

*Reforming the Reform*



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*Problems of Public Schooling  
in the American Welfare State*

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In gratitude to our students,  
from whom we have learned so much.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACSA	Association of California School Administrators
ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
CASPP	California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress
CCEE	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence
CCSESA	California County Superintendents Educational Services Association
CCSS/I	Common Core State Standards/Common Core State Standards Initiative
CCSSO	Council of Chief State School Officers
CDE	California Department of Education
CHIP	Children's Health Insurance Program
CLAS	California Learning Assessment System
CMP	California Mathematics Project
COE	County Office of Education
CORE	Centers of Regional Excellence (Tennessee)
CSMP	California Subject Matter Project
CSR	Comprehensive School Reform
CTC	Commission on Teacher Credentialing
CWP	California Writing Project
ELA	English Language Arts
ELD	English Language Development
EL	English Learner
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
ETS	Educational Testing Service
IASA	Improving America's Schools Act
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IQC	Instructional Quality Commission
LCAP	Local Control Accountability Plan
LCFF	Local Control Funding Formula
LEA	Local Educational Agency

MTSS	Multi-Tiered System of Support
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NAGB	National Assessment Governing Board
NAS	New American Schools
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NECAP	New England Common Assessment Program
NESIC	National Education Standards and Improvement Council
NGA	National Governors Association
NGSS	Next Generation Science Standards
NSF	National Science Foundation
PD	Professional Development
REA	Reading Excellence Act
RTI	Response to Intervention
RTI <sup>2</sup>	Response to Instruction and Intervention
RTTT	Race to the Top
SBE	State Board of Education (California)
SCORE	State Collaborative on Reforming Education (Tennessee)
SFA	Success for All
STAR	Standardized Testing and Reporting Program (California)
TA	Technical Assistance
TCAP	Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program
TDOE	Tennessee Department of Education
TEAM	Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model
TNTP	The New Teacher Project
VNT	Voluntary National Test

## PREFACE

This changes everything. Reformers and observers have applied this phrase to changes across policy domains including welfare, health care, and abortion rights. Toward the beginning of the Obama administration, reformers referred to the Common Core State Standards Initiative this way: as a game-changer that would reconfigure multiple, foundational aspects of American public education.<sup>1</sup>

Pivotal events and policies do, indeed, manifest; and they yield durable, reverberating implications. Yet, “this changes everything” often appears more aspirational than observational. Instead, “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose” operates as a public policy anthem. What would it take to change everything? This is the puzzle our research team considered as we embarked on our multi-year study. We started with thought experiments and considered the general process of reform before diving into data collection that revealed the experiences of policy makers and practitioners. Our overarching puzzle led to three additional puzzles or domains for inquiry. Does the knowledge and know-how to support change exist; and if so, how is that knowledge distributed? Do organizational connections and capabilities to support change exist; and if so, how are those organizational capabilities distributed? Do politics to support change exist; and if so, how are those politics distributed? We looked to political science, to sociology, to history, to economics, and to education for perspectives on how to approach these puzzles of power, policy, and practice.

As we moved from our thought experiments into lived experiences, we examined how people responded to reforms when politics, organizations, and technical know-how varied. We were in the midst of wrapping up our data collection when the COVID-19 pandemic shook the world in the spring of 2020. We contacted our respondents, some of whom had been engaging with us since 2017, to ask if they wanted to talk with us again about what they were experiencing. We were surprised, and humbled, that many agreed.

Those conversations from the early days of the pandemic helped crys-

tallize a timeless story. Moments of disruption shine spotlights back in time, back to prior efforts at reform, back to prior efforts to change everything. As those prior reform efforts age, for instance, they can drift and expand. Our conversations with respondents from the early days of the pandemic revealed the centrality of public education in the American version of the social safety net, even though the formal origins of American public education did not focus on matters like nutrition. Yet, nutrition became a twentieth and twenty-first-century centerpiece nonetheless. From our respondents' perspective in the early spring of 2020, after COVID-19 closed building doors:

[Food distribution] was really the first thing that we put in place . . . distribution at each of our sites, for our communities. That was step one for us.<sup>2</sup>

Our conversations revealed legacies of prior reforms that complicated efforts to address COVID-19. Prior laws reflected aspirations for change, for more humane treatment of teachers and students in systems designed to batch-process humans. The piecemeal accumulations of these provisions, however, created a policy thicket. Again, from the perspective of spring 2020:

I have asked for a waiver from about six different laws for next year for my district in order to let me accomplish the kinds of things that I want to accomplish instructionally. I'll give you an example. I have asked for a waiver of the class size requirement. I have asked for a waiver of the duty-free lunch requirement. . . . I get no help with applying for those waivers from my Core Office. I even reached out to our superintendents' organization. They said, "No. That's a district-by-district decision. You have to do that on your own."<sup>3</sup>

Our conversations revealed privilege and inequities embedded and compounded in ongoing efforts to reform reforms. Those reform legacies, of course, yielded vastly different COVID-19 experiences depending on geography, race, and ethnicity:

our district is so rural that only about 30 percent of our kids have internet access and a device at home, so doing virtual learning really wasn't an option for our kids.<sup>4</sup>

Our conversations both before and during COVID revealed lived experiences as continuity collides with change. In the pages that follow, we examine the ongoing, iterative process of reforming reforms and the prob-

lems those reforms create. We focus on the experiences of policy makers in the middle, between national legislation and frontline practice. This is not a book about COVID-19. Writing in the COVID-19 era, however, helped reveal the problems that arise when we strive to reform reforms—when we try to change everything.

\*

Gratitude permeates this manuscript. We are first and foremost grateful to our many interview respondents, who generously shared their time and perspectives with us. Our team of diligent research assistants formed the backbone of our extensive data collection operations. The team included: Lucas Benjamin, Victoria Chávez, Felicia Davidson, Kimberly Davila, Yelena Denisenko, Kassandra Fotiadis, Katherine Hancock, Victoria Kidd, Rachel Lowenstein, Alexandra Mitchell, Alberto Morales, Neev Parikh, Timothy Peltier, Jeremiah Prince, Antonina Rytwinska, and Michele Winter. We are grateful to our thought-partners Omar Afzaal, Erika Byun, Alejandro Contreras, Kristen Essel, David Herrera, Matthew Lyddon, Domingo Morel, Marie Schenk, Kelly Branham Smith, Carmen Sobczak, and Cadence Willse for their thoughtful contributions to various parts of our data collection and analysis processes.

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We write to learn, and we teach to learn. Many of the ideas that appear in the pages that follow can trace their roots to our classroom lectures and conversations, including those with students in Moffitt's "Education, Inequality and American Democracy" classes at Brown University. We are grateful to our families—to Magdalene Lampert, to all of the Moffitts, to all of the Clarks, to all of the Krumms, to all of the O'Neills, and to all of the Krumm O'Neills—for so generously supporting us with patience and perspective throughout this project.

And we are grateful to David K. Cohen.

This book exists because of David. Among his many gifts, David excelled at bringing people together. David brought the three of us together originally as we were all trying to understand the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Together, we merged our perspectives and moved the project well beyond the Common Core. We combined David's abiding interest in reforms with Susan's interest in administrative policy making and Michaela's interest in the instructional core of teaching and learning. Some of David's ideas about reforming the reform helped structure an early version of this manuscript, and we have kept that as the foundation of the more developed book that took shape after he died. During the two years after his death, we reread much of David's published work, revisited the interviews he conducted with us, revisited his comments on earlier drafts of this project, drew on the decades of conversations we'd had with him, and consistently asked each other "what do you think David would say about this?" We have humbly strived to keep his voice and his mind-prints (to use Magdalene Lampert's term) active in this manuscript. We shoulder the blame, however, for all the ways in which we have fallen short. In the spirit of David-as-convener, we aspire for this book to bring together readers from different perspectives: academics, practitioners, policy makers, and publics.

On August 26, 2020, David called Susan for the last time. The diagnosis was dire: he had only a handful of weeks left to live. Though infused

with deep sadness, the conversation embodied all the familiar elements that had been part of their twenty-seven years of weekly conversations: part political analysis, part social commentary, part reflections on common work, part reports on family news, and laughter—always laughter, even in sad times. When it came time for the final goodbye, David insisted on having the last word. “Thank you, Susan,” he said. “I’ve learned so much from you. Thank you.” Among his many gifts, David was a masterful teacher who flipped the conventional hierarchical teaching relationship to one where students could learn from each other, and he from them. All of us who had the pleasure of working with David were, in one way or another, his students. We learned from him, and to our humble astonishment, he learned from us. In the spirit of David, we dedicate this book to all of our students—David’s, Susan’s, Michaela’s—from whom we have learned so much. Thank you.





# 1 \* What Happens after Reforms?

Reforms embody aspirations.<sup>1</sup> Reformers aspire to significantly and durably transform previously established policies and practices. Education reformers in the mid-nineteenth-century US, for instance, aspired to transform the inconsistent patchwork of locally established schools into a more expansive and predictable set of tax-funded common schools. Education reformers in the second half of the twentieth century aspired to expand access to educational opportunities in American public schools. They worked through federal courts to promote desegregation and more equitable school district funding.<sup>2</sup> They sought federal funds to alleviate poverty and support early childhood education. They established the right of students with disabilities to attend school. Myriad aspirations populated the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century educational terrain, including for example efforts to transform governing arrangements of public schools, curricular content of instruction, accountability mechanisms, and funding arrangements.

These aspirations take shape in legislation as policy makers press for change. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, for instance, established Head Start for early childhood learning—a game-changer in US policy and practice. Head Start marked the first major nationwide investment in preschool-aged children’s well-being in the US, coupling federal funding with community-centered policy making. It simultaneously created new opportunities for well-being and gave families and communities a voice in Head Start program operations.<sup>3</sup> Another twentieth-century game-changer, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, codified the rights of students with disabilities to access education.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the 1975 legislation, more than a million children with disabilities were categorically excluded from participation in public education.

State-level reforms also catalyze powerful forces for change. Over the past thirty years, reforms to develop state-level education standards have combined two aspirations: for higher student achievement overall, and for more ambitious and equitable teaching as a means of addressing racial

and economic disparities in academic achievement. These aspirations have been codified in state statutes like the California Education Code, which “requires the State Board of Education to adopt statewide content and performance standards in the core curriculum areas of reading, writing, mathematics, history/social science, and science.”<sup>5</sup>

But what happens *after* reform legislation passes and becomes law?<sup>6</sup> Some reforms can dissipate quickly, others can endure.<sup>7</sup> Reforms can reflect hollow political promises that elected officials have few incentives to bring to fruition.<sup>8</sup> Reforms can be niche, focused on discrete parts of social goods provision, or systemic, striving to change the broader system of social goods delivery.<sup>9</sup> Whatever their type or intention, reforms create problems. This is a book about the problems reform legislation creates.

Problems are not the end of the story; quite the opposite. Problems in fact provide the fuel and foundation for future reforms: they feed back into the policy making process. This book offers a framework for understanding and anticipating the problems reform create, and how they can engender and influence future reforms.

Our answer to the question of what happens after reform legislation becomes law comes in three parts. The first part is more policy making in the spaces between legislation and implementation: the mezzo level. Rather than moving straight into the implementation of statutory mandates, reform aspirations also manifest in less readily visible policy making at subnational levels: in state agencies, county offices, and district offices, where significant policy making in domains like education, public health, and related safety net programs occurs. Agency directors, county supervisors, and district superintendents are not mere implementers: they are also policy makers. Take, for instance, the parts of the California code that explicitly delegate policy making responsibility to policy makers—such as the California State Board of Education and the California Department of Education—operating in the space between legislation and implementation. Though typically promulgated with much less fanfare, reform aspirations that manifest in policies between legislation and front-line practice are no less important. They also give shape and substance to hazy legislative proclamations. Policy making reforms at one level of government beget more policy making reforms at other levels.<sup>10</sup>

Reform aspirations that emerge in administrative offices look different from those that emerge in legislative chambers, as they move from abstract to concrete. Shifting our gaze from California statutes to California school districts elaborates and expands reform aspirations, defining what such efforts at change might look like in teachers’ and students’ instructional experiences. Translating the abstract language from the California

code into a vision of instructional practice, an assistant superintendent from a mid-sized California city offered her reflections on the reform aspirations for mathematics instruction in her district's high schools. She imagined what she would like to see and hear and experience as she walked down the hallways of her high schools and looked into the mathematics classrooms:

Ideally, for me, what I would like to see walking into a high school math course is students working collaboratively. That maybe they are in partners or in small groups within the classroom and working together on approaches to solving a problem, not just the traditional worksheet, but actually engaged in a problem that could be answered in multiple ways with multiple approaches. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Her reform aspirations emerged alongside decades of state-level reforms in California aimed at establishing ambitious mathematics standards for California public school students. The state codified different versions of these mathematics standards over the course of this assistant superintendent's career, though the technical term "codification" masks the bitter battles that erupted over what math standards should entail. These battles have, at times, pitted the governor against the state's elected superintendent of public instruction, yielding retaliatory budget cuts and forced resignations. They have mobilized powerful interest groups: parents seeking to hold teachers accountable, equity coalitions seeking to hold whole systems accountable, textbook publishers seeking to make sure their products prevail in lucrative California educational markets. Moving as it does from abstract to concrete, policy making at the mezzo level happens in densely populated terrains.

This leads to the second part of our answer: policy makers in the spaces between legislation and implementation rarely make policy from scratch.<sup>12</sup> Instead they do so in inherited, complex terrains packed with prior policies and practices. Legislative reforms in collision with extant institutions, debris left from prior policies, and adjacent policies constitute the political and organizational context within which mezzo-level policy makers decide and act. Despite California's contentious inherited political context, the assistant superintendent perceived the state's mathematics standards as valuable. Unlike some legislative policy makers, who have the luxury of framing their attempts at reform as vague proclamations that are long on vision and short on details, the assistant superintendent conveyed her vision of what she aspired to see when walking into a high school math classroom with specific illustrations of what reform would

look like in practice, in classroom relationships between students, teachers, and instructional content:

[Students would] be saying things like, “I tried doing it this way. How did you try doing it?” As a teacher is facilitating, I would hear the teacher walking around using questioning strategies and not necessarily just providing the answers. . . . “What approach did you take to get to this particular response?” and being able to walk around and notice patterns of maybe where there’s some misconceptions and then stop in the class and [say], “Hey, I noticed as I walked around that many of you are doing it this way. Let me chime in and do a little mini-lesson on this misconception here that I’m seeing across the board.”<sup>13</sup>

The assistant superintendent envisioned collaborative rather than isolated student work. She aspired to see work that was problem-based rather than memorization-based. She wanted to see teachers facilitating student learning rather than presenting a didactic lecture. She hoped to see all students—not only the privileged top of the class—participating in ambitious academic work. State policies helped ignite and fan these aspirations. Yet, along with her vision, the assistant superintendent recognized the problems that accompanied these reform aspirations. Looking at reforms through the eyes of administrative policy makers reveals the problems ambitious reforms create: the third part of our answer.<sup>14</sup>

### **What Are the Problems Reforms Create?**

Metaphors for reform abound. Reforms come like waves crashing on shores, with tides ebbing and flowing, eroding the shoreline and leaving debris.<sup>15</sup> Like evolutionary biology, reform efforts manifest as long periods of stasis punctuated by times of dramatic and rapid change.<sup>16</sup> Like spinning wheels, they can yield constant movement but little improvement.<sup>17</sup> Like Christmas trees, they can contain layers of ornaments added over years.<sup>18</sup> Reforms entice yet remain elusive, like utopian dreams.<sup>19</sup>

When we look at it through the eyes of the assistant superintendent aspiring for teachers and students to engage in rich discussions of complex mathematical problems, we see reform as a kind of human-generated electricity: full of promise yet potentially hazardous.<sup>20</sup> Electricity can provide heat for dwellings, light to see by, and a means to make food that is safe to eat. Similarly, reform as electricity can be generative, offering room for human agency and new opportunities for growth and renewal. Like electricity, reforms can also be devastating, leaving the

terrain and its populations worse off than before. Like electricity, reforms are not unalloyed goods. Electrical currents running through reforms generate some change, yet they can also leave old problems and create new ones.

Shifting our gaze away from legislation illuminates how reforms—like California’s approach to standards-based education—at the mezzo level come coupled with operational considerations: how will reforms actually operate in practice? What would it take for classrooms to look the way the assistant superintendent hoped? Reforms, like California’s mathematics standards, aligned with the assistant superintendent’s vision of mathematics instruction for all children. She wanted to make these reforms work. Yet, along with the state-level reforms came problems for district-level policy makers as they worked to develop policies that would translate general ideas into meaningful practice. The assistant superintendent continued:

I think for us, it’s gonna take change within our system. In the past—and I’ve been with the district . . . for a long time—the approach that we’ve taken has been in pockets. We try this and we try it over here and then we try a different initiative and we try it over there and we see, oh, it works with this teacher, but then that teacher leaves and so, then there goes that piece of it. For us, I really do think it has to be a systemic approach.<sup>21</sup>

The assistant superintendent aspired to move beyond a particular intervention—a new type of textbook, a different kind of teacher training—to transform the ways in which teachers and students engaged in mathematics together. Yet, she recognized problems that follow from reform efforts: pockets of innovative practice that operate in isolation, off the electrical grid.

She also identified problems when reforms spread in unanticipated ways, extending into new domains beyond prevailing capacity: like an electrical device that is built for 110 volts, but gets put into a context that delivers 220 volts. What might start as manageable becomes untenable as task demands expand from one domain into another. As she reflected on what it would take to see the kind of mathematics teaching and learning she aspired to cultivate in her high schools, she began to identify areas outside of mathematics instruction that also needed support. She noted that the instructional improvement she sought connected to a broader vision of support, a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). But along with this recognition came the realization of how large a gap existed between the aspiration and existing resources and practices. As the reforms moved

from one domain into another, there simply weren't enough people or expertise to do the work:

we're gonna need tons of support. We currently don't have in-house experts around MTSS. . . . We're definitely gonna have to seek resources beyond what we have in existence as a district with the hopes of then building internal capacity.<sup>22</sup>

The assistant superintendent also identified problems of reform that overwhelmed and overloaded district policy making, especially in the context of multiple and competing reforms. For the assistant superintendent, this circuit overload appeared at the intersection of aggressive standards-based reform efforts that mandated her schools undergo whole-sale restructuring—"program improvement"—and ongoing requirements to comply with relics of previous reform efforts. She continued:

a lot of times, there is a disconnect between the direction that we wanna go with as a district and where they [the state/county offices] feel they need to take us especially when it's compliance-driven. . . . We were put into program improvement. We had to do certain things that weren't even necessarily good for kids at times . . . but we were mandated to do 'em. So, we did it and there was zero buy-in or very little buy-in and it didn't produce the results that we were hoping for.<sup>23</sup>

She also identified problems with the status quo persisting despite ongoing efforts at reform, including embedded socioeconomic disparities. Despite decades of reforms—reforms that appeared like sparks but fizzled out—racialized and socioeconomic disparities persist, and they are further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic:

the pandemic just exposed . . . the economic inequities that continue to exist. The families who unfortunately didn't continue to get paid, and the extra burden that that placed upon their . . . high school age kids because they had to then go get a job. . . . Or if they're undocumented parents and their kids are the only ones that can go to work. Those pieces . . . were so blatant across our community in terms of students not being able to engage because they had to go to work.<sup>24</sup>

Seeing reform aspirations through the eyes of mezzo-level policy makers—the individuals who make policy in the spaces between legislators and frontline workers—reveals how ambitious reforms may solve some problems while simultaneously creating new ones. Looking back

over decades of reform, the problems so produced are not fatal flaws, but the foundation for future iterations of reform.<sup>25</sup> Let’s take a closer look at how reforming the reforms can unfold.

Reforming the Reform

Public sector reforms are nothing new. “Human beings have been reforming government ever since they invented government,” Paul Light aptly noted.<sup>26</sup> In the case of US public education, efforts to reform mass schooling have been ongoing since mass schooling began. Along with these continual efforts at reform, scholars, policy makers, and the public typically ask: did the reform work? did the reform last? Understanding questions about durability and impact requires that we ask an antecedent question: what happens after reform? Specifically, what happens after legislative bodies pass reform legislation? Before we get to “working” or not, or “lasting” or not, what happens in between the planned change and the measurable outcomes of impact or durability?

Our answer is more policy making in mezzo-level administrative venues that (1) operates in densely populated terrains, (2) shape the political and organizational wherewithal administrators have at their disposal as they make policy, and (3) yield predictable classes of problems that feed back into the policy making process.

Figure 1.1 details what happens after reforms and the problems reforms produce. Returning to our California assistant superintendent, ambitious state standards-based reform policies collided with the inherited terrain (including institutional legacies of racial and economic disparity, prior policy debris from earlier compliance-based policies, and adjacent policy terrains in health and social policy) to shape organizational and political configurations (including understaffing and interest group

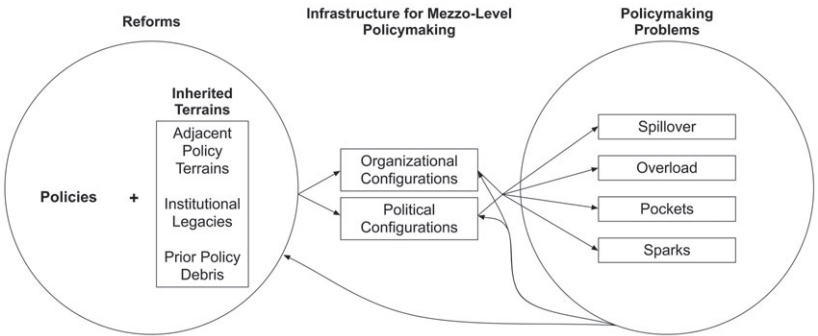


Figure 1.1. How reforms create problems.

conflict) that yielded different classes of problems: spillover, overload, pockets, and sparks.

Put differently, three things happen after legislative reform: the new policy and the inherited terrain collide; mezzo-level leaders make more policy; and the reforms yield new problems.<sup>27</sup> Reforms may solve problems; but because they operate in a populated terrain, they inevitably produce problems, revealing a fundamental dilemma at the heart of reform. Let's consider each component in turn in the context of American public education.

### WHAT ARE REFORM POLICIES?

Public sector reforms seek to significantly and durably transform previously established policies and practices.<sup>28</sup> Like electricity that generates heat and produces light, reforms can open new opportunities. They can arise in specific geographic locations, like the Harlem Children's Zone that strives to provide comprehensive educational opportunities for children living in Harlem. Sometimes they work through federated networks, like Montessori schools or some charter school networks. And some notable examples of reform policies from the past century have emerged through federal-level legislative efforts to transform American public education.

Though states have formal authority over the operation of American public schools, and states delegate considerable policy making to districts, federal-level reform efforts have played a larger role in American public schools since the middle of the twentieth century. Among these has been the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, passed in 1975 and subsequently renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA helped establish the right to a "free and appropriate education" for school-aged children with one (or more) conditions, which now include autism, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, hearing impairment, and other health impairment.<sup>29</sup> In sharp contrast to the highly restrictive approach of institutionalization that had prevailed in the mid-twentieth-century US, the law also specified that districts should meet the needs of students with disabilities in the "least restrictive environment."<sup>30</sup> In the decades that followed the act, previously excluded children gained access to public education, and previously included children received more developmentally and culturally appropriate educational services.<sup>31</sup>

Reforms embedded in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 also ushered in a new era of federal involvement in public education, bringing federal funding to schools through a formula grant linked



to poverty rates.<sup>32</sup> Most of the funding through the act's Title I has gone to state and local education agencies, with the charge to improve student achievement. Between 1994 and 2016, Title I policies relied on the logic of standards-based reforms to promote student achievement.<sup>33</sup> Standards-based reforms embody two ideas. One set centers on perceived problems of students' academic achievement: low achievement overall by international comparisons, and fraught with stark inequalities along socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic lines when compared domestically. The other set centers on more ambitious and equitable teaching as a means of addressing the achievement problems.<sup>34</sup>

Ambitious subject matter instruction is interactive and involves multiple, overlapping components such as deciding what to teach, what materials to use to teach, how to assess students, and how to incorporate learning about students back into instruction to teach more effectively. Some evidence suggests the effectiveness of these components increases when they are aligned among themselves to produce internally consistent guidance for the academic work students and teachers do.<sup>35</sup> From this view, effective instructional support entails making sure teachers have (1) access to quality instructional materials, and (2) sustained opportunities to learn how to use those materials effectively.<sup>36</sup> Though rhetoric vilifying teachers abounds, teachers have tremendous impact on their students' academic achievement, grade completion, and well-being; and most teachers are able to improve their instructional practice when appropriately supported.<sup>37</sup> These two broader ideas about equitable achievement and instructional improvement are foundational to standards-based reforms.

