily Tumpson Molina and Anthony Bianco, Center for the Study of Brooklyn

Ms. Willa Mack

Tracey Pinkard

Ujju Aggarwal

Naomi Peña

Carrie McClaren

Karen Blondel

Carrie Moore

Amanda Abry

**Michelle Fine, María Elena Torre, and Brett Stoudt, Public Science Project
Our communities for their support, trust, patience, and participation.**

**Our families – especially our children!! – for supporting this important work
and putting up with endless long meetings.**

Table of Contents

1 — Introduction

3 — Background and Context

4 — Participatory Action Research

5 — Timeline and Process

6 — Organizational Structure

7 — Methods

8 — Key Findings

9 — History of Racism in Our Place: Educational Self-Determination and Importance and Focus on Red Hook's unique history, geography, and needs

13 — Desire for Access to a Thriving School Close to Home: Educational Equity as the Priority

— The DOE's Structural Accountabilities Are Barrier to Educational Equity

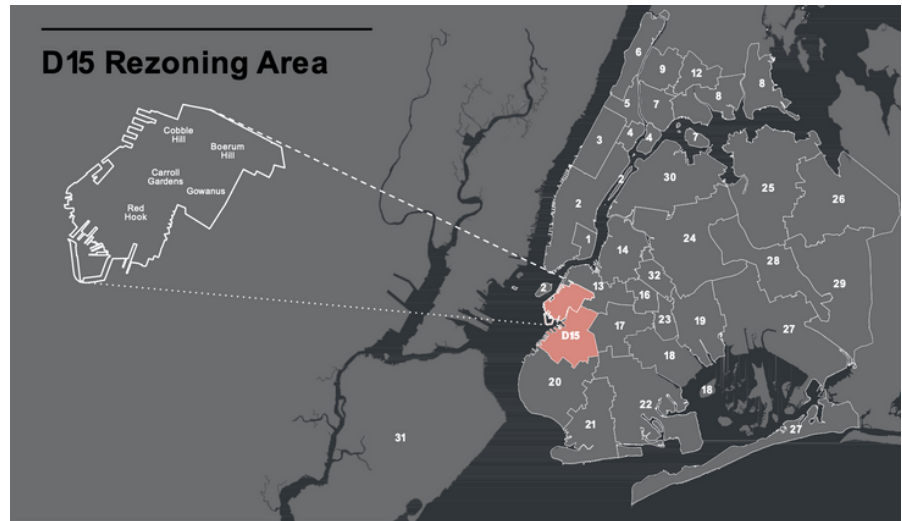
15 — Desire for Equity-Based Integration and a Call to Interrupt 'Zones of Exclusion'

16 — Schools as an eco-system and sites of place-based community building

17 — Recommendations

22 — Endnote

Introduction



In 2019, the NYC Department of Education announced that it was rezoning seven elementary schools within Brooklyn’s School District 15 – in an area the DOE refers to as sub-district 3 and that includes Red Hook, Gowanus, Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, and Boerum Hill. The School Construction Authority has sub-districts across NYC as a way to evaluate and determine school construction projects at a more local level than school districts. The DOE decided to adopt this terminology to describe the geographic area that was the focus of the rezoning. Sub-district 3 and these neighborhoods make claim to some of the widest income disparities in NYC and a highly segregated set of schools (Cohen, 2021). After initial insufficient attempts by the DOE at community engagement, local and city-wide community leaders pressured the DOE to engage a participatory action research approach to the rezoning. As a result, we launched the D15 PAR Project in March 2020 just as the pandemic forced NYC into lockdown. Our work in the D15 PAR Project was to better understand community perspectives and lived experience of educational inequities and to make sense of how elementary school rezoning fit in. We had a particular commitment to ensuring that impacted communities historically left out of educational decision-making i.e., Black, Brown, Asian, Indigenous, people of color and NYCHA residents, were centered and in leadership in this process.

This effort was carried out by a group of family members (in our case, mothers, and grandmothers) from the impacted neighborhoods and school communities called the PAR Team (research team). As a PAR Team, we were majority NYCHA residents though overall we were a diverse team of community members from across the very different neighborhoods, communities, racial/ethnic identities, and socio-economic statuses that make up sub-district 3. Over the course of 17 months, as a research collective, we built knowledge of each other's lived experiences, we studied relevant literature, we engaged in racial justice work, we trained in research methods and conducted a critical participatory ethnographic study that included more than 75 interviews, a survey with 800+ respondents, participant observation via dozens of community and school events, Community Walks around contested areas of the sub-district, and meetings with key community and school leaders. We studied relevant histories in NYC and beyond and learned about integration efforts far and wide, old, and recent. We collected local oral histories of schooling experiences and racial conflict.

We then engaged in participatory analysis of our data, of DOE data, City data, and collectively developed a set of findings that interrogate – and challenge – assumptions about integration, educational equity, educational desire, and schools in relation to community-building. Ultimately, we developed a set of recommendations for the rezoning that were unanimously approved by the Community Education Council for District 15 in June 2021. Through this work, we developed an approach for community-powered and community-accountable educational policy development and district planning. The DOE is now engaging participatory approaches in additional rezoning and long-term planning processes in other parts of the District and City.