Some states were national leaders in developing standards-based reform policies.<sup>38</sup> Several iterations of federal legislation embodied in Title I built on these states' efforts and deployed various versions of standards-based reform policies. Standards-based reforms pursued the intertwined objectives of redressing inequalities in American public education and improving the quality of instruction students receive. In an effort to achieve these objectives, these reforms established ambitious subject matter content standards and aligned elements of teaching and learning—like instructional materials, professional development, and assessments—to those standards.<sup>39</sup>

During the Obama era, federal education policy focused on a particular version of standards-based reform, embodied in what was called the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Broadly, the Common Core was intended to encourage standards-based reform through alignment or congruence between and among core elements of instruction. This typically means congruence or consistency between content standards, curriculum, instructional materials, professional development, and assessments.

The US has a long history of these core elements not being aligned.<sup>40</sup> Reauthorizations of Title I encouraged states and districts to adopt standards-based reform ideas and policies as a condition for receiving the federal funds.<sup>41</sup>

Reforms come in myriad shapes and sizes, but they share several core features. By aspiring to improve upon the status quo, reforms imply that a status quo exists: reforms are not policies created *de novo*, but follow from previous policies and decisions or lack thereof. By aspiring to improve upon it, reforms indict some aspect of the status quo. Such reforms also strive to yield change across locations and over time. A one-year waiver from a state agency for a particular school's average class size, for instance, may change the status quo, but it does not constitute reform. These features that define reforms—prior policies, indictment of status quo policies, spanning space and time—also mean that reforms, by definition, manifest in existing terrains. Though legislators may craft reforms in silos, administrative policy makers experience reforms in inherited terrains.

#### WHAT POPULATES INHERITED TERRAINS?

Legislative policy makers face terrains occupied by parties, interest groups, constituents, other legislators (or aspiring legislators), and a maze of procedural rules that influence which reform efforts make it into law. Policy makers at the state, county, and district levels not only face these political and procedural components of policy making; they also face additional challenges in that they make policy while “doing” policy.<sup>42</sup> Their policy work intersects with adjacent policy terrains, is constrained by institutional legacies, and has to navigate debris left from prior reforms.

ADJACENT POLICY TERRAINS: PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA'S WEAK AND UNEQUAL SOCIAL SAFETY NET. After federal or state level legislative reforms become law, adjacent policy domains complicate mezzo-level policy making. District policy makers may have jurisdiction over education policy, for instance, but their work intersects with policy domains over which they lack jurisdiction: health, housing, criminal justice, transportation, environment, and immigration, to name only a few. Similarly, the absence of policy making in adjacent domains can create additional work for or demands on district policy makers.

The provision of public education forms a cornerstone of US social policy. In stark contrast to Europe, the United States provided tax-funded schooling much earlier and on a larger scale but did not develop other parts of the safety net European countries developed.<sup>43</sup> By the end of

the nineteenth century, tax-supported and state-authorized elementary schools outside the South enrolled a significant percentage of age-eligible White children. This was followed by expanding high school enrollments in the first half of the twentieth century, and increasing higher education enrollment in the second half. This expansion was tied to schools' social and political purposes. Early leaders of expanded access to public education in the nineteenth century evocatively proclaimed that public education would serve as a balance wheel to right the wrongs that America's society and inequality had inflicted on children.<sup>44</sup>

Embedded in this approach to redressing social, economic, and political inequality through public education were some implicit assumptions about American individualism and social mobility: specifically, that through individual hard work and perseverance, individuals could improve their station in life.<sup>45</sup> Unlike European countries, the US did not invest early or heavily in social insurance policies that provide income support during times of economic hardship. Unlike European countries, the US used public schools as the vehicle to provide other services, like meals and health care, albeit in limited ways and for limited populations. Public schools step in to fill gaps left by other parts of the US social safety net,<sup>46</sup> such as mental health care and nutrition. Though estimates suggest that at least 20 percent of children have mental health needs, less than 4 percent receive mental health services from a "specialized mental health care provider": most children who receive mental health care in the US receive it in schools.<sup>47</sup> Estimates suggest that at least one-fifth of children in the US live in households that are food insecure;<sup>48</sup> public schools' meal service constitutes the largest child nutrition program.<sup>49</sup> American public schools pick up where American social policy leaves off.

Public schools' prominence as a go-to venue for US aspirations and social policy has also been a source of weakness. Without a more robust government-funded social safety net or universal health system in the US, public schools have become core providers for child well-being. To learn, students need schools to do much, much more than teach. And when it comes to footing the bill for teaching, learning, and all the support that goes with it, local districts and states pay most of the costs. Interconnected with assumptions about the possibility of social mobility through individual hard work are governance structures embedded in and celebrating localism, which has persisted in the US for centuries.<sup>50</sup> The federal government pays for, on average, only about 10 to 12 percent of American K-12 public education. Until recently, public education was the largest state-level expenditure in the late twentieth century; now in the twenty-first century it is second only to health care. States and localities,

moreover, retain power over the core decisions in public education: what will be taught, who will teach it, where, and how. States also retain power over core decisions about public health, including the breadth of access to Medicaid public health insurance and the breadth of services Medicaid provides. Public education rests solidly in state and local hands, and mirrors state and local inequalities.

The flip side of this belief in the power of education to effect social mobility manifests in centuries of US policies that restrict access to education. Power resides in decisions and non-decisions, inclusion and exclusion.<sup>51</sup> In European countries, the ruling class prevented the working class from obtaining education, fearing an educated working class would lead to a rebellion that would dismantle the prevailing social order and hierarchy.<sup>52</sup> In the United States, restricted access to education has appeared along racial and ethnic lines as well as along constructions of disability, compounding socioeconomic schisms. Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous children, as well as children with disabilities, have been systematically excluded from American public schools through different policies over the course of public education's two-hundred-year history.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, while it provides a portal to social policy benefits, public education also serves as a portal to punitive state-student interactions. Boarding schools for Indigenous children, which were in operation until the 1970s, provide a stark case in point.<sup>54</sup> Disciplinary practices that begin in school persist throughout children's life-course. Black and Latinx children are disciplined at disproportionately high rates beginning as early as preschool, and school discipline policies and practices are consistently associated with subsequent student dropout rates and incarceration.

Restricting access to education manifests even in the absence of explicitly discriminatory policies. When school buildings closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, for instance, some districts already had electronic devices for all their students, ready for distribution; many others did not.<sup>55</sup> Some districts had ample Wi-Fi access throughout the district; many others did not. Some districts had common learning platforms and common instructional guidance that could be adapted and mobilized quickly; many others did not. Disparities in instructional support permeate US public schools. When schools lack access to core elements of instructional support, including devices and materials, children lack access to education.

These disconnects and fragile foundations are not distributed equally throughout the US. Vast variation in access to health, education, and social services and in the quality of those services appears within and across states and localities: perennial features of state and local control. Massachusetts, for instance, consistently demonstrates higher rates of chil-

dren's access to health, education, and social services—along with higher rates of student educational performance and health outcomes—than its neighbor, Rhode Island.<sup>56</sup> Within states, low-income families and children who live in rural or urban areas are significantly less likely to have close geographic access to primary care or specialty service doctors.<sup>57</sup> More economically advantaged neighborhoods and suburbs are more likely to have accessible place-based services like job training, nutrition support, and childcare.<sup>58</sup> Health and education disparities across race and ethnicity remain profound: individuals who are Black, Latinx, or members of indigenous communities in the United States receive lower quality health care than White individuals, even when they have the same level of health insurance and income.<sup>59</sup> High schools that serve high concentrations of Black and Latinx students are significantly less likely to offer advanced placement courses and other courses known to prepare students for college.<sup>60</sup> Significant percentages of Latinx children lack access to high-quality preschool options.<sup>61</sup> Black and Latinx children are significantly more likely to attend schools where high percentages of teachers lack certification.<sup>62</sup> State and local inequalities define American access to educational, health, and economic opportunities.

Since the American safety net relies on schools to serve as parts of that net, mezzo-level education policy making intersects with a range of different types of policies. Though all states participate in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), children's health benefits and eligibility vary by state and pose different degrees of administrative burden for school district administrators to navigate. Estimates suggest, for instance, that California public schools could receive more reimbursement through Medicaid for health-related services provided to students, including vision and hearing screenings.<sup>63</sup> States vary in terms of their policies that affect immigrant communities, including policies pertaining to eligibility for health and housing services. States vary in terms of the extent of and eligibility for state-supported preschool. These policies not only bear on the children and families public schools serve; they also create coordination challenges for school administrators and district policy makers. The education-specific policy field also contains a maze of policies for mezzo-level policy makers. Some parts of the education policy maze focus specifically on school finance. Others focus on charter schools. Others focus on state attendance requirements, including the number of days students must attend and the immunizations they must receive. Mezzo-level policy making in public education means considering and navigating this complex policy terrain, fraught with budget instability that adds to the complexity.

Policies and practices operate not in isolation, but in combination.<sup>64</sup>

“Nothing has been discovered which acts in entire isolation,” the political philosopher and education reformer John Dewey aptly observed.<sup>65</sup> Reform implicates *policies* rather than a singular policy. This plural—policies—is crucial in two ways. For one, major pieces of legislation like Medicaid or the Every Student Succeeds Act are not singular, unitary policies. Instead, each embodies myriad policies. These various policies incorporated within a piece of legislation can evoke different political, administrative, and technical responses, which may operate cohesively and/or at cross purposes.<sup>66</sup> Also, policies from different domains interact with each other as they move from adoption into implementation. Local school decisions (about closing buildings to in-person instruction because of COVID-19, for example) intersect with public health decisions (about access to infectious disease testing), Food and Drug Administration decisions (about criteria for approving vaccines), Federal Communications Commission decisions (about regulating the telecommunications networks essential for accessible online schooling), and so forth. From the perspective of mezzo-level policy makers at the district, county, and state levels, these myriad policies operate simultaneously; nothing operates entirely in isolation.

Since public schools do much, much more than teach, and since they remain the chief source of building children’s academic knowledge, what does it mean to support instruction—to support teaching and learning academic content?

INSTITUTIONAL LEGACIES: TEACHER PREPARATION INCOMMENSURATE WITH TEACHING TASKS. A second part of the inherited terrain comes from inherited institutions: the durable structures that enable or constrain decisions and behavior. Institutions come in many forms. We offer one form—the development of teacher training in higher education—to illustrate.

Indictments of American public schools and American public-school teachers are as old as American public schools themselves.<sup>67</sup> The disconnect between teachers’ tasks and their skills takes several forms. One form of long-standing disconnect appears between the training teachers receive and the demands they face in their professional practice. Relatively low percentages of teachers report feeling well prepared to do things like implement state or district curriculum and performance standards (36 percent), use student assessment techniques (28 percent), integrate technology into teaching practices (20 percent), and meet the needs of English Learners (20 percent) and students with disabilities (21 percent).<sup>68</sup> Feeling unprepared appears to be common among American public school teachers.<sup>69</sup> And this feeling appears to be more acute for some

learning communities than others. Surveys suggest that thirty-two states experienced shortages of English Learner (EL)–certified teachers. Moreover, teachers reported they felt inadequately trained to support EL students, had difficulties obtaining and using appropriate/quality materials and curriculum, and had insufficient access to evidence-based research for teaching English Learners.<sup>70</sup> Professional training for teachers—the training they receive both before and after they start teaching—has faced steady and stiff criticism for its quality, rigor, and relevance.<sup>71</sup> Some of this criticism comes from school leaders themselves, with only 40 percent of school principals reporting they felt schools of education were doing very well or moderately well at training teachers.<sup>72</sup>

Principals' concerns about the quality of teacher education emerges alongside concerns about principals' abilities to guide and support instruction—a second long-standing disconnect that defines the terrain of teaching. Excellent teachers do not necessarily populate the ranks of school leadership: school administrators may arrive at their leadership posts from a range of pathways including teaching, counseling, and the private sector. This arises in part from an enduring tradition of holding school administration distinct from teaching, similar to how hospital administration is held distinct from the practice of medicine.<sup>73</sup> Hospital administrators, however, do not evaluate the quality of doctors, while school administrators do evaluate the quality of teachers. School leaders' lack of personal experience with excellent teaching has become particularly problematic over the past twenty years as their workloads have expanded to include instructional leadership and teacher evaluation. This poses new workload demands on principals, on top of their other administrative responsibilities, such as building maintenance. Principals are not necessarily well trained for these new demands,<sup>74</sup> and estimates suggest that a significant percentage of school leaders fail to evaluate teachers accurately.<sup>75</sup>

A third long-standing disconnect emerges between educators and the diverse communities they serve. This disconnect manifests, in part, through a lack of descriptive representation: school leaders and teachers do not reflect the race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or immigration experiences of US public school students.<sup>76</sup> Today, over half of all US public school students identify as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, or Pacific Islander. Meanwhile, White women make up the majority of the US public school teaching force, which is 79.3 percent White and 76.5 percent female.<sup>77</sup> The disconnects between educators and school communities goes beyond descriptive representation to include the extent to which teachers know about the history and culture of the students they teach and can teach in culturally relevant ways.<sup>78</sup> Having a teaching



force that better reflects the diversity in this country can yield benefits for all students.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, having teachers and principals who descriptively reflect the minoritized communities they serve is associated with a range of positive student outcomes, including lower discipline rates and dropout/push-out rates.<sup>80</sup> Some communities not only lack representative teachers—they lack teachers overall. Estimates suggest a teacher shortage of over 100,000 teachers annually.<sup>81</sup> These teacher shortages include positions that go unfilled as well as positions that are filled by people who are not certified to teach. These shortages are particularly acute for schools with high concentrations of students from minoritized communities. In our interviews of California school district employees, a majority of superintendents reported teacher shortages as a problem facing the district, with nearly three-quarters of superintendents serving in districts with high concentrations of English Learners reporting teacher shortages.<sup>82</sup> Teacher vacancies in the COVID era appear especially prevalent in schools serving children from low-income families.<sup>83</sup>

Piecemeal policy interventions striving to safeguard social welfare, inadequate educator preparation, and educator pipeline challenges have emerged over the past thirty years.<sup>84</sup> Taken together, these factors have produced a crowded policy making field from the perspective of mezzo-level policy makers.<sup>85</sup>

DEBRIS FROM PRIOR POLICY: WHAT REFORMS LEAVE BEHIND. Reformers have been active in public education since the early days of the republic.<sup>86</sup> Over the past fifty years, education reforms have been undertaken across all levels of government. Some reforms shifted education governance from local school boards to mayors' offices.<sup>87</sup> Other reforms changed school assignment strategies—through magnet schools or lotteries—altering which school buildings students attended or were eligible to attend. Other reforms shifted policy making from the district level to the school level, giving some principals more decision-making flexibility through site-based management. Other reforms changed the size of schools or classrooms, sometimes consolidating small districts into a larger district, sometimes divvying up large schools into smaller schools, sometimes seeking smaller class sizes. Other reforms opened up additional pathways, or narrowed pathways, for teacher certification.

Some reforms endure as ongoing institutions: the formal rules (like local property taxes or processes for teachers' professional education) and ideas (like racism embedded in student tracking) that structure ongoing relationships, incentives, and capacities. Other reforms boil down to discrete debris that persists long after the impetus for reform subsides.

Reforms have, at times, left behind Rube Goldberg-like governance ar-



rangements with multiple, overlapping jurisdictions.<sup>88</sup> They leave behind instructional materials that were developed during one set of reforms but live on into others through instructional practices (like students sitting in rows of separate desks or facing each other in pods) and materials (like textbooks). They leave behind physical manifestations of reforms—walls constructed or removed, technologies like film strip projectors or smart boards that denote their eras of origin, different configurations of accessible recreation space. They leave behind ideas about relationships, about human potential, about social structures, about the purpose and aspirations of American public education.

What the electricity of reforms leaves behind depends on how the reforms are harnessed and what they produce. We can see the debris as rubble—old knob and tube wiring—or as transformed infrastructure—an expansive electrical grid. Whatever is left behind, mezzo-level policy makers have to deal with it.

#### MEZZO-LEVEL POLICY MAKING

This takes us to the middle section of figure 1.1. After policy reforms combine with inherited terrains, agencies at the state, county, and district levels develop policies above and beyond implementing legislation: above and beyond putting a federal-level policy or a state legislative policy into practice. The people in these spaces—mezzo-level policy makers between legislators and frontline workers—have authority to make policy that extends beyond the narrow confines of a particular classroom or particular school. Mezzo-level policy making thus entails both a “who” (state and local actors) and a “what” (policy making between legislation and implementation).<sup>89</sup> The “who” of mezzo-level policy making reflects the central role of subnational policy making in federalist systems like the United States. Mezzo-level policy making occurs beyond the jurisdiction of the central state. The “what” of mezzo-level policy making reflects the important role of policy making between legislation and implementation, crucial across policy domains. Like legislators, policy makers at these intermediate levels—state and district agencies—contend with politics. Like implementers, policy makers at mezzo levels contend with administration. Mezzo-level policy making combines politics and administration.

Our focus on mezzo-level policy making thus extends the prevailing “implementation” answer to the question of ‘what happens after legislative reform.’<sup>90</sup> Certainly, implementation is part of what happens after reform legislation. Frontline practitioners—principals, teachers, social workers, counselors—are responsible for putting legislative and administrative policy into practice. And a host of factors bear on whether or not

policies are implemented, and how, if at all. Because frontline practitioners bring values, judgments, and interpretations to bear on their implementation choices,<sup>91</sup> they make policy while putting policy into practice.<sup>92</sup>

But moving straight from reform legislation to implementation misses a crucial step. Implementers' degree of policy making discretion is fundamentally constrained, which is where our approach departs from implementation. Mezzo-level policy makers—like the assistant superintendent at the beginning of this chapter reflecting on what she aspired to see in high school mathematics classrooms—occupy the policy making spaces between reform legislation—like the California Code—and frontline practice. The “who” at the mezzo level makes more policy (the “what”) in between legislation and implementation. Unlike implementation, mezzo-level policies have broader scale and scope than the policies classroom teachers make when they choose which problems to solve with a class or whom to call on. Yet concerns about implementation certainly loom large in the minds of mezzo-level policy makers.

The organizational resources that mezzo-level policy makers have at their disposal depend, in part, on the collision of reform aspirations—like standards-based, or charter school, or early childhood education reforms—with populated terrains: the adjacent policies, inherited institutions, and debris left over from prior reforms. This collision of reforms and inherited terrains generates the organizational and political configurations that mezzo-level policy makers work with as they develop policy. Together, these organizational and political configurations form the infrastructure for mezzo-level policy making.

Education as a field has seen abundant political conflict. Media headlines spotlight the wars that manifest in social policies like public education.<sup>93</sup> Charter school wars pit libertarians and billionaires against teachers' unions. Testing accountability wars pit for-profit companies against under-resourced communities. In other policy domains, childhood vaccination policies pit anti-vaxxers against public health professionals. Affordable housing policies pit subsidized developers against homeowners. These wars engulf headlines and public attention; these wars matter. In the case of public education, they have become especially salient as the politics of education have become more nationalized and as governance of education has expanded at the state and federal levels.<sup>94</sup> Policy work at the mezzo level, however, carries on despite political wars: daily schedules need to be developed, staff training needs to be scheduled, bills need to be paid, students need to learn. But looking at reform efforts from the perspective of mezzo-level policy makers reveals how the wars may bear on the political configurations they must navigate as they do their work.

Our answer to what happens after reform legislation thus extends the

prevailing “more politics” answer to the “what happens after reform” question. “More politics” answers typically pay particular attention to subsequent interest group politics or legislative politics at the state and federal levels.<sup>95</sup> They help reveal how interest groups engage to embed or retrench reform. When reforms reconfigure interest group terrains, those reforms stand a greater chance of persisting. Social Security, for instance, ushered in a new era of interest group mobilization among older Americans.<sup>96</sup> Another form of politics manifests through diffusion: reforms in one state or locality can spread to another. Yet both the interest group and the diffusion view of politics after reforms typically overlook the non-legislative policy making that occurs in mezzo-level policy spaces, like counties and districts.<sup>97</sup>

Looking at reform through the eyes of mezzo-level policy makers reveals the mechanisms through which politics can embed or retrench reform. Policies create politics, and contexts mediate that process.<sup>98</sup> For mezzo-level policy makers, policy making happens in densely populated terrains. The reforms alone don’t ignite politics of embedding or retrenchment. Rather, they combine with prior institutions, debris left from prior policies, and adjacent policies to configure the policy making terrain. Systematic variation across organizational configurations (such as connections between administrative agencies or administrative silos) and political configurations (such as stakeholder convergence or divergence) creates different classes of problems as new policies collide with inherited terrains.<sup>99</sup> New policies create new problems, and those problems feed back into the policy making process. We turn now to those problems.

## THE PROBLEMS REFORMS CREATE

As superintendents and other mezzo-level policy makers construct policy after reform, they encounter several predictable policy making problems; these are detailed in the right-hand section of figure 1.1.

Even when reforms have agency connections and strong stakeholder support, policy makers can face problems from terrains not covered by policy reforms or from policies not designed to connect with each other. Put differently, when reforms accomplish aspects of their aspirations, they can spill over in unanticipated directions. In doing so, they can exceed the infrastructure that originally helped them operate. As reform ideas extend into areas for which infrastructure was not designed, mezzo-level policy makers can become entangled in problems outside their jurisdiction, engaging procedurally but perhaps struggling to engage substantively or not engaging at all. In this way, reforms behave like electrical devices with inappropriate power sources, like a device requiring a direct current but

having an infrastructure that offers only alternating current. Or think of a device constructed to run on 110 volts (e.g., American hair dryers), but taken to a system that offers only 220 volts (Europe). Reforms that work in one area can spill over into other areas; but to operate effectively, they need a different infrastructure, a transformer of some kind. Problems of reform spillover manifest in the enviable situation of strong organizational and political infrastructures. These infrastructures help the reforms to spread. Yet reform “successes” reveal deficiencies elsewhere or become stretched beyond their infrastructural means. This is the downside of spreading reforms: when reforms move beyond the original scope of infrastructure or in unanticipated ways, those extensions can threaten the whole reform enterprise.

Convergence among political stakeholders is by no means a given; and American public schools are no strangers to profound political disagreements. These disagreements were stitched into the original design of the reforms that created public schools. This contestation or political divergence translates into a second type of problem: when mezzo-level policy makers become overloaded or overwhelmed with the demands that reforms create. Such situations can pile up demands that mezzo-level policy makers must manage, and yet leave lacunae for needed supports. We draw on the metaphor of circuit overload to illustrate the overwhelmed mezzo-level policy making that manifests when organizational infrastructure is relatively robust, but political convergence is weak, yielding wide-ranging demands on the system.

Reform ideas that struggle to go anywhere lead to a third class of problems. On the one hand, boundaries can help harness energy in areas where supportive infrastructure is in place, which can generate meaningful change. On the other, boundaries can isolate reforms, and in ways that may exacerbate privilege. Pockets of policy making, operating off the grid, can appear in small groups, but may be unable to expand beyond those pockets to allow other mezzo-level policy makers to participate in reform. While stakeholder convergence can emerge to support the reforms, the lack of organizational connections can impede the spread of the reforms.

Though reforms may at times appear in pockets, at other times they fizzle fast. “Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose,” laments the old saw frequently applied to public policy. When mezzo-level policy makers lack agency connections and stakeholder convergence, reform can inject so much change that little actually gets accomplished, and policy makers remain in a holding pattern until the coast is clear. We depict this problem of reform metaphorically as a spark, known for their intensity, brev-

ity, and modest impact. Though sparks may seem prevalent, they do not define the entire US public education system, nor public policy in general.