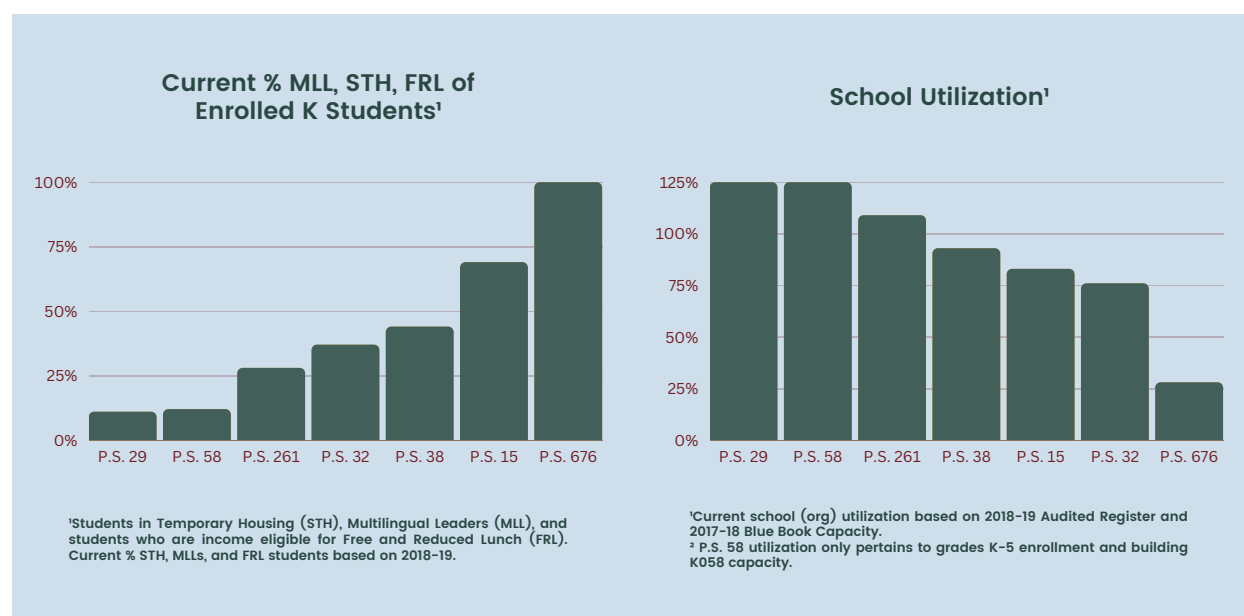


Background and Context

Sub-district 3 of District 15 includes several neighborhoods in an oblong shape running about 3 miles from the south end to the north end. Each of the seven schools included in this subzone are wonderful schools with strong and committed school leaders, staff, parent, and student communities.

Brooklyn School District 15 embodies the complex realities of New York City in various ways. District 15 is widely considered to be a privileged and well-resourced district. This is because several neighborhoods within District 15 are high-income areas and many of the schools include predominantly affluent and white students. District 15 also includes low-income areas with schools that include predominantly Black, Brown, and immigrant community members. Many of the wealthiest residents of Brooklyn call District 15 home (living predominantly in Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill, and Park Slope), while District 15 also includes Red Hook and Gowanus each home to public housing projects, and Sunset Park a neighborhood with large Latinx and Chinese immigrant communities. In District 15, we live close together, but the distance in material reality and social existence between the low-income areas and the affluent areas is wide.

The DOE charts below with data from 2018 – 2019, show school utilization (see chart on left), or how many students attend each school, and enrollment by race/ethnicity and socio-economic status (see chart on right). Looking at these two charts together we can see not only that the seven schools in sub-district 3 are segregated but also that the whiter, wealthier schools in this sub-district are over-crowded while the schools that have more and/or majority Black and Brown children and students from low-income families have room for more students.



Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is an approach to research, or producing knowledge, where those who are impacted by a question, a problem, or an issue are the ones who lead the inquiry throughout the process - from the moment of forming a research question, through research design, data collection, analysis, developing findings, and figuring out what to do about them. In PAR projects, we are guided by the principle: **Nothing About Us Without Us is For Us.**

In this case - community members who were connected to the impacted schools came together to help build a deep community-grounded vision, with attention being paid to centering Black, Brown, Asian, Indigenous, people of color, and NYCHA communities who have historically been under-represented in educational decision making.

In relation to this project, we were interested in understanding “What does educational equity mean to our communities? And how does rezoning fit in?”

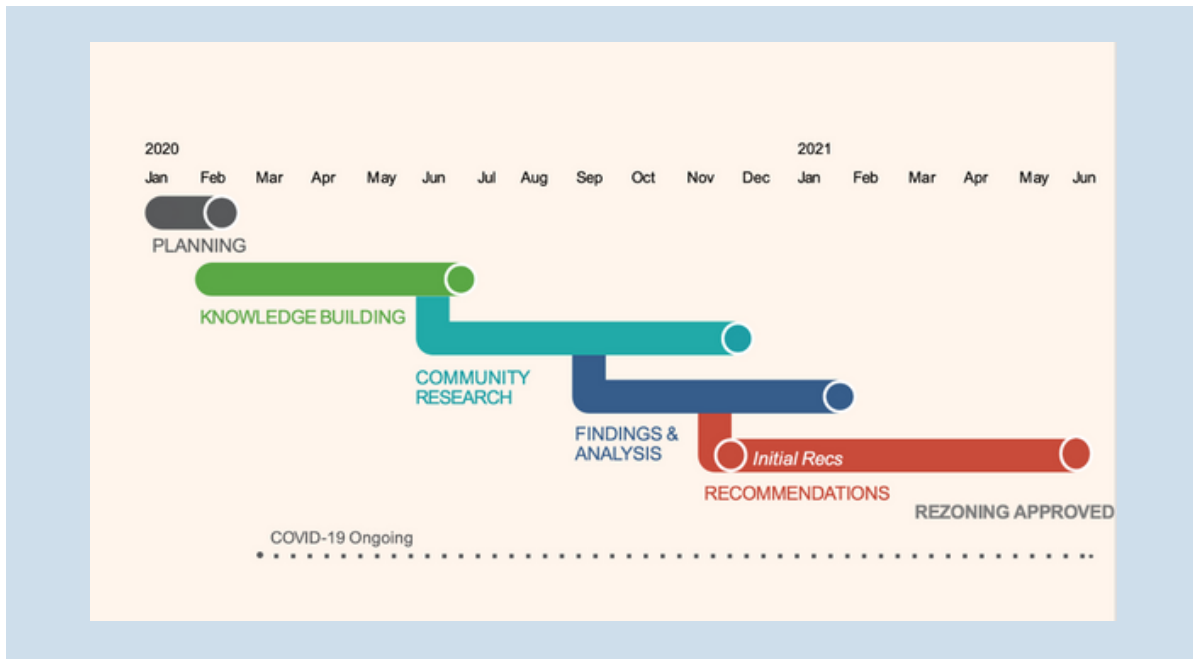
D15 PAR Team

Esther Fesale (PS 676)
Ashley Hammarth (PS 261)
Carolyn Loughran (PS 58)
Vanessa McKnight (PS 15)
Nancy Randall (PS 58)
Marcie Roth (PS 58)
Natasha Rossi (PS 38)
Jeanette Torres (PS 676)
Crystal Vega (PS 676)
facilitated by Maddy Fox (PS 15)

**with Monique Chambers, Dominisha Durant,
Sheantty Braddy, Edwin Pacheco and Aeisha Carillo**

**working closely with the DOE Office of District
Planning Anne McGroarty and Max Familian**

Timeline and Process



The project launched in March 2020 and we met at least weekly via Zoom. The weekly meetings of the PAR team over many months served to develop a sense of collective ownership of the research process and outcomes.

As a PAR Team, we began by building knowledge: about each other, our backgrounds, and educational journeys. We built knowledge of context, history, and educational policy. We met and learned from those with expertise – including community leaders from other Districts, policy experts and organizers, and those with expertise on issues of anti-racism, and histories of segregation and integration efforts.

In the second phase, we devised what we needed to ask community members, and what methods would work best for finding out what we needed to know. In June we started conducting Community Conversations – in-depth one-on-one or small group discussions (outside or via Zoom) with parents about their desires for and experiences with local elementary schools as well as their thoughts on public schooling and the rezoning.

In the third phase, we analyzed our data, developed findings and initial recommendations, and shared publicly to our communities.

In the fourth phase, we worked closely with the DOE's Office of District Planning and District 15 to hone and finalize recommendations. In May 2021, we presented our final recommendations and in June 2021 the CEC unanimously approved the rezoning.

Organizational Structure



The heart of the project were the local impacted communities in Red Hook, Gowanus, Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, and Boerum Hill. The engine of the project was the PAR Team, the group of community members who met weekly and collectively devised the research design, conducted the research, made sense of what we found, and generated recommendations. We kept in close communication with District 15 and the District 15 Community Education Council, mostly via regular brief update meetings with the PAR Facilitator/PI. We worked very closely with the Office of District Planning,



Methods



The D15 PAR Team conducted a critical participatory ethnography that included:

- 75 in-depth community conversations, majority NYCHA residents in RedHook and Gowanus
- 805 survey responses from across the school communities
- 20+ outreach and observation at school events, Open Streets, festivals
- Community Walks

TOTAL SURVEY RESPONDENTS: 805

Percentage of Current School Enrollments	
P.S. 676	27%
P.S. 15	15%
P.S. 32	25%
P.S. 38	17%
P.S. 29	20%
P.S. 58	20%
P.S. 58	19%
BNS, PAVE, Success	21%

OF THE 651 WHO RESPONDED TO RACE/ETHNICITY:

30% IDENTIFIED AS BLACK, LATINX/HISPANIC, ASIAN, AND/OR INDIGENOUS.

70% IDENTIFIED AS WHITE

256 RESPONDENTS HAVE CHILDREN 4 OR YOUNGER IN THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR

Key Findings

5 Key Findings were identified during the analysis of the critical participatory ethnography:

(1) History of Racism in Our Place: Educational Self-Determination and Importance and Focus on Red Hook's unique history, geography, needs

(2) Desire for Access to a Thriving School Close to Home: Educational Equity as the Priority

(3) The DOE's Structural Accountabilities Are Barrier to Educational Equity

(4) Desire for Equity-Based Integration and a Call to Interrupt 'Zones of Exclusion'

(5) Schools as an eco-system and sites of place-based community building

History of Racism in our Place



The work of the rezoning did not take place in a vacuum. We are up against long and troubled histories of racism and divisions in our neighborhoods. It was important in the work of the D15 PAR Project that we were aware of and accountable to those histories.

This area of Brooklyn, Sub-district 3 of District 15, has a unique geography. Red Hook is geographically isolated due to the highway/tunnel, water, and also because of a lack of public transportation in the neighborhood (there are two bus lines that service Red Hook and no subways). The geographic isolation helps set the stage for a wonderful, tight-knit community in Red Hook, but, additionally, it has paved the way for shameful civic neglect. The BQE/Hugh Carey Tunnel/Hamilton Ave

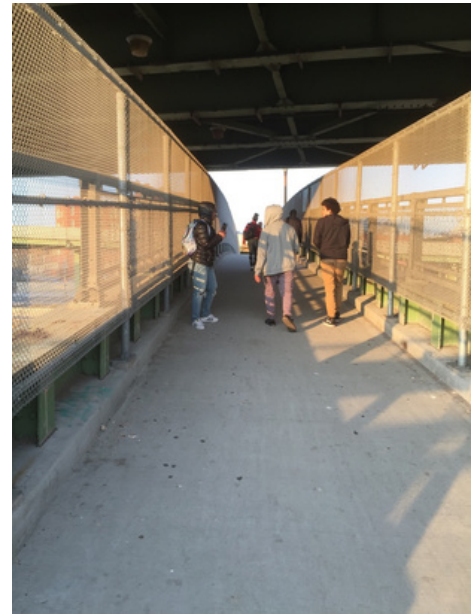
infrastructure presents a significant barrier – in both historical and material ways.