While reform can yield these kinds of spillovers, overloads, pockets, and sparks depending on the organizational and political infrastructure it mobilizes, mezzo-level policy makers are differentially able to manage those problems. By shifting to the mezzo level, we shift the policy making venue to include administrative policy making, which introduces additional complexity (more overlapping policies) beyond that produced by statutory policy making. This means the issue is not just whether the reform endures, expands, or erodes; it is also whether the problems reform produces endure, expand, or erode. Just as policy solutions can embed through increasing returns, so too can the problems reform produces, compounding the policy problems that mezzo-level policy makers face. We find the problems reform produces place disproportionate burden on under-resourced areas. These inequalities are not merely the product of federalism or decentralization; they are the product of how the reform process compounds problems.<sup>100</sup>

What happens after reform is not just more politics. Nor is it merely implementation. Instead, much more policy making emerges at the mezzo level that must contend with problems that feed back into the policy making process. New policies collide with inherited terrains that contain old problems and old policies, generating new problems for mezzo-level policy makers to manage.

## **Our Process of Learning from Reforms**

We have pursued multiple approaches to explore and understand the puzzles we raise and consider in this book. First and foremost, we listened closely to the mezzo-level policy makers who play key roles in determining what instructional support means and entails. Given the structure of American public education, those key policy makers were often district, county, and state agency officials. We also interviewed state, regional, and national reformers who did not have formal policy making responsibilities.<sup>101</sup> Over the course of our research from 2016 to 2020, we conducted over 250 semi-structured interviews, sometimes with multiple people in the room. We devote much of the space in the pages that follow to the perspectives we encountered in these conversations, to allow these policy makers to explain to us and to our readers, in their own voices, the problems reforms create. We have included illustrative portions of those conversations throughout this book: selections that highlight themes raised across the conversations. These narratives typically come from

district-level leaders (superintendents, deputy superintendents, directors of curriculum and instruction, etc.), unless we specify otherwise (county, state, etc.). More detailed discussion of how we analyzed the interviews appears in the appendix.

We focused our conversations on mezzo-level policy makers in two states: California and Tennessee.<sup>102</sup> We chose these states because of their significant differences on two key dimensions. The first is the level of governance centralization within the state. Prior scholarship suggests the potential importance of centralization for organizational configurations. Thus, we selected one state—Tennessee—with a well-developed state department of education that reaches to the regional level with its Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE) office structure.<sup>103</sup> We also selected one state—California—with a fundamentally decentralized governing structure. The second is party identification within the state. Partisanship and polarization figure prominently in American politics and policy; therefore, we selected one state that typically chooses red/Republican leaders (Tennessee) and one that typically chooses blue/Democrat leaders (California), recognizing variation within each state and over time.

Learning from mezzo-level perspectives, we then zoomed up for a 20,000-foot view of perspectives on reform across districts and across states. For this, we relied on several rounds of surveys. Some of our surveys provided us with teachers' perspectives on reforms.<sup>104</sup> Other national-level surveys provided us with the general public's perspective of public schools' policies and practices.<sup>105</sup> We supplemented our surveys with analysis of Twitter data to understand how ideas spread—or do not—between different groups.

The problems reforms create can develop over time. Thus, we also drew on archival material. Some of this material focused on the development of state and city departments of education over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Other material focused on the development of educational standards and instructional support in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Finally, we returned to our mezzo-level policy makers, many of whom generously agreed to one more round of conversations after the COVID-19 pandemic closed school building doors in the spring of 2020. Thus, our research began and ended with voices from the mezzo level—voices and perspectives we strive to elevate throughout this book.

The time period during which we gathered data from mezzo-level policy makers through interviews and surveys—between 2016 and 2020—has shaped our framework in several important ways. We gathered data in an era during which upheaval was front and center in the minds of our respondents: forest fires in California, tornadoes in Tennessee, the

COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Black police brutality, and unprecedented political polarization. Would our framework apply in less turbulent times? Yes, in part because our framework is equipped to reflect variations in turbulence in terms of both the inherited terrain (the left-hand side of figure 1.1) and the political configurations (the middle of figure 1.1). And, yes, in part because turbulence is a human condition. Yet so is human perseverance. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of the smoke they could see out their windows, the anxiety they felt listening for weather alarms, and the devastation events like fires and tornadoes brought on them and on their communities. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of the immediate urgency of attending to social justice in America. They spoke tenderly of children, families, and staff struggling in the COVID era. Yet, missing in our 250-plus conversations was the vitriol so common in the conflict-laden portrayals of American public education that appear in the media or in political speeches. War language and sentiments do not appear in the extended quotes of mezzo-level policy makers that appear in this book because we simply did not hear them.<sup>106</sup> We are aware, however, that mezzo-level policy makers may be facing even more turbulence now than when we interviewed them.

We deploy an electricity metaphor to help illustrate the process of reform and the combined hope, fear, exhaustion, resilience, and resistance we heard from our mezzo-level policy makers in the context of those reforms. The metaphor is, however, an illustration, not an empirical test of a theory. The chapters that follow will lightly draw on the metaphor, but they will neither dive deeply into the chemistry or physics of electricity nor strive to identify electricity everywhere. Like some electricity, we hope our framework will be generative for future scholars and practitioners as they develop more causally oriented empirical tests of how to learn from reforms.

The time period for this study also means standards-based reforms were the chief policy reform in play at the time of our fieldwork. For this reason, we will draw heavily on standards-based reforms nationally and in two states as we illustrate our framework. We see the lessons from standards-based reforms as broadly applicable to other policies and other eras. We draw on historical cases in education to elucidate the framework in other eras. Throughout, we examine connections between education and other components of the American social safety net. In the conclusion, we look more specifically at the implications of this framework for policies involving health, nutrition, income support, and housing.

While our framework has broad relevance, we see two key areas where it may be less applicable. Looking within the US, our framework is less likely to apply to policy domains that operate almost exclusively through



the federal government, such as Social Security, air traffic control, or nuclear defense. Some policy domains lack a mezzo level. Looking outside the US, our framework is less likely to apply to unitary forms of government—Finland, Italy, China, Argentina—and more likely to apply to other federated systems—India, Australia, Brazil, Canada. Mezzo levels are more important policy making spaces in federated forms of government. For unitary systems or for policies operated exclusively through federal governments, “implementation” remains a compelling answer to the “what happens after reform legislation” question.

### **How Reforms Create Problems: Pathways Forward**

The US has saddled its public schools with civic, economic, and social responsibilities while raising the stakes on what it expects students to learn and teachers to teach. These responsibilities have not arisen from a coherent vision or systematic plan at any level of governance. Instead, they have emerged from ongoing reforms and from the absence of reform in other, non-educational sectors, erecting durable institutional legacies and leaving behind debris from prior reform efforts. In chapter 2, we examine these inherited terrains—combining reforms with adjacent policies, institutional legacies, and prior policy debris—and how they have emerged throughout the course of American political, economic, and social development.

What happens after reform? Chapter 3 builds on the inherited terrains from chapter 2 and looks closely at the mezzo-level policy making that follows from reform. In doing so, we illustrate the mechanisms through which reforms create new problems as new policies collide with inherited terrains: problems of spillover, overload, pockets, and sparks. Thirty years of education reform help reveal how and why these problems manifest, and the ways in which they pose enduring challenges for future reforms to manage.

Reform can be cause for celebration: transformations can address parts of public problems. Yet even in auspicious conditions, new policies and practices collide with inherited terrains and can spill over in different directions. We examine these problems in chapter 4. When organizational components are well connected and have stakeholder support for the work, reform ideas can spread. Yet, when spreading reforms require entirely different infrastructures, they can yield policy making that focuses on procedure. We examine reform spillovers nationally through the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and at the state level in California’s approach to standards development and Tennessee’s Response to Intervention policies developed to identify students for special education.



Though reform ideas can spread within and across organizations with strong connections, stakeholder divergence can yield policies that overwhelm mezzo-level policy making.<sup>107</sup> We take up these problems (which are akin to overload) in chapter 5. In addition to providing a national portrait of Race to the Top grants, we look closely at materials development in California and professional development policies in Tennessee. This combination of cases—national, California, Tennessee—suggests that centralization does not “solve” the ongoing reform problem, in part because stakeholder convergence is a matter of politics, not just of organization.

Chapter 6 closely examines problems of isolation that can emerge with pockets of reform that occur off the grid: where weak connections between agencies inhibit the reforms in one area to spread and develop elsewhere. Here, reforms appear in small groups or among isolated individuals. Inequities stitched into previous policy choices manifest both in pockets and in isolation. We examine this nationally through Comprehensive School Reform designs, made possible through the Obey-Porter Act, Tennessee’s CORE offices, and California’s efforts at professional development. While centralization offers some promise to extend reform in this context, it also promises to stoke polarized American perspectives on expanded government.

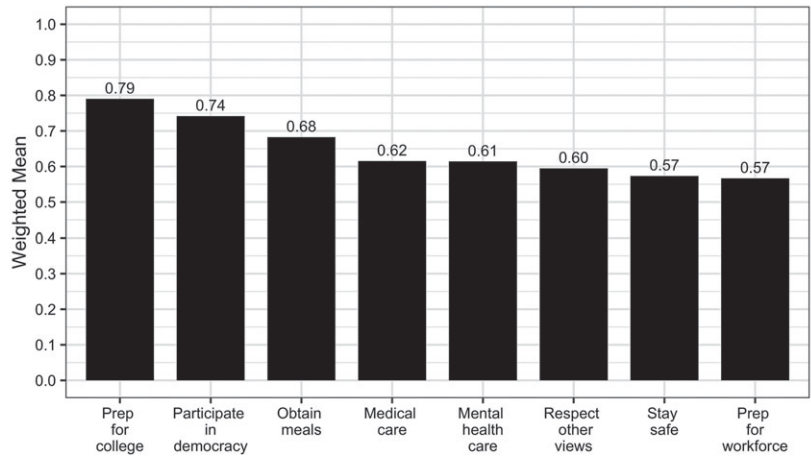
Chapter 7 examines problems of sparks—when so much change happens at once that little gets done—in the context of Tennessee’s educational assessment systems. We also examine sparks through the California Department of Education’s involvement in their System of Support and through federal-level involvement in state assessments. The problems reforms create here underscore the importance of addressing institutional weaknesses outside of public education and highlight the importance of reconsidering the US approach to educational assessment and accountability.

Our conclusion considers three puzzles. First, how might our framework provide an architecture for considering reforms in other policy domains, such as public health? Second, how might our framework provide paths forward in two key domains of school improvement: instructional support and assessments? Third, what would it take to repair the unequal and inequitable infrastructure on which public education builds? Working to repair the foundation outside of schools is essential for teachers to have the opportunity to teach and for students to have the opportunity to learn.

## 2 \* Inherited Terrains: The Political, Economic, and Social Foundations of American Public Schools

For hundreds of years, American public schools have shouldered enormous expectations: to cultivate citizens, to prepare the workforce, to redress societal inequalities, to provide health care, to provide nutritional support, and to do all this in the context of America's porous safety net, contested democracy, and stark inequality.

These expectations manifest in the education clauses of state constitutions, which vary in the ways they link the provision of public education to American governance, economy, and society. California's constitution emphasizes rights and liberties, along with intellectual, scientific, moral, and agricultural improvement: "A general diffusion of knowledge and intelligence being essential to the rights and liberties of the people, the Legislature shall encourage by all suitable means the promotion of intellectual, scientific, moral and agricultural improvement. The Legislature shall provide for a system of common schools. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Indiana emphasizes free government, along with its aspirations for intellectual, scientific, moral, and agricultural improvement: "Knowledge and learning, generally diffused throughout a community, being essential to the preservation of free government; it should be the duty of the General Assembly to encourage, by all suitable means, moral, scientific, intellectual, and agricultural improvement; and provide by law for a general and uniform system of Common Schools, wherein tuition without charge, shall be open to all."<sup>2</sup> Idaho's education clauses link public education with republican (i.e., representative) forms of governance: "The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it shall be the duty of the legislature to establish and maintain a general, uniform, and thorough system of public, free common schools."<sup>3</sup> Other states, like North Dakota, link patriotism and prosperity with public education, open to all children: "A high degree of intelligence, patriotism, integrity and morality on the part of every voter in a government by the people being necessary in order to insure the continuance of that form of government and the prosperity and happiness of the people, the legislative assembly shall make provision for the establishment and maintenance of a system



**Figure 2.1.** Public views of schools’ responsibilities, 2020.

Source: Taubman Center for American Politics and Policy July 2020 survey, conducted by YouGov, 1,000 nationally representative respondents. Responses collected on 7-point scale: 7 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree. These findings may be time-dependent: respondents likely had health and well-being on their minds when given the survey in the spring and summer of 2020.

of public schools which shall be open to all children of the state and free from sectarian control.”<sup>4</sup> State constitution provisions like these codify enormous expectations for public education to weave together political, economic, and social purposes: to be the vehicles for promoting stable government, economic prosperity, and individual moral development.

These enormous expectations manifest not only in statute, but also in contemporary public opinion. When asked in the spring of 2020 about public schools’ responsibilities, majorities of respondents, on average, agreed that *all* of the following were schools’ responsibilities: preparing students for the workforce and college; providing medical care, mental health care, and meals; and teaching students how to participate in democracy and respect others’ views (figure 2.1).<sup>5</sup>

While state constitutions typically task state legislatures with the responsibility of establishing public schools, operational responsibilities for schools typically rest in the hands of district, county, and state agency leaders who make policies in the spaces between legislation and implementation. These enormous expectations can yield enormous problems. From a mezzo-level perspective:

The fundamental problem . . . down to classroom level is initiative overload. . . . You can’t have teachers trying to take on academic improvement, integrate ELD [English Language Development], try to implement

PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports] simultaneously, and include SEL [Social and Emotional Learning] indicators. . . . These are all wonderful things, wonderful things from a policy lens and from a research lens. On a practical level, you're drowning a teaching force, and you're drowning a leading force. . . . You are asking why teachers are leaving or why you cannot recruit people in. You are giving them an impossible job.<sup>6</sup>

This county superintendent offered a daunting portrait of the demands facing public schools even before COVID-19. Leaders, along with teachers, juggle demands that include academic improvement, English Language Development, behavior, and social and emotional well-being. COVID-19 amplified additional, non-academic demands. The lament of having so much to do, on top of everything else, emerged as a frontline anthem during the COVID-19 era.

"Now, we're . . . ordering stickers for where people sit and the Plexiglas and the masks and the face shields, and all of this stuff that isn't about learning, but it is about learning."<sup>7</sup>

How did we get here? How did we get from aspirational state constitutions to a teaching force and a leading force that are drowning? These problems are not new. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, states and localities in the United States took historic and ambitious steps to transform the disparate, patchwork ensemble of locally created schools that emerged in the early years of the American republic into a loosely connected enterprise of mass schooling. As Katznelson and Weir succinctly observed, in the centuries that followed, "schooling for all, in the sense of access to public education, nearly has been achieved in full." Yet the common school glass is also half empty, considering that the ideas underlying common schools "meant more than equal access. It signified a school experience common to all children."<sup>8</sup> And on that score, in the nearly two hundred years that followed the common school reforms, the United States has been engaged in reforming the reform of mass schooling, striving to solve problems inherited and developed from previous reform efforts: along with these sprawling, ambitious expectations have come hundreds of years of efforts to reform schools.<sup>9</sup> Some of these efforts have layered additional expectations on top of old ones—adding social-emotional learning to academic learning, for instance—as the county superintendent noted. Reforming reforms in patchwork rather than systematic fashion has been a long-standing American tradition.<sup>10</sup> In David Cohen's words:

From the very beginning of the country, the first political argument we had in Washington’s presidency was about infrastructure. It was roads, and bridges, and canals; and should the central government have any role. And we’ve been having that argument about fiscal infrastructure [ever since] . . . in the fifties we were still having the argument about roads . . . [similarly] we’ve been patching together solutions to the problem of no educational infrastructure. And I don’t think anybody really understands how old this problem is. And how it’s not going to go away.<sup>11</sup>

It is not going to go away—for education, for banking, for roads and bridges—because each iteration of reform creates problems while solving part of the problem, as reforms collide with inherited terrains.

Saddled with civic, economic, and social responsibilities, US public schools are also expected to raise the stakes on teaching and learning. These responsibilities have not arisen from a coherent vision or systematic plan at any level of governance. Instead, they have emerged from streams of reforms and from the absence of reform in other, non-educational sectors, erecting durable institutional legacies and leaving behind debris from prior reform efforts.<sup>12</sup> These inherited terrains—combining reforms with institutional legacies, prior policy debris, and adjacent policy domains—have emerged throughout the course of American political, economic, and social development.

In this chapter, we consider such elements of the inherited terrain as institutional legacies, debris, and adjacent policies in the context of the democratic, economic, and social purposes of American public schools: the purposes stitched into state constitutions that were quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Before we move (in later chapters) to examining the problems that reforms create, we consider the inherited terrains depicted in the left-hand side of figure 1.1, sketched here as figure 2.2.

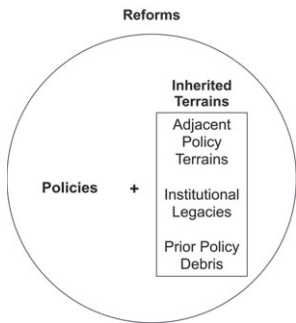


Figure 2.2. Inherited terrains for reforms.

## Legacies of American Democratic Systems

### PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND ASPIRATIONS FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

US proponents of public education have long linked the development and maintenance of American democracy with efforts to educate the American public. Several of the nation's founders argued that voters' knowledge was important to the nation's success, and some proposed to establish schools of one sort or another, particularly universities. But they wrote and spoke about public knowledge and participation relative to the US republic at that time, in which only White men with property could vote. In the early days of the US republic, education appeared important to the functioning of American governance, but it was not portrayed as urgent or inclusive.

More urgent efforts to use schools to promote public knowledge began in Andrew Jackson's era, though the sources of those efforts date at least from Jefferson's presidency. The republic in the early nineteenth century was becoming more of a democracy, as states dropped property qualifications and the franchise was extended to men who were White and twenty-one. Once a broader range of men could vote—including many who were excluded from the franchise in other nations—educators, politicians, and intellectuals argued with more force that popular knowledge was essential to democracy. Looking over their shoulders at changes in politics and the citizenry, elitist politicians and commentators worried that democracy might not survive its citizens.

This concern was not new. Federalists—officials and others—had worried quite seriously about citizens' capacity to govern. Federalists warned against “democratic excess” during and after the Revolution, and again in the late 1790s, when Republican journalists and politicians opposed the Federalist government's efforts to close down free speech and create a larger standing army. Most of the Federalist founders saw government as the responsibility of aristocrats like themselves; education was part of their qualification, but not the only or even the most essential part. John Adams, for example, argued that education would be insufficient to cool the excess passions of common people who were inflamed with democratic sentiments, and that only strong government could do the trick. Education, from this view, might be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for democratic governance.<sup>13</sup>

But the concern grew as the population increased, became more varied and more politically engaged.<sup>14</sup> Political leaders, including Horace Mann, and professional groups, including merchants and artisans, portrayed

schools as the solution to these growing concerns. Schools would protect democracy against the damage citizens would do if left to their own devices; and they would equalize political influence, which was becoming more unequal as economic inequality grew. Schools would protect against tyrants who would prey on popular ignorance to gain unchecked power, demagogues who would use popular gullibility to gain office, and corrupt politicians who would deceive and then fleece uncritical voters. In the words of the chief architect of American public education, Horace Mann, in 1848: “An unenlightened people . . . will permit . . . that their government should injure their interests.”<sup>15</sup>

By cultivating the habits of mind and heart that would make democracy work, schools could save Americans from their greatest enemy, which according to this elitist view was those Americans themselves. Thus, the ostensible democratic purposes of education included knowledge of US history and institutions, judgment to inform reasoned political participation, civil discourse, and majorities’ and minorities’ respect for each other. From this view, public education could impart skills for democratic engagement and democratic enlightenment.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of popular education also gained force with the decline of the Federalist perspective among US leaders. Politicians and judges increasingly came to understand sovereignty as *popular*—that is, residing in the people and not, as was the case in Britain, in the legislature. If sovereignty resided in the people and not in government, and if government depended on the sovereign people for its authority, then the people and their political judgment were supremely important. By the time Horace Mann and his colleagues began to press for common schools in the mid-nineteenth century, these conceptions of popular sovereignty had become well established.<sup>17</sup> That popular sovereignty, however, remained restricted to men who were White well into the twentieth century. If public schools were essential to train citizens for popular sovereignty, why include democratic education for children who—because of their gender, race, or ethnicity—would be excluded from voting? Proponents of educating White girls pointed to the values of “republican motherhood”: these girls could grow up to be the mothers of future voters, and those voters’ training should start at home.<sup>18</sup> Children who were not classified as White received separate forms of schooling or were excluded entirely.<sup>19</sup>

Embedded in this belief in the power of education for republican or democratic governance is an unresolved debate about the state’s purpose in educating for citizen participation. That debate was and remains alive within the line of thought that has urged schools to promote *critical thinking* and intellectual independence along with proper behavior, and, for

most of our history, a pan-Protestant morality—in other words, *uncritical thinking*.<sup>20</sup> This argument within the argument provides one bit of evidence of a deep conflict in democratic nations’ interest in the minds of children, between teaching and learning that promote loyalty to state and society and teaching and learning that promote liberty of thought. The state has a divided interest in children’s minds: for liberty and loyalty.

This divided interest in children’s minds has taken many forms since the late nineteenth century. These ideas persist, sometimes taking form in debates over textbook content and in arguments to promote obedience and order. They appeared central to Cold War–era debates over the development and use of “new math” curricula in public schools in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>21</sup> They also manifest vividly in twenty-first-century American public schools through the kinds of courses that are offered and not offered: schools serving communities of color, communities of English Learners, and low-income communities are significantly less likely to have course options labeled “gifted” at the elementary level and advanced placement/international baccalaureate (AP/IB) or accelerated courses at the secondary level.<sup>22</sup> They also manifest vividly in the rates at which students of color face harsh disciplinary measures—in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions—starting as early as preschool.

American public education, however, is not all about loyalty to the state or obedience to the social order. As Dewey envisioned, public education could offer a path to repair American alienation and exploitation. Though the minority voice, he was not alone in this aspiration. Elements of it, and the pursuit of more critical thinking, simmered for a century and emerged in parts of what came to be called “standards-based reform.” Putting the testing and accountability portions of standards-based reform aside, the instructional ideals embodied in the transformations of standards and instructional materials reflect twenty-first-century efforts at critical thinking. The ideas that came to inform standards-based reform started to emerge in the 1970s, after that decade’s push toward basic skills. Pockets of ideas in the 1980s began to press for “higher-order thinking skills,” not just for the economic elite or White students, but for all students. The press for more ambitious learning swirled together economic justifications (it’s what an information-age economy demands), equity justifications (redressing the tiered systems of American education), and the governance of American democracy. Yet the early twenty-first-century divided interests in students’ minds—for liberty and loyalty—recreated a new version of the problem that Dewey had confronted one hundred years earlier: how to achieve change in systems that were designed for other purposes, where knowledge to accomplish those



purposes was weak, and political appetites for change were skimpy and fleeting at best.

#### THE OPERATION OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AND WHAT IT DOES TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

While schools' potential to cultivate the liberty and loyalty central to democratic systems constitutes one side of the coin—what schools mean for democracy—what the operation of American democracy does to education constitutes the other side. What has the operation of American democracy meant for instructional practice? Thanks to legacies of locally controlled and locally financed schools, chief influences on instruction have included local voters' decisions on school board members, superintendents, local educational issues, and bond issues and taxes. These decisions have not been sophisticated tools with which to guide teaching and learning, but they were among the chief instruments of local political and fiscal control, and any citizen or school official could know them. Familiar issues that dealt with instruction included whether to spend more money to hire more experienced or educated teachers. More educated teachers were likely to be better than less educated teachers, and teachers with some experience were likely to be better than those with no experience. But this was knowledge of teachers, not teaching; it offered only crude guidance about how to manage instruction.