The geographic isolation of Red Hook as cut off from the rest of Brooklyn by highway and tunnel was no accident. The racial segregation of Red Hook, and Red Hook schools, can be traced, in large part, back to the confluence of racist urban planning and federally and state produced demographic shifts that took place in the 1940s – 1960s. During this time, the demographics of Red Hook shifted from being largely white Scandinavian immigrant dockworkers to being Black and Puerto Rican residents. The urban planning that New York City carried out under Robert Moses' leadership was explicitly racist and segregationist in intent. Indeed, in order to build the highway and tunnel that border Red Hook, New York City razed churches, homes, an entire immigrant community, and geographically cut off the neighborhood of Red Hook from the rest of Brooklyn. The lived implications of this urban design and rearrangement have been part of local community members intimate daily and growing up experiences for generations.

We conducted Community Walks as a methodology in this study. On one walk, we walked the school zone line that runs right along Hamilton Avenue in order to physically see, feel, and experience the border between Red Hook and Carroll Gardens. In addition to the PAR Team, we invited DOE Office of District Planning staff, the Deputy Superintendent and PS 676 Principal Figueroa and Assistant Principal Perry, and Red Hook community leaders. We gathered in front of PS 676 and then walked as a group over the pedestrian bridge that connects Red Hook with Carroll Gardens. We wanted to walk from/between Red Hook and Carroll Gardens to "walk the current zone line" and explore what it might feel like if the zone line moved north of Hamilton Avenue, disrupting the problematic border that Robert Moses built.

History of Racism in our Place

When we reached the Carroll Gardens side of the bridge, PAR Team member Vanessa McKnight, now a public school grandparent, asked the group to stop. Vanessa herself had grown up in Red Hook and had attended elementary school in Red Hook. For middle school she attended the school just north of Hamilton Ave, outside Red Hook on the Carroll Gardens side of the bridge in what was then JS 142. In order to get to Middle School, she and other Red Hook young people walked across the pedestrian bridge into Carroll Gardens every day. Vanessa explained that until that moment, she hadn't walked over the bridge in over thirty years. It was a place that haunted her and that she avoided. She asked us to gather so she could tell the following story, surprising herself by the emotions that caught her:



Vanessa McKnight:

Every day was a serious, serious challenge on racism. We would come across this bridge and it would be [white] guys there, not even ones, our same age group, but like the older brothers and sisters, like 17, 18 years old with bats and chains and rocks. And they would beat, especially on the black young men, they would beat them. So the boys stopped going to school. A lot of people stopped going to school for a long period of time because that was the only school that we were forced to go to and forced to come and either drop out, in junior high school, you're only what like 11, 12 years old.

Um, it was very difficult when we would get out of school, wherever they would hide, they would let us get right here, and then you would hear like, they would always make

some kind of a sound or noise and you would hear the chain. And you would have to run for your life over this bridge to get back into the development. We couldn't walk on Court Street. The women could do it early during the day. Like now [at the time we were gathered], mothers would come out very early with their children, like they were stroller size, to come over to Court Street to have the benefits of the nice delicacies they have over their: Italian, uh, mozzarella cheese and things like that, the fish market, the, the check cashing place has always been there, the bakeries have always been there,

History of Racism in our Place

Vanessa McKnight, cont'd:

Principal Figueroa: The coffee shop,

Vanessa: Right. But now after a while, then we could come out like a little later, but mainly the women. And if we did go, you know, the guys would, you know, they wanted to stand up for themselves, they wanted to come over. It would be terrible. We were here that, so, and so is bloody on Court Street. Then you got half of the Projects coming, trying to run over all the way over here to rescue them. So this bridge has a very, very, very, very nasty, uh,

Principal Figueroa: negative.

Vanessa: Negative, uh,

Edwin: history.

Vanessa: Yeah, History. And especially not for this side, but for that side [pointing to Red Hook]. Can you imagine getting up every morning knowing you may get beat up and just because you're Black? So this bridge for me, I, I haven't been over this bridge probably since like '73, '74. This is my first time walking back over this bridge.

Wow.

I mean, I walked over here. Ooh. It gave me really, really, really bad chills and memory. It's not good. It's not good. It was bad. It was bad. And it was older kids that were beating on elementary school kids.

And what was so sad was that the police department would not even come here and stand here to make sure the kids were safe going back. So when I hear people say they don't want their kids coming over this bridge, you've never heard of the children over there [pointing to Carroll Gardens] beating the shit outta the kids over here [pointing to Red Hook] till this day. So this is why when you say what they keep saying, "What do you, what do you want for your children?"

We don't want them to get beat up, going to school. We want them to be able to come across this bridge or any other bridge or any other area for our children to have equity and have equal opportunity. I'm sorry, guys.

History of Racism in our Place

The issues of inequity and segregation in schools are as entrenched as they are unacceptable. Every question we asked in this study, every piece of data we examined, and every discussion we held covered well-trodden ground. There was nothing new here and that reality is excruciatingly painful and feels unacceptable. At times though, because we are so accustomed and because it is our everyday lives, the profound injustice of hundreds of years of structural racism still being sanctioned becomes normalized, and it can be hard to see and feel what is right in front of our eyes

When Vanessa told her story, we were – all of us collectively, across our positionalities – brought in touch with the violence of racism in our everyday, from history through to today. As we stood there with Vanessa, we were face-to-face with the enduring insidiousness of racism in our schools and communities. We were confronted with how little has changed and how even now, dominant narratives can be upside down.

In our community conversations with families living on the North side of Hamilton Avenue, one strong theme that emerged was a concern about safety. Most often families would cite the danger of crossing the six-lane Hamilton Avenue into Red Hook (crossing Hamilton Ave in both directions has been a significant concern and long-standing node of activism for Red Hook community members who have no choice but to cross Hamilton Ave daily). However, safety concerns expressed by families living North of Hamilton Ave also related to long-held associations with the Red Hook public housing development. The implication underneath some expressions of concerns around safety had to do with an understanding of Red Hook as a violent place ([see R3a1 Rit3s research](#) by Red Hook young adults on experiences with and perspectives on violence and community building in Red Hook). Vanessa's story powerfully disrupted that narrative, calling attention to how racism is violence, how inequity is violence, how Black and Brown children endure violence that is overlooked and too often sanctioned by those in power including the schooling system.

Access to Thriving Schools Close to Home

The strongest theme that emerged from our research was a desire expressed by community members for thriving schools close to home. In our community conversations and the community survey, we heard again and again a wide variety of people express a desire for their children to attend a near-by neighborhood school and they wanted that school to be a “good” school. Though, there were wide and varied interpretations of what a “good school” means, the common thread across, and the most fundamental desire, was that the school have the resources, enrollment, vision, and culture necessary to be a highly functional school. We refer to this as a “thriving” school. Importantly, this desire for thriving schools close to home was expressed by community members across race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and neighborhood. Related to a desire for thriving schools close to home was a desire for all schools to thrive.

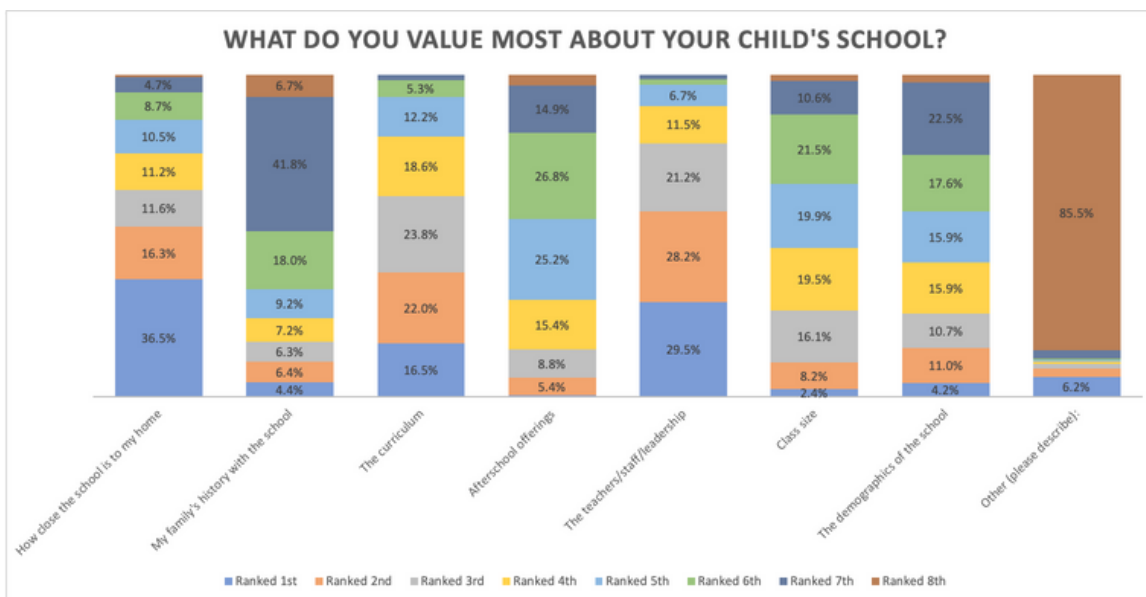
In our study, community members reported a wide variety of reasons for wanting their child to attend school close to home, including: safety concerns, connection to community, commuting challenges (including the limited public transit options in our area, especially into and out of Red Hook), economic concerns in relation to commuting, connection to school, and proximity to extended care networks. Residents of NYCHA developments in Gowanus and Red Hook cited the importance of maintaining historic and inter-generational connections with community schools.

In our survey, we asked participants to rank what was most important to them about their child’s school and provided a list of eight characteristics (including “other”). We asked:

Please rank these items in order of what you value most about your child’s school.

- How close the school is to my home
- My/my family's history with the school
- The curriculum
- Afterschool offerings
- The teachers/staff/leadership
- Class size
- The demographics of the school
- Other (please describe):

Access to Thriving Schools Close to Home



More survey respondents ranked how close school is to their home as being the thing they valued the most about their school first over other factors.

Participants also ranked teachers/staff/leadership, and curriculum consistently in the top three.

The majority of community members in our area already attended a school close to home. In our survey, 54% Black, Brown, Indigenous, and people of color and 66% white participants reported that they currently have a less than 10 minute commute to their child's school.