Some late nineteenth-century educators and system managers knew more about instruction than was captured by either governance decisions or teachers' attributes, but as school systems developed through those decades, contemporary evidence suggested that system managers settled on what citizens and school board members could easily discern: expenditures, facilities, teachers' experience and education, and books.<sup>23</sup> These were directly observable and important for taxpayers, voters, and school managers. They became part of a standard list of important educational resources explained and justified as proxy measures of instruction; but they offered no direct evidence of instruction. They did not give voters and managers a systematic grip either on the quality of instruction or on how to improve it.<sup>24</sup>

Proxy ideas of educational quality—including expenditures and the qualities of teachers rather than the quality of teaching—became the stock in trade of local school management and politics, and the focus of much research between World War I and the mid-1960s. One advantage was that each district could claim it had data on the quality of its schools and could use that to manage. Another was that limited knowledge of

instruction fit with the organization of instruction for batch processing; absent systematic knowledge of how instruction worked, teachers had few resources with which to improve on batch processing. Yet, the proxy ideas of educational quality that informed citizens, school board members, and system managers allowed little room and offered no incentives for teachers either to develop collective knowledge and skill or to use that knowledge and skill to guide instruction. US schooling grew as an enterprise that had little systematic knowledge about its own most fundamental operations. That created incentives to attend to much less direct but more available evidence of schools' performance, including expenditures, teachers' qualifications, students' grades, and promotion and graduation rates. The politics of public education emerged around proxy measures of educational quality far removed from instructional practice.

### **Legacies of American Economic Development**

American public education and the American economy have long been intertwined. The time children spend in public schools (including before- and after-school care) contributes to parents' employment opportunities and decisions.<sup>25</sup> Public schools prepare the American workforce.<sup>26</sup> And public schools are important sites of employment: over 6.6 million adults work in public schools in the United States, or about 4.5 percent of the US labor force.<sup>27</sup> Along with this interdependence between public schools and the US economy come politics and policies that bear on the design and operation of public education. Put differently, the inherited terrain in which reforms subsist includes adjacent policy domains, like US employment policy and politics.

### **PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND FAMILY WORK**

For as long as the United States has offered public education, families have relied on those schools to teach and care for their children while they work.<sup>28</sup> In the early days of the American republic, some evidence suggests families sent children as young as two or three years old to rural, one-room schoolhouses to give families time and opportunity to take care of work in and out of the home.<sup>29</sup> But along with demands for in-person schooling to give families opportunities to work without their children have come tensions between families and schools over requirements for students to attend school. Schools in the early nineteenth century adjusted their calendars to suit White families' economic ties to agricultural production. During and after the Industrial Revolution, child labor laws and subsequent compulsory attendance laws emerged to supersede fam-

ily economic interests and to discourage children under the age of sixteen from working in some industries, including manufacturing and mining.<sup>30</sup> The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 set some parameters on youth employment after US Supreme Court decisions struck down efforts to establish federal and some state child labor laws.<sup>31</sup> Since 1938, federal regulations have evolved to specify some terms of youth employment, including when and for how long minors can work in “non-hazardous and non-manufacturing” jobs, requirements for agricultural work, exemptions for work in family-owned businesses, and maximum number of hours minors can work during a school day.<sup>32</sup>

Within these federal parameters, state laws provide more details for both child labor and school attendance. State-level school attendance laws date back to the middle of the nineteenth century, with Massachusetts leading the way with early versions of compulsory attendance.<sup>33</sup> State attendance laws marked significant developments in state-level governing authority over schools, and developed in conjunction with child labor laws.<sup>34</sup> Since the US Constitution does not specify public education as falling within the jurisdiction of the federal government, states have formal authority to determine the scope of students’ educational rights, which vary significantly by state.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, state-level involvement with schooling was minimal, leaving most decisions to local school districts. Early efforts to expand states’ reach into schooling through compulsory attendance laws met with resistance and neglect, and states lacked mechanisms to enforce these efforts. Though the number of days students were required to attend, penalties for failing to attend, and exemptions varied from state to state, the latter half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century saw the development of state enforcement mechanisms.<sup>36</sup> And despite the variation between states in terms of the details of student attendance requirements, states rather than local districts typically determine the terms of student attendance, including the minimum number of days or hours students must attend school.<sup>37</sup>

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS SITES OF EMPLOYMENT

Family interests constitute only one part of the political terrain shaping the design and operation of American public education. Public schools also constitute important sites of employment. District superintendents and other mid-level policy makers figure prominently in shaping schools as sites of employment. While states set some boundaries—the number of school days students must attend, and what counts as “attendance”—districts across the country negotiate a host of crucial details, including

core aspects of teachers' workdays, making district leaders critical mezz-level policy makers in US public education.

District administrators rose in prominence from the late nineteenth century onward, especially in urban areas, as elementary schools expanded enrollment and publicly funded high schools became more prevalent. This emergence coincided with industrialization in parts of the US, along with ideas about efficient management: ideas that made their way into the design and operation of American schools.<sup>38</sup> These ideas positioned administrators as "experts" in the design and operation of these efficient schools. In what have been labeled "factory" versions of schools, teacher unionization began to emerge.<sup>39</sup> To Margaret Haley, an early teachers' union organizer, teacher unionization offered a way to ameliorate the material conditions of teachers' work and an opportunity to participate in school decisions, consistent with democratic ideals.<sup>40</sup> She wrote, "Across the nation teachers are underpaid, insecure in tenure, overworked in jammed classrooms, and denied a voice in policy because of the 'increased tendency toward factoryizing education' making the teacher an automaton, a mere factory hand, whose duty it is to carry out mechanically and unquestioningly the ideas and orders of those clothed with authority of position and who may or may not know the needs of the children or how to administer to them."<sup>41</sup>

While Margaret Haley laid the foundation for unionization at the turn of the century, teacher unionization didn't take off in the US until the 1950s, organizing under the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. The appeal and spread of unionization varied geographically, appearing more prominently in urban areas in the North, the Midwest, and parts of the West than in the South.<sup>42</sup> While teachers' membership in unions has been declining in the twenty-first century, still over half of teachers belong to a union.<sup>43</sup> Though teachers' unions marshal considerable political muscle in some states, they do not exercise state- or district-level influence uniformly.<sup>44</sup>

Despite their heterogeneity across geographies, teachers' unions primarily focus on the main elements Haley raised over a century ago, including compensation, terms of employment, terms of tenure, in-school working conditions, and grievance procedures. While unions have negotiated for teachers' paid professional development days, unions rarely provide direct instructional support for teachers. One part of the California Education Association has begun moving in the direction of helping support teachers' instructional practices, as have some other union affiliates. Yet unions remain largely on the sidelines when it comes to teachers' professional learning.

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND WORKFORCE PREPARATION

By some accounts, the development of American public education has been a chief contributor to American economic development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>45</sup> The creation and expansion of publicly funded elementary schooling in the nineteenth century and the creation and expansion of high schools in the first half of the twentieth century significantly predated the expansion of mass education in Europe.<sup>46</sup> High school enrollments increased in the US in the first four decades of the twentieth century, reaching 80 percent by 1955.<sup>47</sup> The American workforce, more broadly educated than those of other industrial nations, helped fuel US economic expansion. Federal labor law to some extent applies to the terms of school-related training programs, such as work-study and career-exploration programs and the number of hours students can work.<sup>48</sup> Here again, though, the lion's share of policy making linking public schools and the American economy rests in mezzo-level state and district hands, especially in terms of curricula: the content of what students learn.<sup>49</sup> And the politics of public schools press in multiple directions.

American values like individualism and social mobility—the conviction that through individual hard work and perseverance, individuals could improve their station in life—have loomed large in debates over the economic purposes of American public education, with tendrils that extend from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century.<sup>50</sup> Individualism and social mobility appear vividly in class-based advocacy for district and state curriculum choices. Looking back to the nineteenth century, evidence suggests working-class communities both supported the idea of publicly funded schools and sought to influence the scope of curriculum provided in public schools.<sup>51</sup> While advocating for vocational training and, ultimately, for compulsory student attendance, working-class families also resisted efforts to narrow public school curriculum for working-class students to include only vocational education.<sup>52</sup> Working-class political mobilization and influence over public schooling emerged in discrete geographic areas, however, rather than nationally as broad class-based political organization.<sup>53</sup>

The US middle class also used public schools as venues for promoting economic and employment-oriented interests. As the historian William Reese argues, the emergence and expansion of high schools was “a product of middle-class enthusiasm for useful knowledge” and a curriculum that would “educate young people for the world of work and to reinforce middle-class sensibilities.”<sup>54</sup> By “useful knowledge” proponents of high school expansion meant courses of study aimed at training future accoun-

tants, bookkeepers, and teachers.<sup>55</sup> Underlying this “useful knowledge” would be palpable instruction on “specific values about labor, capitalism, the character of American democracy. . . .”<sup>56</sup>

Families were hardly alone in shaping the nineteenth-century terrain of American public education. As early as 1821, professional and commercial interests figured prominently in the political coalition that supported the development of public education. Public schools’ contributions to the US workforce extended beyond the specific skills students learned in the classroom to include cultivating dispositions considered amenable to US capitalism. Reese continued, “the ethos of individual achievement in an expanding market society . . . reflected a widespread faith among reformers in a republican ideology that emphasized that America had a fluid social system, one in which talent was recognized and rewarded at school and in life generally. . . . Courses in political economy and moral science taught the virtues of individual striving and achievement and criticized public aid for the poor and for the casualties of economic expansion.”<sup>57</sup>

Embedded within district designs to educate American children for the workforce came differentiated expectations and curricula for subgroups of children. These appeared along myriad lines, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, and disability. Categorical exclusion of some populations of students prevailed throughout the first half of the twentieth century, as did tracking different populations of students toward different pathways in the American economy. Boarding schools for Indigenous children, run by White administrators and teachers, explicitly trained girls for domestic work and boys for agricultural work.<sup>58</sup> Schools—either *de facto* or *de jure*—for Black students received such low resource allocations that training for high school and college progression was exceedingly difficult throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Students designated as disabled were frequently excluded from schools altogether until the 1970s. Though enrollments expanded in the twentieth century, differential tracks emerged, preparing students for very different kinds of potential employment and higher education opportunities.

Legacies of early twentieth-century White working- and middle-class influence on public school curriculum persist in key ways, including through the prevalence of a general curriculum rather than something more like the extensive apprenticeship model common in some European nations. Legacies of localism persist by having most funding and curricular decisions made by districts and states. Economic-based interests also persist in the political terrain of education policy. Yet the policy vehicles for economic involvement have shifted over time.

In the 1980s, ideas about public schools as sites for preparing the

American workforce evoked the language of “crises,” pointing to perceived declines in American economic competitiveness.<sup>59</sup> Along with the language of crisis came calls for higher expectations of students, more rigorous instruction, and more accountability for schools to produce excellent students. Many state governors put public education on their state agendas, drawing perceived links between educational performance and state economic health. Business leaders, together with state governors, began promoting ideas of standards-based reform as a potential path forward: higher standards, more ambitious learning, and accountability for performance.

Late twentieth-century ties between education and the economy reflected both change and enduring legacies. On the one hand, this movement marked a departure from employers’ interest in basic literacy and numeracy from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the other, it marked the continuation of employer demand for higher skills that emerged as part of the push for expanding high school enrollments at the beginning of the twentieth century. On one hand it marked an ostensible departure from formalized student tracking, with rhetoric espousing high standards for all students; on the other, the accountability provisions that came bundled together with the higher expectations worked to further stigmatize and marginalize communities, schools, and students along racial, ethnic, language, and socioeconomic lines.<sup>60</sup>

Along with ideas about individualism and social mobility that infused the development of public school curricula came public school designs that on one level were more accessible to students from less resourced socioeconomic statuses than in Europe. But on another level, this idea and the policies that embodied it reflected and reproduced social hierarchies, creating very different opportunities for different students.<sup>61</sup> Altogether, institutional legacies intertwining education and the economy, debris left from earlier policy reforms, and adjacent employment-based policies form the inherited terrain in which new reforms are undertaken. This inherited economic terrain also intertwines with inherited social terrains.

### **Legacies of American Social Stratification**

American public schools have long served social purposes.<sup>62</sup> Proponents of non-tuition-based schools in early nineteenth-century towns and cities argued that such schools would “save” children from their social circumstances.<sup>63</sup> These proponents of public education framed schools as a way to inculcate skills, keep children occupied during the day, and promote social order, thereby disparaging both the children’s families and their communities.<sup>64</sup> Subsequent proponents of public education pivoted

toward different arguments, focusing on how schools could redress the inequities that American society created. Key leaders in the mid- and late-nineteenth-century development of American public schools argued that public education could right the wrongs America's increasingly unequal society inflicted on children. "Education," Horace Mann famously asserted, "beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of men, the balance wheel of the social machinery."<sup>65</sup> Ideas about public education as a way to redress economic exploitation and alienation infused John Dewey's advocacy for the expansion and transformation of public education in the early twentieth century. David Cohen aptly summarizes John Dewey's logic:

[Dewey] believed . . . that reformers could solve basic economic and political problems by acting directly on minds, morals, and culture. He argued that, if schools were reorganized as intellectually serious and cooperative communities, students would learn well and equally. Having learned to respect each other, to work together, and to be productive members of a decent small society, students would grow up differently, making a quiet social revolution because of their more generous habits, ideas, and values. Alienation, inequality, and exploitation could be repaired with much education but little dislocation. Schooling counted for Dewey chiefly as a way to repair the great problems of modern life. . . . *School and Society* was not just a sketch of a new approach to curriculum and instruction, but a proposal to change America root and branch.<sup>66</sup>

This juxtaposition of contradictory ideas—schools as devices for promoting the prevailing social order and as devices for redressing inequities in the prevailing social order—infused the next hundred years of public school development. While these ideas differed in how they defined problems of American society, and in their orientation toward children's learning, they shared the view that schools could solve society's "problems"—however defined. To this end, federal, state, and local decisions about what the American social safety net would provide, where it would provide those services, and what it would not provide became intertwined with American public education.

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

As American public schools developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they became key sites for aspects of public health, notably through efforts to control communicable diseases by means of vaccination requirements, to conduct child health screenings, and to pro-



vide nutritional services. Situating these aspects of public health in public schools reflected, in part, the weakness and fragmentation of the US approach to a social safety net.<sup>67</sup>

VACCINATIONS. Disease control paved the way for public schools' public health missions.<sup>68</sup> The first mandatory vaccination policy in the United States for adults appeared in Massachusetts in 1809, coinciding with a smallpox outbreak. In 1827, Boston became the first city in the US to require students entering school to have documented proof that they had been vaccinated for smallpox. In 1855, the state of Massachusetts followed Boston's lead and made school enrollment conditional on students having been vaccinated for smallpox. A number of other states followed Massachusetts's lead in the nineteenth century, including: New York, Connecticut, Indiana, Illinois, Arkansas, Virginia, Wisconsin, California, Iowa, and Pennsylvania. This list expanded in the early twentieth century as the idea of using schools to abet disease control through mass vaccinations spread across states.<sup>69</sup> A second wave of school-related vaccination policies emerged in the 1970s in response to measles outbreaks and in recognition that kids were sharing measles with each other at school.<sup>70</sup> By 1980, all fifty US states had compulsory vaccination laws for students entering public school—though the list of required vaccines varies by state, as does the level of enforcement and exemptions to the policies.<sup>71</sup>

While state laws have increasingly required school-aged children to demonstrate proof of vaccinations to attend public schools, those vaccinations typically occur within medical providers' offices, and the resources to provide those vaccinations come from myriad sources: private insurance, Medicaid,<sup>72</sup> military insurance, the federal Vaccines for Children Program, and state departments of health (which provide opportunities for free or reduced-price vaccines). In a decentralized and fragmented fashion, a patchwork of pathways operates to respond to the vaccination requirements.

Evidence suggests that the combination of vaccination laws plus incentives plus funding for vaccines and accessibility has been effective at reducing disease transmission. States with measles vaccination laws had measles rates that were 40–50 percent lower than states without such laws. CDC estimates suggest childhood vaccinations prevented 732,000 deaths and 322 million cases of childhood disease in the US from 1994 to 2014.<sup>73</sup>

In the case of vaccination policies, American states have used compulsory school attendance laws to abet compulsory vaccinations in pursuit of public health. In doing so, states rely on public health providers—not

public educators—to perform the vaccinations, but they require public schools to be the enforcers of the law. For other aspects of public health, the US has left the provision of public health care to the schools.

**CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.** School-based nurses constitute the backbone of school-based health care provision, and have done so since the late nineteenth century. Around 1890, some urban school districts began employing nurses to screen kids for infectious diseases. Their roles expanded to include routine vision, hearing, and health exams, though the politics of public health restricted the scope of school-based health care to prevent competition with fee-for-service physicians.<sup>74</sup> School-based nurses typically provide episodic care—including illness assessment, first aid, and health education—and medication management. Students' access to school nurses depends on geography. Rates of student access to school nurses ranges from one nurse for every 275 students in Vermont to one nurse for every 4,893 students in Utah.

Like school-based nurses, school-based counselors began emerging in the public school landscape at the end of the nineteenth century. Nationally, about 80 percent of elementary schools and 98 percent of secondary schools have at least one counselor on staff. School psychologists became more common in schools after the inclusion of students with disabilities in public schools in the 1970s; school psychologists typically play a large role in testing students for disabilities. Public schools have become the backbone of children's mental health care in the US, providing 80–85 percent of children's mental health services. Yet, again, students' access to school counselors and mental health care depends on geography. State rates of student access to school counselors range from one counselor for every 200 students in Vermont to one counselor for every 924 students in Arizona. California, home to 1 in 8 American public school students, reports one counselor for every 1,000 students.<sup>75</sup>

Pockets of more intensive public school–public health partnerships formed in the 1980s with the emergence of school-based health centers. This more comprehensive approach first emerged in a few states—New York, Connecticut, Delaware, Oregon, and Michigan—thanks to funding from state-level appropriations. These states located the school-based health centers in areas they designated as significantly under-resourced: typically in schools with Title I designations, which means more than half of the students in the school receive free or reduced-price lunches.<sup>76</sup> In policy diffusion fashion, other states followed suit: Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New Mexico, Rhode Island, Texas, and West Virginia. The number of school-based health centers nationwide has expanded from about 100 in the late 1980s to more

than 2,300 in 2020. These centers provide primary health care services to 6 million public school children in America (or about 12 percent of public school students), and serve kids in 11,000 schools.<sup>77</sup> About half of the school-based health centers serve more than just students enrolled in the school where the center resides, extending services to students from other schools, students' families, school personnel, out-of-school youth, and other community members.<sup>78</sup> There is variation in the health services that the centers provide, but unlike the conventional school nurse arrangement, school-based health centers typically offer primary care, mental health services, and preventive services (which includes immunizations, vision screening, chronic disease management, and screenings for mental health challenges).<sup>79</sup>

**PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND CHILD NUTRITION.** When public schools closed in response to COVID-19, many schools found ways to continue to distribute meals to children and their families. When all other school-related functions seemed to grind to a halt, food service continued. Providing school breakfasts and lunches, however, has been a relatively recent addition to public schools' responsibilities. While some advocates began raising concerns about child nutrition in the early twentieth century, it did not rise to district, state, and federal agendas until the Great Depression.

In the early years of the Great Depression, responses to child hunger remained largely in local hands, with community efforts to find resources to support meals for children during the school day. Advocates' interests in more food for children converged with agricultural economists seeking markets for surplus commodities. These two interests combined to produce state-level programs that relied on agricultural surplus to channel food to public school lunchrooms. This evolved into federal-level assistance, along with requirements: schools that accepted federal assistance for food would provide meals to children at no cost if their families were unable to pay.<sup>80</sup> The subsequent National School Lunch Program of 1946 formalized and institutionalized the relationship between American public schools and American agricultural interests. One of the chief sponsors of the legislation was the southern segregationist Senator Richard B. Russell, who championed the school lunch program as a way to promote and protect agricultural interests. The southern democrats who were crucial to the bill's passage also ensured that the federal role in overseeing the program would be light. In its early decades, the program did little to reach children who were poor or Black.<sup>81</sup> The program transformed, however, at the end of the 1960s, as Congress and the Nixon administration set national standards for children from families below a certain income

level to have a right to school lunch.<sup>82</sup> While the federal government created the right to free and reduced-price school lunches, it does not foot the full bill for school lunches, passing part of the financial obligation on to states and localities. The federal government also passed on policy making responsibilities. For example, the child nutrition division constitutes the largest or most heavily staffed division in California's Department of Education. When COVID-19 hit the scene, nearly 30 million children—over half of all children attending public school—were receiving free or reduced-price lunches during their regular school days.

Hunger looms large in the United States. While the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest US food program overall, school meal programs serve more children and are arguably one of the most popular of the social safety net programs. Surveys suggest over 60 percent of Americans support free school lunches and over half support free school breakfasts.<sup>83</sup> Yet while public schools provide a key part of the social safety net, the complicated history of the school lunch program reveals the complex array of interests at work. The federal school lunch program remains housed in the Department of Agriculture: it began as a program to deal with surplus commodities and its ties to agriculture remain strong. It is not merely a program about student well-being. Efforts to create national standards and establish nutritional requirements for school lunches come laden with normative judgments about what constitutes "healthy" or "appropriate." These determinations have had much to do with promoting particular views of American culture, beneath the veneer of nutritional science.<sup>84</sup> For all their political popularity, school lunch programs remain underfunded, pushing the costs onto states and districts. While ostensibly a "federal" program, children's nutritional safety net depends on state and local policies and economies.

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION

Place is paramount in access to and experience of the American social safety net and American citizenship.<sup>85</sup> American social policy bears on public schools in ways that go far beyond what services schools are tasked to deliver. Social policy bears on public schools for what is *not* delivered, or what is delivered inequitably. Compared with European nations, American social welfare policy has been historically minimal. US provision of cash transfers (such as the former Aid to Families with Dependent Children program) has been modest compared with Europe, and has been declining since the mid-1990s. The amount of cash-based transfers available to families with children also varies by state. Moreover, the provision of place-based services varies not only by state, but also within each state.<sup>86</sup>

This geographic variation means some areas with high rates of poverty and need have fewer available resources to address those needs than do areas with lower rates of poverty. When the US social safety net fails to provide adequate care, public schools are left to fill in the gaps and deal with the consequences. Children's social conditions do not reside outside school doors; they reside within schools and are expressed through the children schools serve.

With respect to schools' contributions to the safety net, the availability of health services, before/after school options, course offerings, and teacher contracts depends on district decisions and district financing. Even for matters with less district discretion—like providing free and reduced-price lunches and services for students with disabilities—districts foot hefty parts of the bill. State-level financing of public education grew in the latter half of the twentieth century: states and local districts each contribute about 45 percent of the funds for public education. Yet vast variation persists across states in the extent to which state-level financing redresses fiscal disparities between districts.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, Parent Teacher Associations have increasingly become funding devices for wealthier parents to channel funds to their children's local schools, fueling and perpetuating within-district fiscal inequities.<sup>88</sup>

In addition, the distribution of unmet needs follows systematic patterns of segregation and discrimination established and embedded during the twentieth century. The interdependence between residential segregation and school segregation has manifested in several ways.<sup>89</sup> In southern states, like North Carolina and Georgia, *de jure* school segregation was used as a tool to force Black families into particular neighborhoods. The historian Karen Benjamin documents how southern city leaders created Black schools in parts of town far away from desirable residential land, forcing children to either travel long distances to the school they were allowed to attend or, as often happened, inducing Black families to move closer to the Black schools. In cases like these, schools were used as tools to create residential segregation.<sup>90</sup>

More often in the North, residential segregation led the way for subsequent school segregation. Notably, effects of housing discrimination arising from the Federal Housing Administration, established in 1934 to provide federal mortgage insurance, still linger. Exceedingly small percentages of the housing stock built by the FHA after World War II were available to home buyers who were Black or Latinx.<sup>91</sup> The Home Owners' Loan Corporation, established in 1933 to help with home refinancing, also overwhelmingly benefited White families, and created the pernicious "security" maps that led to geographic "redlining," preventing families of color from obtaining home financing. Evidence suggests that commu-

nities with greater levels of federal housing investment from the 1930s through the post–World War II era (which comprised mostly White families) remain significantly more racially segregated today than communities with lower levels of federal investment.<sup>92</sup> This segregation bears not only on family wealth accumulation,<sup>93</sup> but also on local communities’ ability to raise funds to support local schooling, which remains heavily dependent on local tax revenue. As Katznelson and Weir aptly observed, “The more segmented and segregated schools become, the more uneven are their finances, their curricula, and the capacities of their teachers and administrators.”<sup>94</sup>

Overall, American public schools are more racially and ethnically segregated in 2021 than they were in 1971.<sup>95</sup> States have pursued myriad ways to reconfigure school finance, from Abbott districts in New Jersey to the creation of Local Control Funding Formulas in California. Even when school finance formulas manage to equalize aspects of between-district or within-district funding, school finance is layered on top of fundamentally unequal neighborhoods and communities: unequal in terms of economic development, housing infrastructure, utilities infrastructure, air quality, access to other parts of the social safety net—the list continues. Public schools constitute a key component of America’s place-based social safety net, tasked with overcoming the failures of the other parts of that net.