This finding was particularly salient in relation to thinking about rezoning because of what we didn't hear. For instance, we didn't hear from Red Hook residents a strong and consistent desire to attend elementary schools across Hamilton Ave in Carroll Gardens. Though there are two schools in Carroll Gardens (PS 58 and PS 29) that score very highly on City and State metrics for schools, that are ranked highly by some City-wide parent resources (like Inside Schools .com), and that have a "word-of-mouth" reputation particularly within predominantly white and affluent parent circles as being "desirable", We did not find widespread desire from families outside the zones of PS 58 and PS 29 to attend those schools. Proximity, neighborhood, and historical connection emerged as more salient than any one notion of "good".

Desire for Equity-based Integration and a Call to Disrupt 'Zones of Exclusion'

In the community survey and in our community conversations a strong theme that emerged was a vision of public school as free, quality, and accessible education for all. We asked community members where their children attended school. Families in the Gowanus, Wyckoff, and Warren Houses reported a desire to maintain access to PS 38, PS 32, and PS 261, with attention paid to issues of integration and equity within the schools. We did not find that Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian, people of color community members from Red Hook express a consistent desire to attend PS 58 and/or PS 29. However, community members did express a desire for all schools to be accessible to all.

What emerged was a desire for equity-based integration and a call to disrupt what Ujju Aggarwal calls 'zones of exclusion'. We heard community members express that they did not support school zoning that contributes to producing racially segregated schooling and resource hoarding. This concern around exclusivity was often expressed in relation to perceptions of better and more resources available to the two over-enrolled schools with majority white students via the PTA budgets and specialized programming.

Meanwhile, from our community conversations and the survey we heard a desire for diverse schools. In our community survey, 88% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: It is important to me that my child's school is racially diverse. This finding was consistent across race/ethnicity. However, when we asked survey participants to rank what they value most about their child's school, only 4.2% ranked the demographics of the school first. There is some research that suggests that though white parents may state a desire for "diversity" this is not often demonstrated through action (Hagerman, 2018).

Reflective School Communities

An important and related theme that emerged was that Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian, and people of color community members and some white community members express how important it was for them that their children to attend schools in/with community schools reflective of surrounding communities in which they were situated and where school community members lived. In other words, we heard a desire for transformation towards equity-based integration, which leaves room for community schools that are majority children of color, living in community together, attending a thriving and popular school. As this white PS 32 parent from Sunset Park stated: "My daughters are black, and it's important to me that they have the opportunity to learn with a critical mass of other black children."

Schools as an Ecosystem and Schools as Sites of Place-Based Community Making

When we started the work, we were thinking predominantly from the parent/family/child perspective: what do community members experience and desire? As the work continued, it became clear that it was crucial to consider the research questions from the school-level perspective. What do schools need to thrive? How are schools impacted by the current zoning and admissions structures? What are the equity implications? Through analysis of DOE data, community conversations, participant observations, and importantly, discussions with School Leaders towards the end of our data collection period, we came to an understanding and analysis that schools exist as an ecosystem, between and across schools and between and within communities. And yet, the potential for this ecosystem to be equitable is undermined in significant ways by a range of structures that force schools into an every-school-for-itself logic and oblige (compel) the most vulnerable and historically under-resourced schools to compete with each other for students and enrollment.

In Sub-District 3 of District 15, the schools with room for more students are the schools with majority Black, Brown, Students of Color from NYCHA housing and low-income families. Due to the Fair Student Funding formula, thus those are the schools that need more students to have the budgets they need to thrive as schools.

An important theme that emerged from our observations, participant observations, and conversations was about ways elementary schools, especially, are connected to local community. Participants talked about their families' experience of schooling as community-building; and about the importance of elementary schools as connected and accountable to local community.

This connection to place-based community, especially in diverse (by race/ethnicity and socio-economic status) areas and schools connected to NYCHA developments, provides important opportunities for learning and engagement for students, families, and school staff in relation to the range of lived experiences that touch the school. It also reveals the ways that schools and educational policy and practices intersect with other public policy areas and justice issues.



Recommendations

Two key recommendations were made during tas a result of the findings:

(1) Explore Transforming PS 676 into a Middle School

(2) Rezoning: Zones of Inclusion

Additional Recommendations were also made for:

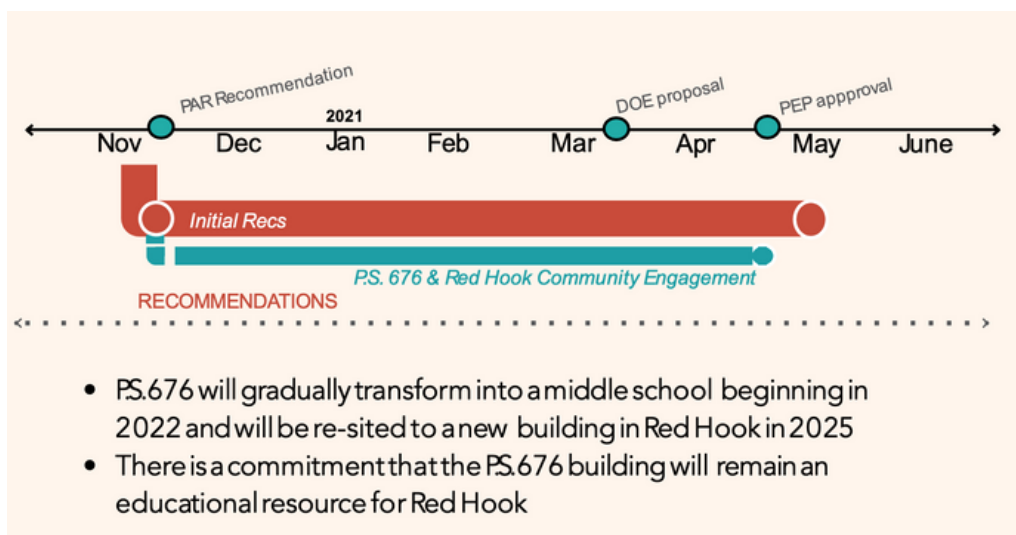
- **Support for those working in schools**
- **Funding and Policy**
- **Infrastructure and Built Environment**

Explore Transforming PS 676 into a Middle School

Our first recommendation was that the DOE support PS 676 and the Red Hook community to explore transforming PS 676 into a middle school. This recommendation was the first to be implemented, approved by the Panel for Educational Policy in April 2021 and implemented Fall 2022.

There has long been a call for a new public middle school in Red Hook as there was no current public middle school in the neighborhood. Red Hook young people had to leave the neighborhood in order to attend public middle school and general ed high school (there is a transfer high school in Red Hook).

The recommendation to transform PS 676 into a middle school emerged as a creative response to the enrollment challenges faced by PS 676, and to some extent PS 15, produced in no small part by the presence of PAVE Academy charter school in the same neighborhood just a couple of blocks away. As the PAR team studied the enrollment and zone retention data, walked zone lines, and talked with community members there was no elementary rezoning solution that held strong promise to significantly improve elementary school enrollment at PS 676. It came down to the reality that there were not enough children in Red Hook for three elementary schools. The idea of transforming PS 676 into a middle school felt responsive to current community needs and demographics. The idea received widespread positive reaction from Red Hook community members, including from within the PS 676 school community. PS 676 transforming into a middle school emerged as the best idea in this moment and as part of a vision of local public school design as responsive and flexible to current community needs.



Rezoning : Zones of Inclusion

When the Rezoning of Subdistrict 3 was announced by the DOE and before the PAR Team started, there were two approaches initially proposed by the DOE: continue with zone lines or adopt a shared zone (these were presented as maps and known locally as Approach 1 and Approach 2). The D15 PAR Project found that binary limiting.

The PAR team deliberated over whether/ how it might make sense to remove zone lines in various configurations for months. We ultimately recommended hybrid approach to rezoning that is accountable to the specific needs and contexts of our schools and families.

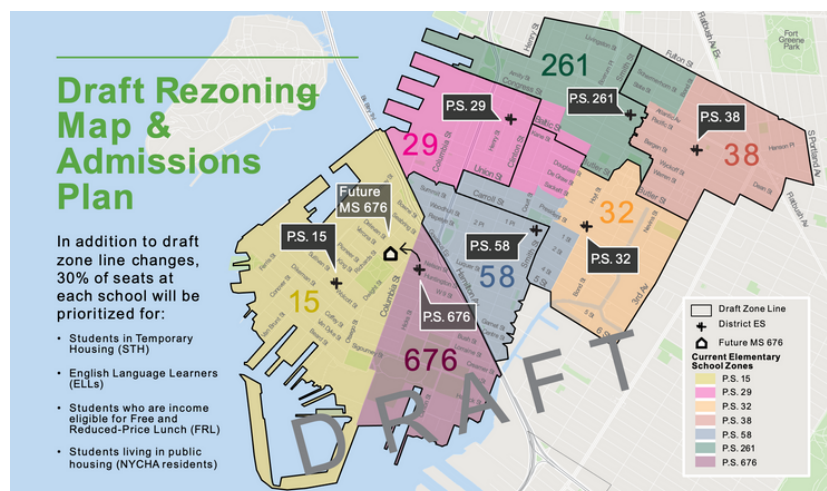
We recommended maintaining zones, though shifting lines in a Zones of Inclusion approach to help ensure community members have thriving elementary schools close to home while also opening up access to all schools across the subdistrict through priority admissions for those historically excluded from some schools.

In this approach we recommended:

- Using individual zone lines as tools to equitably support community schools
- Using admission priorities to increase and protect access for those community members historically excluded
- Ensuring that rezoning is understood as part of comprehensive program of equity work

We recommended continuing to use zones to help ensure families have access to a thriving school close to home, and moving the zone lines to support more equitable enrollment across the subzone. We also recommended prioritizing access to all schools for children from families who are NYCHA residents, low-income, English language learners, and students living in temporary housing.

The DOE Office of District Planning (coordinating for the NYCDOE) worked closely with the PAR Team to develop a proposed rezoning map.



Rezoning : Zones of Inclusion

In the end, the rezoned map is different in fundamental ways from what previously existed and from what was originally proposed. However, at first glance, it does not look drastically different.

When we made our final recommendations some integration activists in the City including a local elected were disappointed (at best) with the proposed rezoning. In their view, our recommendations did little to address issues of segregation in sub-district 3. Indeed, they suggested that the proposal based on the PAR Team's recommendations increased segregation by making Red Hook one zone and did only a little to increase diversity by race/ethnicity and socio-economic status at PS 58 and PS 29.

We disagree with that analysis.

That analysis prioritizes “race and enrollment” or moving bodies as an (the) approach to integration. Instead, the approach to rezoning we proposed was accountable to local communities of color, to the schools historically rooted in those communities, and to conceptions of equity-based integration. Indeed, to focus on “integrating” PS 58 and PS 29 (which would require a rezoning that relied on Red Hook children traveling out of Red Hook) is more about a concern about those mostly white spaces than an accountability to communities of color. New York City schools and housing are problematically segregated. However, the oppressive, violent, racist structures and praxes that produce these segregated conditions do not get undone with a single policy change, and certainly not with a school rezoning.

We propose that the purpose/goal is to transform how decisions are made in order to make ongoing, sustained, structural change possible, even inevitable. It’s not only the rezoning itself, but the way it came about and the insistence on ongoing participatory engagement and continuing structural change that is community-powered and community-accountable.