The American social safety net matters not only for the services it provides, but also for the ways that it treats people and the messages it conveys to people about their status and stature as American citizens or future citizens.<sup>96</sup> Programs that offer entitlements (like Social Security Disability Income) or offer opportunities for meaningful participation (like Head Start) are associated with feelings of efficacy and political engagement.<sup>97</sup> The American safety net also matters to schools for what is *not* provided: sufficient and equitable housing, health, nutrition, and support. The issue for schools is not just the responsibility of filling in holes in the safety net, but also the responsibility of working with children and families for whom there is insufficient support, regardless of source (education agency, health agency, etc.). While this matters for all parts of the social safety net, it appears especially crucial for public education, given its explicit charge to contribute to American democracy, economy, and society.

## Public Schools and Dewey’s Problem

As David Cohen reminds us, John Dewey’s “program of school-as-social-reform-community-and-source-of-democratic-culture was a modern chil-

dren's crusade": a crusade that aimed to change American society "root and branch."<sup>98</sup>

What does the dependence of the American economy, social safety net, and democratic governance on public education mean for schooling and efforts to reform schooling: efforts to learn from experience and incorporate that learning into policy and practice? Another way to think about this is not what does education do to the economy, social safety net, or democracy, but rather, what do each of these things do to public education? How does their dependence on public education constrain what public education can do, and what reforms to public education can accomplish?

Our question—what happens after reform—reveals a much broader puzzle about reform situated in policy making processes. A fundamental part of this process entails the interconnectedness of policies, both under one legislative umbrella and across policy domains.<sup>99</sup> This interdependence returns us to the fundamental problems facing Dewey in his ambition to remake society by remaking schools.

Contrary to prevailing accounts, Dewey's vision did not fail, Cohen argues, in part because it was never really tried: "children's learning would be central to solving the great modern social problems. His ideas have been tried only in bits and pieces by thoughtful primary-grade teachers in a handful of public schools and a few precious private schools. His proposals were far too radical and, to judge by their usual interpretation, far too difficult to understand ever to have been tried extensively."<sup>100</sup> Dewey did fail, however: he failed to investigate and reveal the problems his vision would encounter and to consider means for managing those problems. Put differently, what would it take to change everything? Cohen continues: "If Dewey committed any intellectual crime, it was . . . not to have followed through on his remarkable proposals, and not to have carefully investigated the problems of achieving change in schools, the problems of using schools as an agent of social change, and the possible strategies for dealing with such problems. . . . The problems with which Dewey dealt are our problems, as are those he ignored."<sup>101</sup> We turn now to those problems.

### 3 \* How Reforms Create Problems: New Policies, Inherited Terrains, and New Problems

How could schools possibly remake society? The reform enterprise—while full of hope and aspirations—creates extraordinary problems in the course of striving to change schools and using schools to create broader societal change.<sup>1</sup> Why is this? Rather than original big bangs, reforms often take shape in the context of inherited terrains: the institutions and policies that came before. For policy makers operating at the nexus of legislation and implementation, reform policies collide with inherited terrains that shape the political and organizational infrastructure for mezzo-level policy making. These collisions and subsequent configurations yield predictable classes of problems that feed back into the policy making process. These problems are not unique to American public schools. Nor are they unique to twentieth- and twenty-first-century American social policy. Yet, examining problems of reform in pursuit of school improvement helps elucidate the general problem of reforming reforms.

That general problem, however, depends very much on context. In this chapter, we elaborate on that context—building on the inherited terrain from chapter 2—and we portray ways in which that inherited terrain combines with reform policies to generate the infrastructure that mezzo-level policy makers have to work with. This isn't a tidy process. Nor is it singular: the politics of twentieth- and twenty-first-century American federalism cast particular hues on reform processes. It is also not haphazard or random. But we can discern core elements of infrastructure that help us understand the kinds of problems reforms create.

To do so, we look closely at organizational and political infrastructures and their heterogeneity. Thanks to American federalism, the general inherited terrain of political, economic, and social purposes of American schools takes different shapes in different mezzo-level settings: in different districts and states. Given this heterogeneity, we then take a close look at the leverage California and Tennessee provide for our analysis. We begin, however, by revisiting the general problem of reforming the reform.



## **Dewey's Problems**

What does it take to reform reforms? As David Cohen argued, reforms rely on aspirations; but aspirations alone are insufficient to effect meaningful change: "Reformers need 'unrealistic' hope . . . but such vision alone can enable them to ignore the difficult work in which hope would be given legs and direction, in which hope could be informed by systematic learning and thus be given the means to sustain itself and improve through the inevitable frustrations and failures. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Dewey was neither unique nor alone in his focus on aspirations and neglect of operations. Giving primacy to aspirations over operations constitutes one chief reason problems of reform feed back into ongoing policy processes. Cohen continued: "Dewey's inattention to such . . . work, like that of many reformers who have followed in his visionary footsteps, is one sad and self-induced reason that we repeatedly learn the same lessons about school improvement over and over again and why so many promising ideas for change 'fail' before ever gaining much headway."<sup>3</sup>

Returning to our guiding metaphor, what would it take for reform electricity to be generative? What would it take to dismantle the pieces of the old that interfered with improvement, and how might they be harnessed to generate new forms of improvement? Put differently, what would it take to build "the intellectual and social infrastructure that is needed for abiding reform"? David Cohen summarized infrastructure this way: "devising strategy and tactics, making plans and building organization, systematically investigating the process and progress of reform and its impact, and thus creating opportunities to learn from experience."<sup>4</sup> From this view, building infrastructures for reform hinges on know-how, organizations, political support, and processes that abet ongoing learning.<sup>5</sup> Organizations loom large in infrastructure for reform: ways for component parts of the policy process to coordinate, collaborate, and learn from prior experiences. This includes the authorities, responsibilities, and relationships between constituent and collaborative units to put ideas into practice. Coordination and collaboration can yield consistent messaging about safe practices to prevent disease transmission, for instance, or ways for teachers to learn from each other that yield coherent instruction for children across classrooms. Infrastructures for reform also depend upon each of those component parts possessing the appropriate expertise to perform their tasks. Even when organizational connections are coherently linked, the quality of the guidance that passes through those connections matters. Knowledge and know-how vary both across and within policy domains: knowledge of how infectious disease spreads, knowledge of the

principles of engineering needed to secure bridges, knowledge of how to monitor water quality for lead, knowledge of how to teach young children how to read.

Stakeholder support, especially in democracies, also looms large. John Dewey, for his part, epically failed to generate stakeholder support for his reform ideas. As David Cohen observed: “How could schools that were an expression of industrial capitalism create an educational regime that would radically change and subvert industrial capitalism? Even if schools could somehow devise and operate the curriculum he proposed, how could it be sustained in a society that had already demonstrated hostility to such things?”<sup>6</sup> Though it is often difficult and unlikely, stakeholder support can emerge. While factions perpetually populate governing landscapes, they can converge or coexist.<sup>7</sup> Stakeholder support for the school lunch program, for instance, wedded agricultural interests with child well-being advocates, and states and localities have, by and large, supported the program and its administration. When pressures for change emerged—moving the program away from a means of managing commodity surpluses and toward children’s nutritional, health, and well-being needs—those changes occurred within the boundaries of the program’s original design.<sup>8</sup> While the school lunch program did not espouse lofty Deweyan ideas about remaking society, it has enjoyed durable political support.

Organizational and political infrastructures for reform are relative: they depend on the tasks reforms aim to achieve.<sup>9</sup> Infrastructures, moreover, are not merely matters of bodies and budgets: having high numbers of staff and financial resources in some absolute sense. Infrastructure depends on how ambitiously policy strives to reform practice, and whether policy and practice mobilize the resources commensurate with those ambitions.<sup>10</sup> Reforms, together with inherited terrains, figure prominently in whether or how infrastructures to support reform take shape.

Organizational and political infrastructures for reform are also ongoing. Reform at a particular point in time is not the end of the story. Rather, it marks the beginning. Policy makers and practitioners navigate complex inherited policy terrains as they develop policies after reforms, bringing to life Dewey’s observation that “Nothing has been discovered that operates entirely in isolation.”<sup>11</sup> Though Dewey highlighted interdependence in his philosophy, he stayed silent on the implications of such interdependence for his ideas about reform. Even when infrastructures for reform manifest in one domain, that domain inevitably and eventually intersects with other domains. Even when reform “works,” it is never enough. The more we learn, the more we realize what we do not know. The more work we accomplish, the better we see what remains to be done.

The classic approach to studying reform asks, what does it take to abet reform? What kinds of infrastructures are necessary? Does the absence of those infrastructures help explain why and when reforms fail to achieve their aspirations?<sup>12</sup> But recognizing Dewey's insight on interdependence—that nothing operates in isolation—invites a different approach to understanding reform: one that assumes their ultimate insufficiency over time and space. Federal or state legislative reform at a particular point in time creates new problems for mezzo-level policy makers as new policies collide with old problems and policies in inherited terrains. Rather than asking “why do reforms fail?” and then striving to prevent those failures, this alternative approach asks “what problems do reforms create?” and offers perspectives on managing those problems from the outset and throughout the life course of reform. This distinction is not merely semantic. Instead, it embeds “opportunities to learn from experience,” to use David Cohen's phrase, in the reform process. We will always be reforming reforms. The question for reform thus becomes “what kinds of problems will reform create?” Understanding the problems that reforms create can provide us with guidance on how to manage those problems.

The perpetual process of reform arises, in part, thanks to the inherited terrain. Recall that we identified core features of reforms: they follow from previous policies, they indict some aspect of status quo arrangements, and they strive to cross space, time or both—to yield change across locations and over time. These features mean that reforms manifest in existing terrains, which we sketch in chapter 2. Though legislators may craft reforms in silos, administrative policy makers experience reforms in inherited terrains, where nothing operates in isolation.

Reforms colliding with existing terrains shape the policy making infrastructures that follow from reforms: what we, and others, call the mezzo level. In US public education, the mezzo level consists of state, county, and district agency policy makers. We focus specifically on unelected mezzo-level policy makers: those who are either appointed or hold positions as civil servants. These mezzo-level policy makers are distinct from legislators and from frontline practitioners such as teachers and other street-level bureaucrats. The infrastructures for reform that arise from the collision of new policies and the inherited terrain are both organizational (connections between administrative agencies) and political (stakeholder convergence). We offer the schema from chapter 1 again here as figure 3.1 to help illustrate the process of reform and these characteristic problems.

Systematic variations in political configurations (stakeholder convergence and divergence) and in organizational configurations (connections and silos) yield different types of problems for policy makers to manage. Our conversations with hundreds of policy makers helped us see how

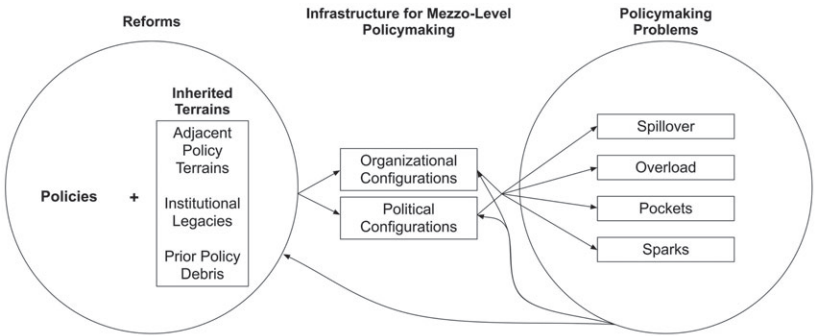


Figure 3.1. How reforms create problems.

Table 3.1. The Problems Reforms Create

	<i>Stakeholder Convergence</i>	<i>Stakeholder Divergence</i>
Organizational Connections	<b>Spillover:</b> strong organizational connections and stakeholder convergence enable reforms to spread; but as reforms extend, mezzo-level policy makers can become entangled in problems outside their jurisdiction and engage procedurally.	<b>Overload:</b> reforms spread within and across organizations with strong connections; stakeholder divergence, however, can yield configurations with multiple, sometimes competing claims on mezzo-level policy making. This divergence can overwhelm mezzo-level policy makers.
Organizational Silos	<b>Pockets:</b> individuals and/or small groups have know-how and political support, but they lack organizational infrastructures for reforms to spread and be taken up by others.	<b>Sparks:</b> mezzo-level policy makers lack agency connections and stakeholder convergence; reforms can inject so much change that little actually gets accomplished.

reforms, like electrical currents, can yield problems when they spill into new jurisdictions, when they overload circuit capacities, when they operate in isolated pockets, and when they surge to yield sparks without meaningful change. We describe those problems in table 3.1.

While reform can yield any of these general problem types depending on the organizational and political infrastructure they encounter, mezzo-level policy makers are differentially positioned to manage those problems at different points in time: appearance in a particular box is neither permanent nor absolute. As we mentioned in chapter 1, reform depends on how the electricity is harnessed and what it encounters along the way. However, just as policy solutions can embed through increasing returns,

so too can the problems reform produces, compounding the policy problems that mezzo-level policy makers face, especially in under-resourced areas.

Returning to figure 3.1, reforms combine with inherited terrains to shape the subsequent organizational and political infrastructures. Though reforms may emanate from the federal government or diffuse nationally, the mezzo level—state, county, and district-level agencies—constitutes the chief policy making venue for American public education. Thanks to American federalism, national or state reforms encounter vastly different terrains, depending on the state and district, yielding organizational and political infrastructures that vary in their suitability to support reform. What happens after reform depends in large part on where—geographically—we look.

We briefly sketch general conditions of heterogeneity across states and districts that contribute to different, predictable classes of problems following from reforms. We then discuss our research strategy, which looks closely at two states—California and Tennessee—and the leverage they provide for our analysis of four types of reform that fall under the broader umbrella of standards-based reforms: education content standards, student assessments, teachers' professional development, and interventions for students with disabilities.

## **Organizational and Political Infrastructure for Policy Making**

Our stylized model of reform depicts reforms combining with inherited terrains to yield organizational and political configurations at the mezzo level that bear on subsequent policies, and ultimately, subsequent problems. In the context of US public education, inherited terrains are hardly singular. The political geography of US federalism yields significant variation across the US in terms of mezzo-level organizational and political configurations. The institutional legacies of American federalism and American racism loom large as sources of ongoing variation mezzo-level policy makers must manage.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE: CONNECTIONS AND SILOS**

Organizational connections and organizational silos contribute to different kinds of reform problems. The operation of American federalism has some responsibility for producing both types of structures. Federalist systems, in which levels of government have different jurisdictions, are both prevalent globally and brimming with potential assets.<sup>13</sup> In principle,

federalist systems offer opportunities for geographic subunits to tailor government services to local needs and preferences. The federalist design of American public education, for instance, allows school districts opportunities to decide which languages to offer students—Chinese, Spanish, French, German, Latin—and at what grade levels. Federalism also provides opportunities to keep the central government in check; constraining the central government constitutes one of the leading justifications for selecting and designing federalist systems of government.<sup>14</sup> Federalism's multi-jurisdictional designs can also be amenable to the spread of reform ideas. Learning from others' experiences constitutes one of the primary means by which reform ideas spread from local jurisdictions to state-level policies, as happened in the case of antismoking policies that started as municipal policies and evolved into state-level policies.<sup>15</sup> Federalism is also amenable to states learning from other states' experiences, as in the case of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), which includes learning from other states' successes and failures.<sup>16</sup>

These same multiple jurisdictions also yield significant variation in the ability of counties, districts, and localities to muster the organizational infrastructure to develop and deliver policy.<sup>17</sup> Herein lies a dilemma: multiple jurisdictions and connections across those jurisdictions create opportunities for reform ideas to spread, and simultaneously render the uptake of those ideas difficult in some geographic spaces. Federalist systems notoriously struggle to abet coherence across relationships and responsibilities—coherence that allows the constituent parts of the governing system to communicate and to operate oversight mechanisms commensurate with their tasks, and to do so equitably.<sup>18</sup> Federalist systems also struggle with scope: scope that enables each governing unit to have influence over the relevant geographic spaces, commensurate with their tasks.<sup>19</sup> And federalist systems struggle with resources: the material wherewithal to accomplish their responsibilities and tasks.<sup>20</sup>

Organizational infrastructure in American public education is neither uniformly siloed nor uniformly connected.<sup>21</sup> Thanks to the operation of American federalism, it varies across more than 90,000 public schools housed in over 13,500 school districts, within fifty states. These component parts—classrooms in schools, in districts, in states—have distinct and overlapping jurisdictions for the elements of teaching and learning, including the content of instruction, instructional materials, methods of assessing teachers and students, and professional development for teachers.<sup>22</sup> Within this sprawling, loosely connected terrain, local, state, and federal education agencies vary in their means of communicating with each other.<sup>23</sup> These agencies also vary in their opportunities for overseeing the work of teaching and learning.<sup>24</sup>

The scope of American public education renders connections across units even more variable. Again, what happens after reform depends on geography. Variation manifests at the district level. A relatively small percentage of US school districts educate most American public school students. School districts also vary widely in the geographic scope of their jurisdiction, ranging from tens to tens of thousands of square miles.<sup>25</sup> Variation also manifests at the state level. Hawaii consists of a single school district; California has more than a thousand. The size and scope of California's education terrain was a common lament among mezzo-level policy makers in the state:

the CDE [California Department of Education] in our state will never be able to do what the Arkansas Department of Education can do in their state, meaning that in Arkansas they have a team of folks at the Department of Ed that will go out across their state and provide professional development. That's part of their mission and structure. Arkansas is a state that if you drive three hours from Little Rock, you could hit every corner of the state. In our state it's not possible. We have to accept that.<sup>26</sup>

Coordination, in these multi-jurisdictional contexts, can be costly; and districts and states are differentially positioned to cover those costs.<sup>27</sup> Districts vary significantly in their per-pupil expenditures, with lots of heterogeneity within states depending on local resources and local opportunities to obtain revenue through property taxes.<sup>28</sup> Above and beyond inequalities, funding for US public education remains low relative to the cost of providing adequate education. Estimates suggest that it would cost California an additional \$25.6 billion—in addition to the \$66.7 billion it already spends—to provide adequate public education, commensurate with the goals specified by the state's board of education.<sup>29</sup> Low levels of funding are especially pronounced in areas of high need. Estimates suggest spending per pupil in high-needs districts in California was between \$5,700 and \$6,200 less than what it would cost to provide students with adequate education services.<sup>30</sup>

Costs of providing an adequate education go beyond paying for teachers, materials, facilities, and support staff. Organizational infrastructure for service delivery also depends on coherence and scope: coordination, communication, oversight across spaces within schools, between schools, between districts, between districts and states, and between states. While some federal, state, and district policies apply across schools, discrete decisions about instructional practice emerge within schools and differ between schools, including decisions about instructional materials, professional learning, and professional communities. Within districts, coordi-

nation between schools can be costly. Barriers between schools within districts can pose impediments to school leaders sharing ideas and resources with each other.<sup>31</sup> These barriers also exist between districts, rendering cross-district coordination difficult. Coordination costs in these complex contexts are distributed unequally and are often disproportionately borne by subunits with more limited resources.

US public education reforms don't interact with a singular inherited terrain. Instead, reforms must be carried out in 13,500 different school district terrains, nested in fifty different states. The organizational configurations that manifest from this collision are vast and varied, as are the political configurations. However, neither connections nor silos are unalloyed goods or bads. They are features of the infrastructure that yield different forms of problems. Connections can allow bad ideas to spread; silos can prevent good ideas from spreading. These are two different sides of the same problematic reform coin. This is, in part, why we don't extol centralization as the cure for all reform problems. The same holds for political infrastructure.

#### VARIATION IN POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: STAKEHOLDER CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

What happens after reform legislation? Interest group politics constitutes one answer to this question. National-level reforms—like Social Security or airline deregulation—are more likely to endure when previous configurations of groups dissipate and new ones that support the reforms assemble and embed.<sup>32</sup> American federalism injects more complexity into post-reform political dynamics, amplifying the importance of state and local political configurations for policy domains including education, Medicaid, nutrition assistance, and subsidized childcare, among others.

In the case of public education, the inherited terrain discussed in chapter 2—the democratic, economic, and social purposes of education—embodies multiple forms of claimants. Governments, employers, families, workers, and social advocates all make claims on US public education. Fragmented American federalism—with its 13,500-plus school districts, most of which grant some governing authority to elected school boards—entails additional venues for claimants.<sup>33</sup> Claimants come in many forms. Yet, during the last half of the twentieth century, teachers' unions have constituted a chief category of claimant. In some geographic spaces, teachers' unions play a prominent role in advocating for teachers' working conditions through federal, state, and local policy making.<sup>34</sup> Their prominence varies significantly by locality, region, and state. In the early twenty-first century, cross-state "reform" organizations emerged as an-



other important source of influence in the education policy terrain.<sup>35</sup> Often with foundation funding, these organizations typically advanced policy agendas advocating standards-based reforms, accountability, and charter schools, sometimes at odds with teachers' unions.<sup>36</sup> With all of these claimants and all of these possible venues, is convergence ever tenable? or even desirable?

Like organizational connections and silos, stakeholder convergence and divergence are neither inherently good nor inherently bad. They are features of the infrastructure that bear on subsequent problems. Consider, for instance, the apparent political convergence we might discern if we looked only at school board operations. Though school boards have formal authority over core aspects of public education, school board elections typically generate little attention to substantive policy issues.<sup>37</sup> Instead, they tend to focus on candidate characteristics or parochial considerations. And turnout rates are typically low, averaging between 8 and 12 percent of the eligible voting population.<sup>38</sup> This can yield an electorate that is not demographically representative of the broader population, and school board members who are typically wealthier than the communities they represent.<sup>39</sup> Nationalization in education offers another vehicle for convergence. Nationalization has entailed, in part, mobilizing funds from foundations and large donors to promote particular reform ideas—like charter schools or test-based accountability—and inserting those funds and reform ideas into targeted (high-impact) school board elections. Convergence may just reflect privileged participation and representation.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, stakeholder divergence does not necessarily embody robust democratic contestation, the stuff of democratic theory. It can mean bitter, entrenched polarization or candidates exacerbating political differences for electoral gain.<sup>41</sup> Short-term political incentives create conditions for policy makers—including mezzo-level policy makers—to make hollow promises with little palpable relation to improvement.<sup>42</sup> State-level governance designs—whether state policy leadership is elected, appointed, or both—also loom large in shaping the political infrastructure for reform.<sup>43</sup> While education policy has had a long history of relatively greater bipartisan convergence than other policy domains, like environmental protection, social policy, or health policy, it can also be fraught with systemic political inequalities.<sup>44</sup> On the whole, evidence suggests participants in school-related decisions weakly reflect the communities that public schools serve.<sup>45</sup>

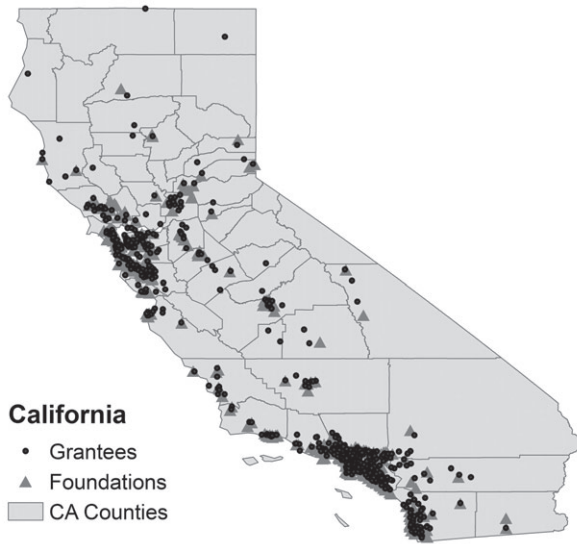
Returning to Cohen's insights on Dewey, infrastructure does not operate in isolation, but depends on the reform and its interaction with the inherited terrain. In subsequent chapters we examine closely how particular reforms combined with inherited terrains to yield organizational

and political configurations, and the subsequent problems those configurations produced. Yet, since what happens after reform depends in large part on where—geographically—one looks, we consider general organizational and political configurations that constitute mezzo-level policy making in two states: California and in Tennessee. We begin by discussing the research strategy that led us to these two states and to several types of reforms; and we discuss the analytic leverage this research strategy provides. We then offer a brief sketch of organizational and political configurations in our two states, which sets the stage for the analysis that follows.