Additional Recommendations

In addition and in order to support the goals of the rezoning, we recommended:

- Continue the PAR Team's work by creating the Rezoning Community Equity Team (ReCET), an independent body of community members who will collaborate with the DOE and the D15 CEC to assess and support implementation of the rezoning recommendations from community perspectives. Our recommendation was that this group should maintain majority representation from Red Hook and Gowanus NYCHA residents and be funded by the DOE.
- Work with each school to launch outreach and education around the rezoning changes right away. Develop a range of community outreach plans for fall/winter 2021-2 to inform community members of rezoning changes and build knowledge about each school. The goal should be to reach as many families of rising Kindergartners as possible. This effort could include outreach to/via: playgrounds, childcare/pre-school providers, a virtual Elementary School Fair, printed flyers. All outreach should be made available in multiple languages and modalities.
- Support and resource parent and family education and training for building equitable and anti-racist communities within integrating schools

IN SCHOOLS: Support SLTs, PTAs, school leaders, and school communities on work around equity and integration as the rezoning is implemented

- Support, deepen, and resource ongoing anti-racist and culturally-responsive, sustaining pedagogy and curriculum within and across each school, including restorative approaches to school discipline. Increase public visibility of and accessibility to this work at the school and district level.
- Support hiring practices that are inclusive of communities of color and immigrant communities.

IN FUNDING AND POLICY: We understand funding and anti-racist education and work as areas where bridges and connections need to be built across schools. And as part of that work we consider it important to:

- Examine PTA funding, PTA practices, and the Chancellor's regulations on PTAs, and to work to make PTA funding and operations more equitable
- We also recognize that even very well-funded PTAs comprise only a portion of overall school budgets. We therefore believe it is necessary to critically examine fair student funding, school budgets, and the impact that budget policies and practices have on school operations and educational equity

IN OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- Push NYC to repair and renovate the footbridge between Carroll Gardens and Red Hook, and create a Red Hook park at the base of the footbridge on the Red Hook side.
- Monitor and address issues of transportation, like bussing, and road safety in order to better support Zones of Inclusion. One immediate priority is to expand the crossing guard program with special attention being paid to 6-lane crossings on school routes.

Endnote

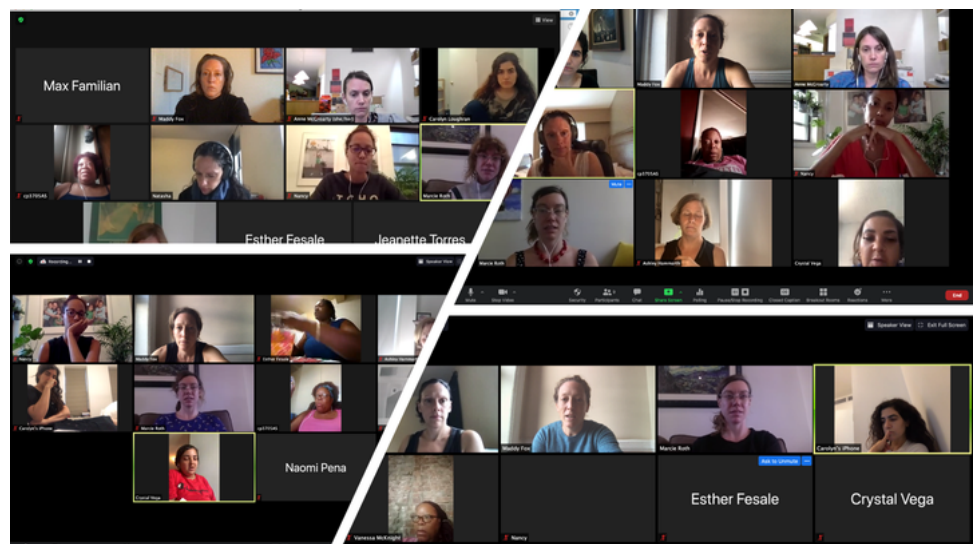
Urgent need for implementation, outreach, and ongoing community accountability

We are thrilled that the rezoning we recommended was implemented. However, our most important recommendation was not taken up.

We recommended the Department of Education direct resources towards the implementation of the rezoning recommendations.

Over the 2021 – 2022 academic year, we learned that the work of outreach and education about rezonings and admissions changes is the sole responsibility of individual schools. There is no Department of Education nor District office that is responsible for supporting nor resourcing this important work. Meanwhile, over-extended schools can't be solely responsible for outreach and community education about schools. As much as schools want to do this work, they need external support. Building on our finding about schools as ecosystems, we see that this work should be coordinated across schools and communities. As a result, though our work was deeply participatory, as Kindergarten and Middle School admissions rolled around, many local impacted community members were not directly informed of the changes. We are concerned that impacted community members, especially NYCHA and other historically excluded communities do not know about the changes. We continue to see community outreach, ongoing parent leadership development/community participation, and district-level support and coordination around school enrollment and admissions as urgent needs in our communities.

Vanessa: What stood out to me as a long-term member of my community to see something that should have been done years ago. But did we have the power, did we have the knowledge, did we have something that could stand the test of time. ... We made change, but my biggest challenge is I don't want our work to be in vain, to be pushed aside or that nothing meaningful will happen. Anything that you implement that is new, it takes a while for it to catch on. ... If we don't do ReCET soon, they could undo it all. But, if we succeed with ReCET, we can keep our Eyes on Them. We can keep working towards equity for all our communities.



For full report, citations, additional PAR Team member commentaries, and appendices please email district15parproject@gmail.com or madelinefox@brooklyn.cuny.edu