### CASE SELECTION

As we noted in chapter 1, we initially chose California and Tennessee because of their significant differences on two key dimensions: the level of governance centralization, and party identification within the states. Tennessee has a well-developed state department of education that reaches to the regional level with its Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE) office structure. During the past several decades, Tennessee has on average elected red/Republican leaders. California, in contrast, has a fundamentally decentralized governing structure and on average chooses blue/Democratic leaders. These dimensions were important because of our attention to organizational and political configurations. And yet, despite the ways in which Tennessee and California varied at the state level with respect to governance centralization and party identification, our interviews with mezzo-level policy makers in both states revealed much greater variation in organizational and political configurations when it came to individual policies, as well as a common set of problems that reforms created.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: THE CASE OF CALIFORNIA. Organizational and political decentralization define California's educational terrain, which yields significant variation across the state. Political decentralization manifests, in part, through California's traditions of direct democracy, creating ample opportunities for citizen initiatives to emerge on ballots. Notable ballot initiatives include Prop 227, passed in 1998, which required all English Learners to be taught in English. Sixteen years later, Prop 58 removed the English-only requirement and gave districts room to choose how to provide English Learners with language instruction. The notorious Proposition 13, passed in 1978, limited the amount of residential property tax available to support public education. California ranked 46th out of the 50 US states and the District of Columbia in per-pupil expenditures in the 2016–2017 school year.<sup>46</sup>



**Figure 3.2.** Distribution of California private foundations and grant recipients, 2014.

*Source:* Open Center for Nonprofit Research, 2014 geocoded by zip code in ArcGIS. Map produced using ArcGIS. See the Appendix for more source information.

Despite the restrictions on residential property taxes, vast variation exists between school districts in the revenue they can generate through foundation funding. Since many of our interviews in California raised the importance of foundation funding, we examined the geographic distribution of foundation support across California.

We map those results geographically in figure 3.2 and present them in Appendix table A.3.1 by percentage of students who are English Learners and percentage of students who receive free and reduced-priced lunches.<sup>47</sup> Our findings suggest that, at least during the time of our study, foundation investment primarily benefited geographic areas with relatively low rates of child poverty and relatively high household income.<sup>48</sup>

California's vast terrain—the state educates more public-school children than many other countries—means that it is home to multiple and varied economic and political regions. “There are at least 7 different California's within California,” we heard during our interviews. These different California's have different economic conditions—from tech sector, to agriculture, to defense industry, to supply-chain, to entertainment. California is home to extreme privilege and extreme poverty. While California faces aggregate statewide conditions, like environmental challenges from air pollution and concomitant health implications for children and families, those statewide conditions are not experienced similarly across

the state. The same holds for its politics. While teacher union strength defines California as a state, union relationships with school districts vary by district.

Organizational decentralization manifests in several ways. Recall, mezzo-level policy making occupies the space between legislative policy making and implementation. In California, the mezzo level appears in several types of agencies: the California Department of Education (CDE), county offices of education (COE), and local education agencies (i.e., school districts).

Within the CDE, we focused specifically on the units involved with instructional support.<sup>49</sup> Policy makers within the CDE have authority over a range of issues, such as to “compile and disseminate data on districts, schools, staff, and students”; “oversee development of curriculum frameworks, standardized student assessments, instructional materials, and school facilities standards”; and “oversee county offices of education.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, significant state-level administrative policy making authority resides beyond the CDE’s jurisdiction. Responsibilities for teacher certification and credentialing, for instance, reside with the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, another executive branch agency.<sup>51</sup> The legislature created the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence in 2013 to provide high-needs districts with more intensive support.<sup>52</sup>

Policy making also happens at the county level in California, with its 58 county offices of education. Policy making authority at the county level is held by a mix of elected, appointed, and civil service positions. Funding comes from state, county, and foundation sources. Responsibilities across the counties vary, but can include approving district budgets, calling district elections, helping develop curricula, supporting staff development, and monitoring districts’ textbook choices and teachers’ qualifications.<sup>53</sup>

Mezzo-level policy making also appears at the district level in California’s 1,000-plus school districts. Like county offices, policy making authority at the district level contains a mix of elected, appointed, and civil service positions. Funding comes from state, district, and foundation sources, as well as private donations (i.e., parent-teacher groups).

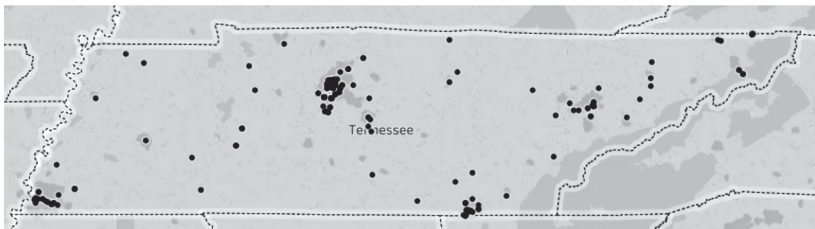
**ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL CONFIGURATIONS: THE CASE OF TENNESSEE.** While local control looms large in Tennessee, it involves fewer dimensions of fragmentation than California. Unlike California’s multiple state-level executive-branch education agencies, Tennessee has one: the Tennessee Department of Education. Tennessee’s legislature has played an active role in education reforms, setting both general and specific policies. The legislature, for instance, approved the state’s participation in the Common Core State Standards Initiative, then

withdrew the state from the Common Core, then legislated specific elements to include in the state’s educational standards. Yet, mezzo-level policy makers in the state agency hold significant policy making authority for key aspects of student assessments, teacher evaluations, teacher professional development, and special education, among others. Mezzo-level policy making extends from the state to Tennessee’s eight CORE offices. Unlike California’s county offices of education, the CORE offices are subsidiaries of the state agency. Like California, mezzo-level policy making in Tennessee appears in the state’s 100-plus school districts through a mix of elected, appointed, and civil service positions.

While Tennessee does not operate on the scale or scope of California, mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about the “four Tennessees” within the state’s borders, and the varied needs and political claims arising from the rural east, Nashville and its suburbs, and Memphis. Like California, Tennessee ranks toward the bottom of all fifty states in terms of per-pupil funding. Unlike California, district financial support from private foundations is much more rare, noted in figure 3.3.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike in California, teachers’ unions in Tennessee play a less prominent role in politics. Compared with other states, Tennessee’s teachers’ unions rank toward the bottom in terms of their resources, their membership levels, their involvement in politics, and their perceived influence.<sup>55</sup> Like California, Tennessee’s politics reflect urban-rural divides.

**EMPIRICAL LEVERAGE FROM OUR CASES.** When we chose California and Tennessee for this project, we expected California to appear in the bottom of our table 3.1 (with organizational silos) and Tennessee to appear in the top (with organizational connections). We wondered, since California trends blue and Tennessee trends red, whether political convergence and divergence would manifest in both states. To our surprise, both states appeared in all four quadrants when we considered the particular reforms and the combined organizational/political configurations. As we



**Figure 3.3.** Distribution of Tennessee private foundations and grant recipients, 2014.

Source: Open Center for Nonprofit Research, 2014 geocoded by zip code in ArcGIS. Map produced using ArcGIS. See the Appendix for more source information.

analyzed our evidence, we learned the problems that accompany reforms do not map neatly onto general rubrics of centralization or partisanship, suggesting that neither centralization nor party politics alone can solve the problems reforms create.

We also started our project expecting to find classes of problems that come hitched to specific reforms: we expected that student assessment reforms would reflect one class of problems, and teachers' professional development reforms would reflect another. Here again, the evidence surprised us. Problems, it turns out, inhere not in the reforms themselves, but in the reforms as they operate in inherited terrains, with particular combinations of organizational and political configurations.

### **What Happens after Reform?**

What happens after reform is much, much more policy making at the mezzo level, as reforms collide with other policies and inherited terrains. Those collisions create new problems.<sup>56</sup> Policy making at the mezzo level can thus create feedback: new policies create new problems for mezzo-level policy makers, and those problems feed back into the mezzo-level policy making and reform process. Reform both solves problems and produces problems: problems that feed back into subsequent policy reforms.

Part of what happens after reform is more politics, which is consistent with prevailing portraits.<sup>57</sup> Yet, these politics operate in less visible state agencies, in county offices, and in districts. Implementation also follows reforms. But implementation is not automation. Administrators draw on their values and belief systems as they make decisions about student disciplinary actions.<sup>58</sup> Teachers draw on their own beliefs about science as they implement science curriculum.<sup>59</sup> Frontline practitioners, like teachers and principals, essentially make policy while "doing" the policy through their professional practice.<sup>60</sup> Yet "implementation" implies that plans have been made and that "implementers" simply carry out those plans. Some reforms come with such specificity; but many others do not. To consider the work of mezzo-level administrators as mere implementation would diminish the scope and importance of their work.

In the analysis that follows, we begin by examining prominent examples of national-level reforms. We then look at aspects of these reforms in our two states, California and Tennessee, to understand the kinds of problems that follow from reforms, given different configurations of organizational and political infrastructures (table 3.2).

As we examined standards development in California and Response to Intervention efforts to support special education in Tennessee, we discerned evidence of spillover: efforts to extend reform electricity into

**Table 3.2. The Problems Reforms Create: National, California, and Tennessee Cases**

	<i>Stakeholder Convergence</i>	<i>Stakeholder Divergence</i>
Organizational Connections	<b>Spillover</b> Federal: NAEP CA: Standards TN: Response to Intervention	<b>Overload</b> Federal: Race to the Top CA: Instructional Materials TN: Professional Development
Organizational Silos	<b>Pockets</b> Federal: Comprehensive School Reform CA: Professional Development TN: CORE	<b>Sparks</b> Federal: Assessments CA: System of Support TN: Assessments

domains that lacked commensurate infrastructure. Reform ideas took off and galloped across geographic spaces with strong organizational connections and stakeholder convergence enabling the flow of reform ideas through organizational components. Both of these reforms reflected aspects of ideas embodied in the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The spread of reform ideas gives cause for celebration. Yet, reforms in one area revealed deficiencies in other areas, sometimes in unanticipated ways: problems emerged from domains *not* covered by the infrastructure to support reform.<sup>61</sup>

As we examined instructional materials reforms in California and professional development reforms in Tennessee, we discerned problems of circuit overload that overwhelmed capabilities; in both cases, circuit overload was linked to national reform efforts reflected in the federal Race to the Top grants. While organizational connections enabled reform ideas to spread, political divergence produced simultaneous layers of policies and lacunae in supports, creating conditions for unsustainable reforms and overwhelmed practitioners. Centralization—like that in Tennessee—does not “solve” these reform problems, in part because stakeholder convergence is a matter of politics, not a matter of organization. Moreover, centralization in one policy domain—like education—doesn’t solve the social safety net problems from other domains, like health, housing, or nutrition.

We found problems of pockets of reforms off the grid facing mezzo-level policy makers in California as they sought to create professional development opportunities for their teachers, and in Tennessee as they sought to provide instructional support through CORE offices. While rapidly spreading ideas lead to one class of problems, reforms that struggle to go anywhere lead to another in the absence of connective tissue across organizations.<sup>62</sup> In such cases, policy reform appears in small groups or

among isolated individuals but is unable to reach the broader collectivity, as was the case with Comprehensive School Reform designs.<sup>63</sup>

We found sparks confronting mezzo-level policy makers as they dealt with California's System of Support, and in Tennessee's approach to student assessments, which we ground in analysis of federal efforts at assessments. Complaints of so much change and so little improvement abound in American public policy: nothing appears to get done.<sup>64</sup> Though such complaints may seem prevalent, they manifest in particular combinations of weak organizational and political infrastructures.<sup>65</sup>

### Reforming the Reform

David Cohen's analysis of Dewey—that Dewey ignored the problem of what it would take to transform both schools and society—remains relevant to this day. Critiques of both the Common Core State Standards and the broader standards-based reform efforts have been mounting.<sup>66</sup> Some critiques target the normative ideas that underlie standards-based reform, celebrate localism, and decry common standards as antithetical to democratic governance.<sup>67</sup> Other critiques focus on implementation, and call for more rather than less centralization to achieve greater implementation fidelity and coherence, especially for curricula.<sup>68</sup> Other critiques focus on the persistence of low and unequal achievement in American public education, and attribute failure to standards-based reform, rather than placing blame on the design of American institutions and centuries of education reforms that created the landscape in which standards-based reforms subsist.

Yet, focusing on the failures of standards-based reform to remake education or remake society overlooks the opportunity to take seriously that Dewey's problems are *our* problems and will remain problems for reform in the future. Reforms create new problems even as they partially address existing problems. We closely examine key aspects of standards-based reform, nationally and in two states, to show how this feedback works: how reform in different configurations of infrastructures yields different kinds of problems, and how those problems feed back into the policy making process. From this view, standards-based reforms are not a failure; instead they provide an opportunity to learn. To learn, we turn to mezzo-level policy makers for lessons.



## 4 \* Problems of Policy Spillover

Sometimes things go well. Despite the inhospitable inherited terrain of American social policy, some reforms manage to marshal the organizational and political wherewithal to generate outcomes congruent with reform aspirations. Smallpox was nearly eradicated in the US in the early twentieth century. Millions of elderly Americans moved out of poverty by the middle of the twentieth century through Social Security. Massachusetts greatly expanded health insurance at the end of the twentieth century. Reforms can work.

Moreover, reforms that work are more likely to spread than those that don't.<sup>1</sup> This is the beauty and power of policy diffusion. Reform policies can spread from US cities and towns to states and to the federal level, as in the case of policies banning smoking in public places, or expanding children's health insurance.<sup>2</sup> Yet, problems can surface, even when all goes well: even when an organizational and political infrastructure for reform emerges that is infused with knowledge of how to enact change. Success with a handful of early childhood vaccinations led to calls for more, leaving public schools to be the enforcers for an ever growing state-mandated vaccination list. As populations and beneficiaries expanded, Social Security's financial durability became uncertain. Recognition as a model for US health insurance expansion thrust Massachusetts and its policy into much more complex technical, organizational, and political terrain. This is the downside of diffusion: moving beyond the original scope of infrastructure can boomerang back and threaten the whole reform enterprise.

As reforms succeed at accomplishing aspects of their aspirations, they can spread in unanticipated directions: covering additional diseases, additional populations, additional geographies. In doing so, they can exceed the infrastructure that originally helped them operate. In this way, we see reforms as electricity with inappropriate power sources, like a device that requires 110 volts being asked to operate in a system built on 220 volts, or a device requiring a direct current but having an infrastructure that offers only alternating current. To operate effectively, those reforms need a different infrastructure: a transformer of some kind. Yet reforms can move in

unanticipated directions for which infrastructures to harness their energy are underdeveloped or nonexistent.

We examine how spillovers from reform unfold in several ways. We begin by looking nationally at fifty years of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This historical analysis provides an opportunity to see how infrastructures for reform *can* be constructed: how organizational and political infrastructures can emerge, with knowledge infusing both. This reform, however, extended into other domains with less well-developed infrastructures for reform.

We then move from the national level to the state level to examine problems of spillover. In California, we examine the development of educational content standards. Like the National Assessment of Educational Progress, California education standards have had a bumpy ride. But during the period in which we conducted our research, standards enjoyed relatively robust organizational connections and stakeholder convergence in California. This happy story, though, produced problems for mezzo-level policy makers. Links between standards and other parts of standards-based reforms helped the current spread into domains for which the infrastructure was much less well-developed. Standards took the blame for weaknesses in other components of standards-based reform.

In Tennessee, we examine Response to Intervention (RTI) policies developed to identify students for special education. Like California standards, RTI enjoyed organizational connections and stakeholder convergence. Yet, as standards-based reforms expanded into special education, crucial elements of know-how remained absent. When mezzo-level policy makers encounter new problems for which they are unprepared, they rely on old routines. The RTI case illustrates how spillover from reforms can abet procedural policy making.

These three represent ostensibly ideal cases, considering the organizational connections and stakeholder support that emerged. Yet even in these enviable cases, problems emerge. We turn now to those problems.

## **The National Assessment of Educational Progress**

### **SETTING THE NATIONAL STAGE FOR REFORM**

Proponents of education reform have long looked to information on academic metrics, in hopes that such information might help cultivate the will and skill for better teaching and learning.<sup>3</sup> Gathering, analyzing, and reporting information—through assessments, audits, and evaluations—represent well-known ways for government to oversee service-provider

practice, operating under the assumption that knowledge production may reveal deficiencies in practice and marshal pressure for change through heightened visibility.<sup>4</sup> This is one way of understanding the creation of the original US Department of Education: to gather and distribute information to “shame” US states into providing publicly funded education through common schools. The US Department of Education was created in 1867 with the charge to collect education statistics that would reveal the “progress of education” in the United States. One of the Department’s sponsors, Congressman James Garfield (R-Ohio), argued, “If it could be published annually from this capital through every school district of the United States that there are states in the Union that have no system of common schools; and if their records could be placed beside the records of such states . . . that have a common school system, the mere statement of the fact would rouse their energies, and compel them for shame to educate their children. It would shame out of their delinquency, all the delinquent states.”<sup>5</sup>

The ideas that animated Garfield’s reform proposal assumed the production of comparative information would create incentives for states that did not provide publicly funded education—notably in the South—to begin to do so. While information has the potential to motivate action, the spirit of the proposed Department of Education focused on information as a source of incentives for change: to “shame” states into educational improvement.

The federal agency’s organizational and political infrastructure to gather information and effectively use that information began inauspiciously. Organizationally, loose connections between schools, districts, and states meant the federal agency was so rudimentary that it lacked even a list of publicly funded schools operating in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The staff of the federal agency consisted of only three clerks to fulfill the agency’s ambitious mandate to gather basic descriptive information on the vastly distributed and disparate US public schools.<sup>6</sup> Despite its modest resources and restricted reach, the mere existence of the federal agency provoked concerns among advocates for strong local control in the US federalist system. The emergence of the Department of Education elicited claims of central government overreach into terrain the Constitution had left to states, which states then largely left to localities. Throughout the United States’ history, including the post-Civil War era in which the federal education agency emerged, debates over intergovernmental jurisdiction were inextricably connected to debates over the preservation of racialized disparities. The Department of Education did not last long as an independent agency. Its Congressional

opponents demoted it to an Office and moved it into the Department of Interior, which was, at the time, run by a staunch opponent of a strong federal government.<sup>7</sup>

The federal government was not alone in its approach to using information-gathering as a tool to direct attention toward versions of student and school outcomes. Some districts in the nineteenth century pursued this approach as well. The historian David Tyack recounts how the superintendent of schools in Portland, Oregon created an examination system in 1874 and published results in the local newspaper revealing that most students had failed to pass their exams. Parents and teachers were furious, and calls for the superintendent's resignation ensued.<sup>8</sup>

The use of information to press for educational reforms re-emerged as part of the federal government's policy strategy in the 1960s. Akin to Garfield's original purpose for a federal education agency, President Kennedy's commissioner of education, Francis Keppel, began to seek information that would support educational performance comparisons across geographic spaces. While the Office of Education had developed procedures to collect information on student enrollment, staffing levels, and other descriptive features, Keppel argued for data collection that would provide information on student performance. Consistent with fractured American federalism, states administered an array of different assessments. There existed no way for students' performance to be compared across states. Keppel observed: "There was an information problem . . . no data existed to supply . . . facts on the quality and condition of what children learned. The nation could find out about school buildings or discover how many years children stayed in school; it had no satisfactory way of assessing whether the time spent in school was effective."<sup>9</sup> Keppel and his associates proposed and developed a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that would regularly assess samples of students over time in core content areas of reading, math, science, and later writing, civics, and arts. NAEP sought ambitious reform, got off to a rocky start, and yet developed aspects of infrastructure over time to abet those reforms.

#### BUILDING THE NAEP'S ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURES FOR REFORM

The NAEP reform idea collided with an inherited terrain deeply wedded to local control. To have any chance of forging stakeholder support, NAEP's sponsors made organizational choices to diminish the appearance and operation of centralized administration. Organizationally, its sponsors housed the original NAEP outside the federal Office of Education and

gave appointed boards, not government bureaucrats, oversight authority. The Education Commission of the States originally administered NAEP, and then transferred operations to the Educational Testing Service in the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> Though Commissioner Keppel had originally sought an assessment design that would allow comparisons between states, a subsequent compromise allowed comparisons between regions, but not states: comparing the Northeast with the Southeast, for instance. Consistent with the institutional legacies of loosely jointed American federalism and the American appetite for limited government, this organizational arrangement did not depend on strong links between the federal government, state governments, and local districts. Instead it worked through nongovernmental intermediary organizations.

The organizational infrastructure developed over time. Over the course of two decades, NAEP's governing structure settled into a distinct governing board (the National Assessment Governing Board) with clear contractual relationships with the assessment provider (ETS), and administration overseen by the government agency (the National Center for Education Statistics).<sup>11</sup> What started as regional comparisons then moved to state-by-state comparisons in the early 1990s: all fifty states opted into a transformed version of NAEP conducive to comparisons across states.<sup>12</sup>

NAEP's design also marked efforts to reform the norm-referenced tests that populated the assessment terrain during much of the twentieth century. By design, norm-referenced tests allowed districts to compare the performance of students from different schools and systems. Norm-referenced tests could not, however, speak to whether students were learning the kind and amount of educational content and skills needed for their academic development or workforce preparation. As Fritz Mosher aptly observed, NAEP's original designers "knew that norm-referenced, standardized tests were developed to sort students. [Their] vision [for NAEP] was an assessment that would support teaching and learning, rather than select and sort students."<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, states and districts used different tests, rendering meaningful comparisons exceedingly difficult. Over time, several types of infrastructure emerged to support this approach to assessment. NAEP's original developers included prominent statisticians and psychometricians who played key roles in building the assessment's architecture.<sup>14</sup> They constituted NAEP's original technical advisory committee and helped create a methodologically robust foundation on which NAEP continued to build. Expertise for the assessment's content—reading, math, and science items—came from a combination of "subject matter experts" and teacher review panels. These review panels intertwined technical know-how with stakeholder convergence by inviting educators and parents to review the

items included on the national assessment. Subsequent evaluations suggested NAEP's review process cultivated agreement across stakeholder groups.<sup>15</sup> The responsibilities for the assessment remained at the national level with the Governing Board, the federal agency, and the contractor; it did not depend on significant organizational infrastructure in state or local education agencies to administer the assessment.<sup>16</sup>

NAEP's design also reflected efforts to build and maintain stakeholder convergence. Animosity toward federal-level involvement in US public education has been both prominent and palpable throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. NAEP has not been immune to such hostility. Commissioner Keppel's proposal to create a national assessment drew stiff opposition from some organizations representing state and district school administrators, some of whom instructed their members to refuse to participate in any national assessment, even if the federal government did not design or administer it.<sup>17</sup> NAEP's sponsors sought to manage stakeholder opposition through several of NAEP's original design elements. This included the decisions to house NAEP's governing structure outside the federal government and to design NAEP to compare regions but not states. Stakeholder opposition to NAEP softened, to the point that states signed on to allow state-by-state comparisons roughly twenty years after NAEP began. A group of large urban school districts also volunteered to enable comparisons between cities. Stakeholder support has helped buffer NAEP from efforts to inject more political control over its processes or to use the NAEP platform as the mechanism for high-stakes state-level accountability tests.<sup>18</sup>

Reform, however, entails an ongoing process of revision, of dismantling old components and building new ones, as evidence and experience emerge and accumulate. As knowledge around item validity and reliability continued to advance over the course of NAEP's administration, problems with some of NAEP's original measures in math and science became clear. While NAEP's administrators could replace and update those items, doing so had downstream consequences for the assessment's ability to reveal trends over time. Improving item measurement meant disrupting the trend line, which meant altering the assessment's ability to perform its function of reporting educational progress over time.<sup>19</sup> Reforming the reform had reverberating consequences for the assessment, and implications that extended beyond NAEP.

#### PROBLEMS OF SUCCESS AS REFORM SPREADS

Continuous adjustments to NAEP's design and redesign helped secure NAEP's reputation as the "gold standard" educational assessment in the

US. That gold standard, however, spilled over into interconnected terrain, where identifying the “gold” revealed shortcomings in other domains over which NAEP did not have jurisdiction: notably, in states’ and districts’ standards and assessments.

NAEP’s overarching purpose to provide information on the condition and progress of education in the United States, like the original 1867 Department of Education, entwined with other aspects of schooling beyond assessment. Garfield’s 1867 proposal assumed greater access to schooling would follow after the release of descriptive information comparing states that did and did not have common schools. For NAEP, depicting educational progress—or lack thereof—generated a signal or measure of educational progress in the aggregate. The assessment was not equipped, however, to identify the factors that contributed to educational or instructional improvement. Along with reforms to the reform—reforms that helped build a better national assessment—came evidence on the limits of assessment as a policy tool for producing improvement. Reforming the reform helped manage some problems and revealed other problems in areas beyond the reach of the reform’s original infrastructure.

For NAEP, problems emerged around how to interpret the results: data do not speak for themselves. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, NAEP reported scores for each item.<sup>20</sup> This begged the question, though: what do item-by-item scores mean? NAEP shifted to reporting numeric scores, but what did a numeric score from 0 to 500 across a subject area mean, and what did an increase or decrease signify?<sup>21</sup> As an alternative, the National Assessment Governing Board launched a process for determining “cut-scores,” which designated different levels of performance: advanced, proficient, and basic.<sup>22</sup> While this may have provided a more readily accessible label for interpretation, it connected NAEP, at least implicitly, to some of the guiding ideas in standards-based reform: to have achievement levels and measure progress toward those levels.<sup>23</sup>

Reforms to NAEP also helped expose weaknesses in the design and delivery of US public education’s instructional practices, for which NAEP provided more puzzles than answers. NAEP’s design was amenable to identifying trends over time, but not to specifying the causes for those trends nor what kinds of interventions might change the trends. When NAEP data revealed low educational performance in Tennessee relative to other states, for instance, reformers barreled ahead with a range of interventions aimed at instructional and educational change. NAEP, however, was not equipped to specify which of those interventions might be best suited to produce improvement.<sup>24</sup>

Information on schools and on educational progress was, in a sense, the face that launched a thousand ships.<sup>25</sup> It formed the foundation of

the original federal role in education. NAEP, one hundred years later, came to enjoy a reputation as a gold standard assessment, able to produce valid and reliable results while shielding the assessment from American hyper-partisanship and polarization. Yet, NAEP also helped convey the limits of information alone: so much more is necessary above and beyond information on educational progress. Mounting evidence makes clear that information alone does not equip practitioners or policy makers to make impactful changes in policy and practice. But US policy makers repeatedly produce policy built on the assumption that information about academic outcomes will help propel improvement. Moreover, the US has a long history of using information as an incentive or accountability device, rather than using it to build capacity.<sup>26</sup> Reforming the reform—reforming NAEP—helped reveal a host of interconnected policy problems for policy makers to manage and address.

As the “gold standard” educational assessment in twentieth-century American public education, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reflects psychometric and statistical expertise. It also became the reference point for other kinds of assessments, in both its methods and its substantive approach. NAEP differed markedly from norm-referenced 1960s and 1970s assessments by using subject-matter content to form the foundation of the assessment. In doing so, NAEP implicitly paved the way for demonstrating how assessments could reflect implicit content standards. NAEP was not part of the explicit, federal-level standards-based reform policies, like Goals 2000 or reauthorizations of Title I, that produced No Child Left Behind. Yet, with its content-oriented assessment approach, combined with reporting scores by label (advanced, proficient, basic, etc.), it reflected ideas contained in standards-based reforms. NAEP’s approach also stood in contrast to state level policies in the 1970s and 1980s that focused on minimum competencies expected for graduation, rather than on higher standards or expectations. NAEP became a reference point against which states’ policies and decisions were measured.<sup>27</sup>

NAEP created a model for considering what content a national assessment should address. These were not easy decisions, nor was the process free from dispute and political complications. But in making the pivot from norm-referenced assessment to content-oriented assessment, NAEP paved the way for much broader conversations at state and district levels: what should students learn? States—and mezzo-level policy makers within states in particular—began to take up this conversation and this thread of policy making by developing subject-matter content standards. One of the national leaders in state-level standard-setting was California.



## **California's Content Standards**

California is no stranger to academic content standards. The state's curriculum frameworks, which are foundational to defining the content students are expected to learn, date back to the 1960s. Over the course of sixty years, the organizational and stakeholder infrastructure for each round of California frameworks did not so much spontaneously emerge as splutter along in fits and starts.<sup>28</sup> Reforming the reform of California subject matter standards has not enjoyed smooth sailing or a tidy, linear progression of knowledge accumulation and policy making that reflects that accumulation.<sup>29</sup> Yet, looking at the period between 2015 and 2021, California's standards embodied notable organizational connections and stakeholder convergence. Rather than signaling failure, policy zigzag offers a window into reform and the problems reforms create.<sup>30</sup>

Aspects of California render it decidedly inauspicious for the development of statewide academic content standards. As we noted in chapter 3, California's form of educational governance is fundamentally decentralized, and covers vast geographic terrain with more than 1,000 school districts and 6 million students. The legislature's financial and human capital investments in its primary state-level government agency over the past twenty years have been skimpy, at best. Its political terrain is notorious for epic ideological battles between parties and regions, along with strong union politics. And yet California managed, for a time, to build aspects of organizational and political infrastructure to overcome these obstacles to content standards and frameworks.

California's perseverance with standards and curricular frameworks, however, also reveals their vulnerability: their links with other components of instruction made them the go-to lever for other policies aimed at improving teaching and learning, like instructional materials, professional development, and assessments. Reforming content standards linked them with other policies. Those links helped reform spill over into areas with less well-developed infrastructure: policy makers used standards to advance purposes well beyond subject matter content, ensnaring standards in other policies' failures.

### **THE INHERITED TERRAIN FROM REFORMING THE REFORM OF CALIFORNIA CONTENT STANDARDS**

The development of subject matter standards in California represents, in some ways, a remarkable accomplishment. The standards are remarkable because they have endured in some form: versions of standards have been

around since the 1960s in the form of frameworks.<sup>31</sup> More sustained attention to developing standards began in the 1980s during Bill Honig's tenure as California's superintendent of public instruction, though they came more fully to fruition after his tenure.<sup>32</sup> Broadly, educational standards have endured as a legitimate component of California policy making for decades.<sup>33</sup>

Standards are also remarkable because they have weathered substantive revisions. The reforms have been reformed. No stranger to controversy, standards' specific content has changed, sometime reflecting evidence, sometimes reflecting political power, sometimes reflecting ephemeral fads. But those controversies have not immolated the underlying policy idea.<sup>34</sup> Instead, the underlying idea of standards or curriculum frameworks has transformed to reflect different views of student learning.<sup>35</sup> California's mathematics frameworks in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, contained elements of "the new math": a push for a more conceptual approach to mathematics, grounded in the discipline of mathematics, propelled by the Soviet launch of Sputnik and the ensuing political angst that the US was falling behind the Soviets in math and science.<sup>36</sup> Like much of the country, California's frameworks pivoted away from "new math" to focus on basic skills and minimum competencies in the 1980s.<sup>37</sup> Embedded in the attention to "basics" was a sequential view of human learning: that humans first learn rudimentary skills, and then more advanced skills.<sup>38</sup> Also embedded in the basic skills approach, though, was a view of social hierarchy: that only *some* children were able to learn advanced skills, that only *some* children should receive engaging instructional content. These ideas about social hierarchy typically follow racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines.

While support for the idea of having state standards (i.e., curriculum frameworks) persisted, ideas about what those standards should entail shifted in the mid-1980s. California began to pursue a much more ambitious approach, aimed at creating opportunities for *all* children to have access to more challenging, more conceptual academic content.<sup>39</sup> This approach, which later went by the name "standards-based reform" or "systemic reform," was not unique to California, but was part of a "swelling stream of thought and action," in Cohen and Hill's terms.<sup>40</sup> The 1985 California Mathematics Framework, for instance, focused more explicitly on students' conceptual understanding of mathematics, on the discipline of mathematics, and on cooperative learning in the classroom.<sup>41</sup> California adopted new frameworks for ELA in 1988, foreign language in 1989, and science in 1990.<sup>42</sup> The 1992 California math framework went further than the 1985 framework in promoting a conceptual approach to teaching and learning mathematics, and it focused more explicitly on equity.<sup>43</sup>

California's curriculum frameworks are also remarkable because they have reflected state-level organizational infrastructure in a state notorious for organizational fragmentation and weakness in other aspects of education policy. Jurisdiction for education content standards resides in the hands of the California State Board of Education,<sup>44</sup> supported by the Instructional Quality Commission<sup>45</sup> and, to some extent, the California Department of Education.<sup>46</sup> State standards and frameworks represented one of the main ways in which organizational infrastructure for standards-based reform developed in California.<sup>47</sup> But having relatively more infrastructure than in a previous time period is not identical to having sufficient infrastructure relative to the task at hand; nor are capabilities and infrastructures cast in amber.

California's curriculum frameworks are also remarkable because they have navigated and survived California's epic political battles.<sup>48</sup> Though national- and state-level support for ambitious standards began to gather steam in the late 1980s, fiscal austerity shrank the California budget pie, rendering state- and district-level stakeholder convergence more challenging.<sup>49</sup> Legendary conflict arose between Governor Wilson and State Superintendent Honig over the direction of state policy, which carried over into standards. Groups mobilized for and against specific parts of the content standards, in specific content areas. Through it all, the Instructional Quality Commission and State Board of Education navigated the political terrain, allowing regularly scheduled curriculum frameworks to emerge that provided broad guidance to the state on subject-matter learning objectives for each grade. Over time, California moved from allowing its 1,000-plus districts to have the flexibility to determine whether or not to have content standards, and if so, what those standards were, to having statewide content standards by subject and by grade.<sup>50</sup>

By the time California adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010,<sup>51</sup> the state had had decades of experience with prior standards.<sup>52</sup> Responsibility for establishing standards resided at the state level,<sup>53</sup> including the Instructional Quality Commission and its mechanisms for translating standards into curricular frameworks.<sup>54</sup> California state-level policy makers also had decades of experience navigating the difficult political terrain of standards-based reforms. Adopting the Common Core offered the state a way to update state standards, along with some political protection against rekindling fights that had emerged from California's previous standards adoptions, especially in mathematics.<sup>55</sup> Experience from challenges facing previous standards adoption processes appeared to contribute to the adoption of the Common Core in California. Experiences navigating political conflict also appeared to inform state-level policy making that coupled the adoption of the Common Core State Standards

with new fiscal policies shifting important funding allocation decisions from the state level to localities.<sup>56</sup>

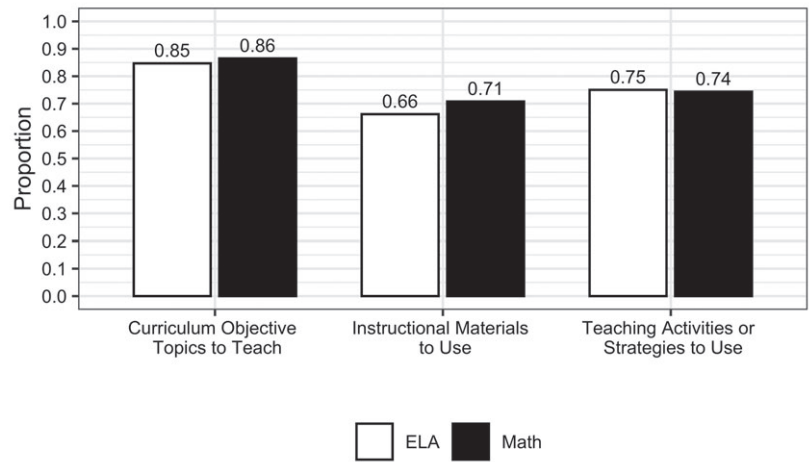
#### MEZZO-LEVEL ORGANIZATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND STAKEHOLDER CONVERGENCE

Though California adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010—instead of developing its own standards—it nonetheless continued to use its established process of developing curriculum frameworks to help districts and teachers put those standards into practice, relying heavily on the Instructional Quality Commission, as it had for previous versions of state standards.<sup>57</sup> While California’s State Board of Education ultimately determines what the state’s curriculum frameworks should entail, the Instructional Quality Commission advises the board on frameworks, as well as on the quality of instructional materials to support the standards and frameworks.<sup>58</sup> Even though the Instructional Quality Commission’s guidance is non-binding—the California State Board of Education ultimately decides on the subject matter frameworks—the approved frameworks provide statewide guidance,<sup>59</sup> and the Commission offers a vehicle for reconciling potential stakeholder divergence. Its stakeholder-focused processes have generated sustained support among mezzo-level policy makers, despite political opposition to particular decisions. Over time, California’s frameworks have generated significant and stable appreciation from mezzo-level policy makers and from teachers. From a mezzo-level perspective, one of our interviewees told us,

I’ve certainly come to have a great deal of respect for all of their work around the frameworks . . . they use teachers, to an amazing extent, in all their curriculum committees, and their framework-adoption committees.<sup>60</sup>

The Common Core version of standards, like previous versions of California standards and framework documents, reached from state policy into classroom practice.<sup>61</sup> Our survey results from 2018 found that a majority of California teachers used California standards documents for a range of decisions, including choices about curriculum objectives, instructional materials, and teaching activities (figure 4.1).<sup>62</sup>

Stakeholder convergence supported the durability of the Common Core’s version of standards in California.<sup>63</sup> For the period between 2005 and 2020, convergence persisted at the state and district levels for the idea of standards in general, and California’s approach to standards in particular.<sup>64</sup> Though the national political climate toward standards was fraught with political cleavages during the Obama and Trump administrations,



**Figure 4.1.** Perceptions of standards use, 2018.

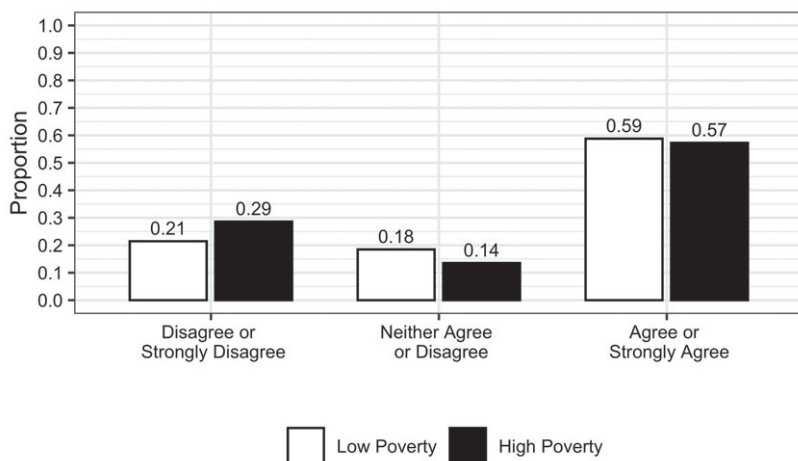
Source: RAND Corporation America’s Teacher Panel, March 2018. Survey conducted for *Getting Down to Facts II*. Sample drawn from California. Question asked: “This current school year (2017–18), I used my state’s standards document in deciding about what . . .” Figure reports weighted sample. ELA N = 137, Math N = 135.

California largely kept those cleavages at bay.<sup>65</sup> Our 2018 survey of California teachers found that majorities felt like California’s grade-level content standards were appropriate for their students (figure 4.2). They also felt like the curricular frameworks, overseen by the Instructional Quality Commission and approved by the California state board, helped them teach.

District superintendents similarly conveyed the usefulness of California’s subject matter standards and recounted ways in which “standards play a key role” in their decision-making, in part through the ways “they have refocused us.”<sup>66</sup> Stakeholder support also emerged at the state level.<sup>67</sup> During the Obama presidency and into the Trump administration, California’s primary educational agencies—the State Board of Education, the California Department of Education, and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing—worked collaboratively.<sup>68</sup> As one superintendent put it,

Right now, our state—we’re going down the same path together . . . the governor, the state board, the department of education and even CTA as a partner in all of this, we’re all on the same page about what needs to happen within our education system.<sup>69</sup>

The convergence of stakeholder support at the state level stood in marked contrast to the sharp divides that characterized California education gov-



**Figure 4.2.** Perceptions of standards appropriateness, 2018.

Source: RAND Corporation America's Teacher Panel, March 2018. Survey conducted for *Getting Down to Facts II*. Sample drawn from California. Question asked: "CA grade-level standards are appropriate for the needs of students in my class." Responses on 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. High and Low Poverty N = 147.

ernance in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>70</sup> Governor Brown's decision *not* to fill the position of secretary of education received praise as helping contribute to that convergence.<sup>71</sup> From a mezzo perspective:

I've seen the board get stronger, and be more policy-driven in the past, particularly with this administration, with Mike [Kirst] as the chair. They've been very policy oriented. They've been really concerned about trying to implement in a way that makes a lotta sense and is responsible and is constructive. I think that's been a positive development, and in terms of the board, and of the quality of their work, and their commitment to their work has been, I think, outstanding. They've been really focused on trying to make the system work effectively for districts, and—I think because the governor gives them full reign to do that, I think that really helps. He doesn't really interfere in that process at all, so that's been a positive development over time. That speaks not to just the strength of the governor, and his commitment, but the quality of members that they've been able to find to serve on the board, as well.<sup>72</sup>

Governor Jerry Brown, together with State Board president Mike Kirst, also managed to garner support from the California Teachers Association, a political powerhouse in California.

[O]ne of the reasons you haven't had pushback from the teachers, is the California Teachers Association has said . . . "We're behind this thing, and we know we've got members that aren't behind it, but we're not gonna give them much of a megaphone within the ranks of the union." And so at the idea level, everybody's for it.<sup>73</sup>

Yet support for the standards has not necessarily materialized in investments for the related components of instruction that make standards work.<sup>74</sup>

The nonlinear development of California's standards and curricular frameworks falls into our category of reforming the reform, combining with the inherited terrain to yield notable organizational and political infrastructure. Yet, while the Common Core could build on some of the previously established organizational components, some of their underlying ideas entailed a profound shift:<sup>75</sup>

the Common Core was not just another list of stuff for kids to learn . . . it really did go right to the instructional core of the classroom, and so it required an extraordinarily more robust effort. . . . I'm not sure states fully appreciated that or had the wherewithal to respond to that.<sup>76</sup>

Along with the reforms that produced California's standards and frameworks came problems, as aspirations for standards spread.

#### PROBLEMS OF SPILLOVER BEYOND INFRASTRUCTURE

California has been reforming its reform of subject matter standards for sixty years. Yet, from the 1980s onward, standards have not operated in isolation. Policy makers at the national and state level have aspired to treat standards like a linchpin for reform in other facets of teaching and learning.<sup>77</sup> The standards would be the foundation of other parts of standards-based reform that, in some formulations of the idea, aspired to encourage ambitious teaching and learning for all students, not just for the elite and privileged few. The reforms that unfolded for California's standards both revealed problems in other domains and intertwined standards with those problems. From a mezzo-level perspective:

The frameworks, I feel, are really, really well done, but they're a very, very daunting and dense kind of a roadmap . . . the framework is not something that you could lay in front of a teacher or even like a teacher coach and say, "Here. Take it away." It's not self-executing. It needs a training, in and

of itself, to show people how to use it. Then, it takes time to walk people through it. . . . The frameworks are good, but they're a thousand pages.<sup>78</sup>

Content standards, recall, formalize learning goals by subject and by grade. For third grade mathematics, for instance, California standards include understanding of the concepts of multiplication and division and how they relate to each other. The problem of setting technically and politically defensible learning goals intersects with the related problem of how to support teachers' instructional practices so that they will be able to teach those goals. In the 1980s, state-level policy makers developed additional policies to support the translation of state-level standards into classroom practice.<sup>79</sup> To this end, the California legislature passed SB 1882 in 1988, which provided state-level funding for several pathways to support teachers' professional development. This included funding regional consortia to support districts' professional development. It also included the creation of discipline-specific networks—called the California Subject Matter Project—to support teachers' professional development.<sup>80</sup> This state-supported professional development sought to train teachers and administrators to understand the framework, “understand the standards, and know how to use their materials in terms of delivering the content of those standards to students in grades K through 12.”<sup>81</sup>

Trying to help teachers engage deeply with state content standards, how to use materials appropriately, and how to adjust instruction accordingly was extraordinarily ambitious. A California mezzo-level policy maker put it this way:

It was . . . a massive undertaking on the state's part . . . whether you agree with the content of the training and the philosophy of the training . . . the idea of investing those kinds of resources into ensuring that teachers and administrators are better prepared to deliver the curriculum and on administrators' part to support the teachers in their delivery, is huge.<sup>82</sup>

Reformers hoped for standards to become a linchpin of California's assessments as well. Like the National Assessment of Educational Progress, with its aspirations to connect the substance of educational assessments to the content that districts and states expected students to learn, California policy makers sought to develop and use assessments that reflected their content standards. Developing the content standards revealed shortcomings in prior assessments: an assessment aligned with the content standards could not come “off the shelf,” but would instead require more and different organizational, technical, and political infrastructure.<sup>83</sup> California's assessments took several forms, including the California Learning Assessment



System (CLAS) in 1993.<sup>84</sup> Students' results on the CLAS suggested high rates of failure to learn the California standards, provoking political controversy aimed at the assessment. California districts stopped using CLAS in 1995.<sup>85</sup> Several other assessment systems followed CLAS: the California Standardized Testing and Reporting System (STAR) in 1997, followed by the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASPP).

Failures in the assessments' administration and in the student performance they reported created a sort of bad-news boomerang for standards.<sup>86</sup> When large percentages of students performed badly on the assessment, ire turned to both the standards and the assessment. Standards could not be an island unto themselves, both because instruction involves multiple components *and* because reformers deliberately linked them. California had been linking these components for two decades before the Common Core State Standards Initiative linked them even more closely.

Overall, the Common Core State Standards are more detailed than prior standards; and they are more explicitly connected to a broader vision of redressing inequity in public education. Yet the Common Core State Standards installment of standards in California encompasses much more than a discrete moment or a singular policy. It embodies decades of accumulating efforts at instructional improvement, intertwined with national policy shifts in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which later became the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and national discourse on standards. It also unfolded concurrently with the Great Recession and state-specific developments in domains including education finance systems, accountability systems, shortages in the teacher pipelines, and suffocating pension debt. While standards-based reforms have a long history, the Obama era was distinguished by its ambition and by the pace of desired change.<sup>87</sup> As one interviewee put it:

As a California teacher and administrator for over 40 years, the number and pace of the changes in the last few years is more than I've experienced at any other time.<sup>88</sup>

Some of the changes the California administrator discussed were specific to California's approach to standards-based reform. This approach included California's decision to shift its student assessment system from a California-specific assessment to the Smarter Balanced Assessment, used in other states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Washington. Those reforms, however, intertwined with other state policies, including a major overhaul of state education financing. These finance reforms, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), dismantled dozens of state-level categorical funding streams that earmarked funds for specific uses.<sup>89</sup> The

funds from those categorical streams were then combined and reallocated to districts based on a formula-grant basis, giving local districts who were eligible for state funds more discretion in fund use.<sup>90</sup> Districts developed their funding strategies under LCFF commensurate with district decisions in their Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). The California mezzo-level administrator continued:

First the adoption of Common Core literacy and mathematics standards in 2010, next the implementation of Smarter Balanced Assessments, and then the extensive governance and funding expectations of LCFF. These changes challenged educators to rethink the fundamentals of schooling all at once. It's tough to get your head around how to move forward and still teach and run schools every day.<sup>91</sup>

Other mezzo-level policy makers echoed this view:

There was so much going on in the early years. When I say early years, I'm referring to '13-'14, '14-'15, '15-'16, where we were shifting from LCFF going to this new LCAP model. We were in the process of looking at implementing Common Core both in ELA and math knowing that, in the wings, we would be looking at science and then history, social science.<sup>92</sup>

Mezzo-level policy leaders worried that, even though the Common Core expected more from teachers than prior standards, investments in professional development were not commensurate with prior investments:

The thing is, those [prior] standards did not call for huge shifts in instructional practice in the way that the Common Core standards are calling for, yet we haven't made that same kind of investment in professional development that we did back in the early 2000s.<sup>93</sup>

Common Core embodied a more ambitious and equity-focused version of standards-based reform, with reverberating implications beyond just standards.<sup>94</sup> In the words of State Board of Education president Mike Kirst, the Common Core "will impact almost all key state education policies in fundamental ways."<sup>95</sup> Both mezzo-level policy makers and the State Board president identified the spread from one domain into another. Profound changes to some policies had reverberating implications for others.<sup>96</sup> The links arising from this version of reform include:

how to coordinate the actions and products of many independent private-sector materials providers so that they deal with the same knowledge and

skills . . . how to coordinate the actions and products of many independent private- and public-sector teacher education and professional development agencies so that they instruct teachers in the same knowledge and skills . . . how to develop the means to monitor instructional quality and the means to use the knowledge that results to improve instruction; how to coordinate these functions and the agencies that perform them so that they attend to the same knowledge and skills; [and] . . . how to coordinate these functions and the agencies that perform them when the school systems that offer instruction are so unequally resourced, and when those systems reside in varied racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic contexts.<sup>97</sup>

Reforms around the development of ambitious instructional content standards exposed gaps between that content and instructional practices: solving the content standards problem revealed and ensnared standards in the professional development problem, the materials problem, and the assessment problem.

#### PROBLEMS FEEDING BACK INTO THE POLICY PROCESS: CALIFORNIA STANDARDS

When reforms like electricity spread to domains that lack appropriate infrastructure—that lack appropriate power sources like transformers to convert currents—that incompatibility can feed back into the policy making process. Even if the standards embody improvement, those standards are susceptible to the weaknesses in related policy domains as well as to weaknesses in the American social safety net overall.<sup>98</sup> This was a problem not just for California, but for standards-based reforms more broadly. The fate of standards has become tied to the quality of instructional materials and professional development. From a mezzo-level perspective:

So, standards are holding, and they continue to suffer . . . from a lack of high-quality materials, and highly uneven support for professional development and implementation in other ways.<sup>99</sup>

A key part of standards' justification in California centered on whether and how standards could leverage and serve as a vehicle for *other* policy changes, including instructional support for English Learners. From a mezzo-level perspective:

Where are we [laughter] on implementation of Common Core? We're digging in to . . . our ELD [English Language Development] standards, which are interwoven into our ELA Common Core State Standards. We have a lot

of work to do on our ELD standards . . . shifting the mind[set], the practice of, “You remove the English Learners from your class. You level them all. You create a pull-out program . . . that is totally disassociated with whatever it is they’re learning and you do something in isolation.” . . . *Versus* our integrated and designated ELD. . . . You can’t just go buy a program to do integrated ELD. . . . What does that look like, especially at a secondary level? . . . That’s a big mountain we have yet to move.<sup>100</sup>

These links extend to instructional materials development, especially for English Learners. Another interviewee said:

From where I sit, I think we’ve gotten a lot of things right. We’ve adopted the right standards. We’ve developed and adopted curriculum frameworks that are a really great resource. Our state’s linkage to the ELD [English Language Development] standards and the ELD framework is tremendous. We have those policy pieces in place, and we also have the resource pieces in place. I think as a state we still struggle with how we do instructional materials and the adoption of that.<sup>101</sup>

This version of reforming the reform, in ways, entangled standards in other domains.<sup>102</sup> From a mezzo-level perspective in California:

Everybody embraces the Common Core, but defining what it looks like in action and replicating that is a tremendous lift.<sup>103</sup>

Decisions about standards, frameworks, and curriculum become high-stakes because of their implications for other instructional elements that are much bigger business: assessments and materials. This was, in part, intentional: standards-based reform had broad-scale reform as the goal, and aspired for standards to be the policy that would launch the other policy elements.<sup>104</sup> The flip side of links, though, means standards also become implicated in ancillary social, ideological, and pedagogical arguments.<sup>105</sup>

Standards have become implicated in *other* policies’ success and failure.<sup>106</sup> In the 1990s, California’s standards and frameworks became “scapegoats” for California’s declining rank on NAEP relative to other states.<sup>107</sup> Two decades later, standards-based reforms, including the Common Core standards, became implicated in persistent differences in achievement along racial and ethnic lines. Blaming standards was not unique to California. Mezzo-level policy makers in Tennessee discussed both how standards were targets for complaints that had little or nothing to do with the standards as written, and how districts chose to bring them into practice.

What we found often is that the problem [and source of complaint] is not necessarily the standards. The problem might be in an ill-advised social studies field trip in a certain local school district. . . . It has actually helped to be able to point to the standards to say, 'This is specifically what we require.' Districts can decide how they want to carry that out. This was in the realm of district decision.<sup>108</sup>

Standards development spread into other domains and revealed weaknesses in other parts of instructional infrastructure, weaknesses that feed back into standard-setting policy processes. The development of standards-based reforms in Tennessee similarly revealed weaknesses in other parts of instructional infrastructure, notably for students with disabilities. Like standards development in California, Tennessee's Response to Intervention developed organizational connections and stakeholder convergence. Like standards development in California, its ambitions spilled over into domains with limited instructional infrastructure. Whereas this spillover yielded a bad-news boomerang in California, it yielded procedural policy making in Tennessee.

### **Procedural Policy Making: Tennessee and Response to Intervention**

We argued at the outset that reforming reforms produces problems because policies and practices operate not in isolation but in combination, as Dewey observed.<sup>109</sup> Reform is a matter of *policies* because reform indicts old policies by introducing new policies; because major pieces of reform legislation like Medicaid or the Every Student Succeeds Act are not singular, unitary policies;<sup>110</sup> and because policies from different domains interact with each other.<sup>111</sup> Our cases have focused on links between policies underneath a common meta-policy umbrella: standards-based reforms. We turn now to how combinations of different meta-policies—No Child Left Behind, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and Tennessee's approach to standards-based reforms—produce problems as reforms spill over into domains with insufficient infrastructure.

While remaining a "local control" state, Tennessee nonetheless centralized aspects of its mezzo-level policy making architecture as it moved forward with its approach to standards-based reforms. This manifested in the state's approach to special education, with the state's Common Core Leadership Council pressing for a statewide approach to identifying students with specific learning disabilities through Response to Intervention. With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (PL 108-446), also known as the reauthoriza-

tion of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students could be identified with specific learning disabilities using Response to Intervention (RTI) models.<sup>112</sup> The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 sought to align IDEA at the national level with No Child Left Behind and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: bringing particular attention to accountability and assessments for students with disabilities<sup>113</sup> and allowing schools to provide additional interventions and supports to all students. Using assessments of students and fidelity checks of interventions, RTI was intended to help teachers and administrators assess the effectiveness of instruction and identify students who could benefit from interventions.<sup>114</sup>

#### RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION REFORMS AND INHERITED TERRAINS

When PL 108-446 was passed, states and districts embraced RTI models to change both special and regular education.<sup>115</sup> The reform ideas spread quickly. In a study conducted just one year after the final regulations of IDEA 2004 were released, 15 states were found to have adopted an RTI model, 22 states were developing models, and 10 states were providing districts with information and guidance related to RTI.<sup>116</sup> Tennessee was among the ten states that initially provided information and guidance to districts about RTI, but the state did not change the way students could be identified with specific learning disabilities until the 2008–2009 school year, when it permitted both IQ-discrepancy and RTI methods, and left the decision largely up to local education agencies (LEAs).<sup>117</sup> In the years that followed, the state agency compelled some LEAs in Tennessee to adopt an RTI model because they were facing issues of disproportionality in their special education population.<sup>118</sup> Other LEAs chose to adopt an RTI model on their own, although not all of these districts did so for the purpose of changing eligibility criteria for specific learning disabilities. Still other LEAs continued to use a discrepancy model to identify students with specific learning disabilities.<sup>119</sup> Though the idea of RTI spread throughout the state, a single agreed upon model of RTI remained elusive: schools and districts varied in how they approached RTI. This heterogeneity emerged because of the absence of a single model for RTI. Even though there are common principles across existing models,<sup>120</sup> crucial design decisions were left up to mezzo-level policy makers.

In the spring of 2012, in the context of conversations about the best instructional practices in early elementary reading and mathematics, the Common Core Leadership Council, a group of thirteen directors and supervisors from across the state, decided that they needed “a statewide RTI

model to promote consistency and improved instruction.”<sup>121</sup> This council emerged to advise the Tennessee Department of Education in its transition to the Common Core State Standards,<sup>122</sup> and their support of a statewide model for RTI indicated initial stakeholder convergence for the effort. In the fall of 2012, mezzo-level state administrators in the Tennessee Department of Education shared proposed guidelines with districts and presented the guidelines at the annual Tennessee Educational Leadership Conference. An RTI task force convened by January 2013, and it voted to proceed with a statewide plan for RTI. In that same month, the Students with Disabilities Advisory Council passed a proposal presented to them by the State Department of Education to use RTI to identify students with specific learning disabilities. The State Board of Education considered the RTI proposal on January 31 and February 1, 2013. In the few short months that followed, there was a flurry of activity related to RTI: a Reading/RTI Leadership Team set about researching and writing the Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework, termed RTI<sup>2</sup>; a task force of psychologists was assembled “to help develop and review content related to interventions and eligibility standards for students suspected of having a Specific Learning Disability,”<sup>123</sup> and a public hearing occurred in March.

The State Board of Education discussed RTI<sup>2</sup> in four meetings and workshops over a five-month period in 2013, and voted on new guidelines and standards for specific learning disabilities in June. Faced with a change in the evaluation procedures for the highest incidence category of disability in special education, Tennessee schools had little choice but to find some way to comply with the policy. At a minimum, not complying with the policy could quickly make schools vulnerable to lawsuits from parents and disability rights organizations.

Because the RTI<sup>2</sup> policy included a mandate, the state ensured that virtually all Tennessee schools would find a way to comply and put RTI into place, abetting organizational connections.<sup>124</sup> However, the three short pages on new guidelines and standards for specific learning disabilities the State Board of Education approved provided few details about what RTI was expected to look like in practice. The new guidelines and standards made it clear that “underachievement” could not be due to “a lack of appropriate instruction,” and provided a few specific procedural details. For example, the evaluation standards required “formative assessment of student progress during intervention . . . provided to the student’s parents at a minimum of once every four and one-half (4.5) weeks,” and “two systematic observations in the area of suspected disability”: one as a part of routine classroom instruction and the other during “intensive, scientific research-based or evidence-based intervention.”<sup>125</sup> Of course, these guidelines did not provide enough detail to create the *single* statewide RTI

model that the deputy commissioner for the TDOE had argued for when introducing this policy to the State Board of Education or that Tennessee's Common Core Leadership Council had concluded was needed "to promote consistency and improved instruction."<sup>126</sup> Moreover, the guidelines signaled future challenges for the reform as the state would try to implement RTI<sup>2</sup> in grades K–12 in both English Language Art and mathematics, pushing the model beyond its research base in early literacy instruction.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL CONNECTIONS, STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT, AND MEZZO-LEVEL PROCEDURAL POLICY MAKING

After the reforms that produced Tennessee's RTI came more mezzo-level policy making. To support the implementation of a single statewide RTI model and detail what the model looked like in practice, the TDOE created an array of supporting materials including its *Response to Instruction and Intervention Manual* and *Implementation Guide*. These documents, which were 88 pages and 278 pages respectively, contained detailed descriptions of district and school procedures related to RTI<sup>2</sup> and represented a considerable effort on the part of the TDOE to explain RTI<sup>2</sup> and support its implementation. The manual was divided into six sections: an introductory section, a section devoted to general procedures, three sections for procedures related to each of the tiers of instruction, and a final section on special education procedures. The five sections dedicated to RTI<sup>2</sup> procedures provided specific recommendations about school and district leadership teams, the percentage of students served in each tier, and the instructional time required for particular academic subjects, as well as descriptions of universal screening procedures, data-based decision-making, and fidelity monitoring. In the absence of meaningful technical know-how, mezzo-level policy making focused on elaborate procedures,<sup>127</sup> including student-teacher ratios and minutes per day of instructional time.

The larger *Implementation Guide* followed the same organizational structure as the *Manual*, but provided additional supporting materials for various subsections, including sample documents, schedules, and forms to be used by schools and districts. For example, while the *Manual* contained two paragraphs about the importance of contacting parents to support RTI<sup>2</sup>'s "culture of collaboration,"<sup>128</sup> the *Implementation Guide* contained twenty sample letters for different grade levels, instructional tiers, and academic subjects, as well as a parent contact log and a parents' brochure to educate families about RTI<sup>2</sup>.

As the TDOE attempted to help schools and districts achieve the ambitious aims they set for RTI<sup>2</sup>, they went about elaborating their RTI<sup>2</sup> frame-



work. Because there was not just one accepted RTI model, Tennessee's decision to have a statewide RTI model required the TDOE to translate generic RTI principles into specific tools and processes for practitioners. In their effort to do so, however, the TDOE confronted various demands and expectations of schools and districts, which were described this way:

Some districts want that autonomy. Some of them want gray. They want to be able to make local decisions and site-based decisions about how it looks. And then, other districts, want it really tight. They want us to tell them exactly what to do minute by minute. And so, you know, it's challenging to make sure you provide enough guidance and enough support that you feel like we can say, as the state, this is where we are. But yet, you want them to have kind of that loose tight. You know, you want them to have enough local decision-making that they feel ownership over it and they can tweak and make changes along the way that meet the needs of their students.<sup>129</sup>

While trying to balance this “loose-tight” tension, the TDOE faced its own limited know-how: it had limited knowledge and/or practice base for building a statewide RTI model, especially when crafting the model for the upper grades.

As the TDOE tried to navigate these features of the environment and produce a single statewide RTI model to support schools and districts, some aspects of the framework became highly specified. For example, there were very specific details in the framework about what percentage of students were to be served by each tier, how much instructional time should be devoted to English Language Arts and mathematics at various grades and tiers, and what teacher-student ratios should exist for interventions. These specifications were easy to provide, helped create a tangible picture of RTI for schools and districts, and may have helped to satisfy the request of those districts that, in the TDOE's estimation, wanted to be told what to do.

The TDOE policies remained largely silent, however, on what teachers would do with students in the various tiers, and they did not clarify terms like “multisensory” and “student-centered” that were used to describe the desired instruction. Describing and supporting high-quality instruction stretched beyond the TDOE's technical capacity, and arguably any mezzo-level policy maker's capacity. This is hard work. The TDOE's procedural policy making passed significant decision-making down to other mezzo-level policy makers. Everything from what supporting resources (universal screeners, interventions, etc.) to buy and how to schedule the tiers of instruction and utilize teachers and staff, to who would sit on the RTI<sup>2</sup> Leadership Team and the frequency with which they would meet,

was passed along to districts and schools. On the one hand, passing on this decision-making created room for districts and schools to tailor policies to their circumstances. Different schools had different resources (teachers, programs, etc.) to marshal in this effort, and the TDOE was clear that schools and districts needed discretion to make this model work for them. On the other hand, passing on this decision-making kept the TDOE from bringing more bureaucratic constraints to local decisions. For example, as a department in the state government, the TDOE could not recommend programs for purchase without going through a lengthy request-for-proposal process (as they did with the universal screeners). This meant the TDOE could not help schools and districts navigate critical purchasing decisions that went along with, for example, the selection of intervention programs, even when they were explicitly asked for help or the state had clear opinions.<sup>130</sup> Ultimately, the reforms that yielded RTI policies relied heavily on procedures and were light on meaningful instructional supports for teachers and schools.

#### FEEDBACK FROM PROCEDURAL POLICY MAKING

The expansion of standards-based reforms into special education motivated policies around the identification of students for special education services. In Tennessee, this included the creation of Response to Instruction and Intervention. Along with organizational and political infrastructures for this reform, Tennessee mezzo-level policy makers enjoyed some know-how for how to make RTI work for early grades in literacy. Expansion from early grades in literacy to all K–12 grades and more subjects, however, stretched that knowledge thin. Expansion yielded procedural policy making, teeing up mezzo-level policy makers to attend to achievable yet superficial matters.<sup>131</sup> This is not shirking: policy makers are, in principle, fulfilling their obligations. Yet, establishing and fulfilling requirements bears scant resemblance to the goals expressed in the broader reform idea.

#### Conclusion

Reforming the reform is just the beginning. NAEP's trajectory for improving the quality of its assessment items cast a light on problems with interpreting NAEP's results. The results that NAEP produced cast light on problems in teaching and learning that NAEP could not address, but that fueled flurries of policy initiatives. The development of subject-matter content standards in California that teachers referred to when making instructional choices cast a light and spilled over into deficiencies in the

instructional materials and professional development teachers had access to. Tennessee's momentum with standards-based reforms and some of their work around early literacy whetted reformers' appetites to create a statewide RTI model that extended into domains where knowledge was thin. Even when stakeholders converge, even when organizational connections are robust, problems follow from reforms.

In the three cases discussed here, policy makers had relatively high levels of organizational infrastructure in the context of American federalism—relatively clear jurisdictions and clear organizational connections—recognizing that American public education never resembles a pure form of hierarchical, rational Weberian bureaucracy. Problems of spillover are not problems that more centralization—vertical integration—is positioned to solve. Instead, horizontal reach poses the problem: areas outside the domain of reform. Problems of spillover are, in many ways, *best-case* scenarios for reform. Yet, even in the best of circumstances, reform produces mezzo-level policy making problems. Cohen was right to observe that Dewey's reform ideas had never really been tried, and to wonder, therefore, how they could be declared failures. Yet, even if they had been tried, even if the infrastructure to support them had emerged, they would not have avoided problems: they would not have yielded a permanent solution. This is not a fatal flaw; rather, it is a feature of policy making to recognize and consider each step of the way.

## 5 \* Problems of Policy Overload

WITH CADENCE WILLSE

A long list of wars has come to define the terrain of American public education: the great school wars; the teacher wars; the desegregation wars; the testing wars.<sup>1</sup> These wars have elevated important ideas to the national stage. They have brought forth impactful leaders. Looking beyond their ideas and their leaders, these wars have a common foundation: political contestation. Contestation is crucial to the well-being of democracies. Calm, in contrast, can be a marker of quiescence or domination.<sup>2</sup> Yet, contestation creates particular classes of challenge for mezzo-level policy makers: the directors, administrators, superintendents, and coordinators who make policy decisions for day-to-day school operations.

Our eyes may be drawn to heated debate at packed school board meetings, to strikes, and to contentious campaigns: all of these matter. They can consume mezzo-level policy makers' time and attention and structure their policy decisions. The policy making challenges that arise from contestation, however, are both much less glamorous and much more intractable: the product of political contestation is often simply too much work to do. Someone might win a war, but smoldering legacies from all sides and over time are typically left behind for mezzo-level policy makers to reconcile and navigate. In technical terms, we analyze this in terms of stakeholder convergence and divergence.

Chapter 4 considered both organizational connections and stakeholder convergence, which taken together enable reforms to gallop across jurisdictions and beyond their infrastructure, sometimes to their peril. Here we examine circumstances of organizational connections and stakeholder divergence. Recall that reforms, by definition, aspire to create change. In doing so, they indict some aspect of status quo arrangements: the inherited terrain. All else being equal, conditions of sustained political convergence are better positioned to clear out the underbrush of the inherited terrain. Such convergence, however, might be thin or fleeting, and it rarely operates as a permanent condition, even for popular policies like Social Security, Head Start, or subsidized school lunch. Stakeholder convergence at one point in time can disintegrate into divergence at another.

Where does this leave mezzo-level policy makers?<sup>3</sup> Stakeholder divergence can produce layers of policies for these policy makers to navigate and reconcile, especially when stakeholders fail to dismantle previous policies or to prioritize layers of policies.<sup>4</sup> Reforms in the context of stakeholder divergence, we argue, yield overload for mezzo-level policy makers.

Overload constitutes a common complaint voiced by street-level bureaucrats and implementers.<sup>5</sup> From a mezzo-level perspective, however, we examine what overload means for policy making. We begin by offering an account of the federal Race to the Top grant process. We build on existing analyses of Race to the Top grants here to offer a portrait of reforming the reform: how they emerged from some lessons drawn from No Child Left Behind's failures, lessons that also contributed to the emergence of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Yet Race to the Top also provides an important case of stakeholder divergence and its reverberating implications for mezzo-level policy makers. While the political heat from Race to the Top and Common Core grabbed headlines and politicians' campaign rhetoric, we look at the problems that a lack of stakeholder convergence created for mezzo-level policy makers down below: a circuit overload that overwhelmed their capabilities. The problem for mezzo-level policy makers is not merely energy from the electricity of national-level reform, but how those reforms combine with densely populated inherited terrains and the legacies of all the reforms that came before. Managing this kind of electricity can be resource intensive and can exacerbate mezzo-level inequalities.

We examine the problems overload poses to mezzo-level policy makers in the context of instructional materials policies in California and teacher professional development policies in Tennessee. These two state-level cases contrast with the heated, polarized national portrait of Race to the Top and Common Core to show the problems that arise from a lack of stakeholder convergence—not just active divergence.

## **Overload on a National Scale**

### **RACE TO THE TOP GRANTS AND THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS INITIATIVE**

Federal Race to the Top grants constituted a core component of the Obama administration's approach to standards-based reforms, emerging in 2009 as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) on the heels of the Great Recession of 2008. Race to the Top established a set of criteria for states to address in their applications, evaluated those applica-

tions, and then made financial awards to eighteen states and the District of Columbia based on those applications over the course of three grant cycles.<sup>6</sup> The criteria contained in the call for Race to the Top applications were extensive and reflected aspects of the standards-based reform approach that had been spreading through American public education over the previous twenty-five years. Applicants needed to describe state actions and plans for improving teachers' instructional practice, investing in data systems, and improving performance, including state plans for accountability systems connected to ambitious subject-matter content standards.

These criteria reflected efforts to align the elements that are core components of instructional infrastructure, including: standards or expectations of what students should learn at various grade levels; materials and professional development opportunities to equip teachers to teach that content; incentives for educators and students to attend to that content reflected in assessments and accountability provisions; and attentiveness to schools that consistently struggled to produce student academic achievement.

#### REFORMS THROUGH RACE TO THE TOP: CONDITIONS FOR OVERLOAD

Race to the Top grants continued to build on standards-based reform ideas while adopting policy strategies that differed from those used in implementing the No Child Left Behind Act—the chief vehicle for federal level involvement in American public schools as the reauthorized version of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act.<sup>7</sup> In the years leading up to Race to the Top, a growing body of evidence suggested that No Child Left Behind's rigid approach to accountability did little to improve student achievement and much to provoke political animosity.<sup>8</sup> Put more bluntly, the strict accountability measures included in the No Child Left Behind Act backfired. They did not appear to be associated with meaningful instructional improvement; instead they elicited backlash that led to state after state seeking exemptions from the federal law.

Race to the Top grants emerged several years before the reauthorization, titled Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), replaced NCLB as the vehicle for distributing the Title I formula grants that had become fixtures in American public education since 1965. Together, Race to the Top and the subsequent Every Student Succeeds Act embodied a different approach to standards-based reforms. In principle, Race to the Top application criteria created more opportunities for state variation and more room for states to make choices, albeit within a standards-based reform framework. Orga-

nizationally, *Race to the Top* departed from NCLB by returning to the primacy of state plans and state agencies, in contrast to the NCLB's expansion of federal government requirements and oversight.<sup>9</sup>

While the *Race to the Top* grants were optional and ostensibly promoted state discretion in the development and implementation of standards-based reforms, the federal government shaped the terrain of subnational education policy in important ways. Notably, the grants had standards-based reforms solidly embedded in the application criteria.<sup>10</sup> State applications could exercise discretion within the standards-based reform approach, but completed applications reflected core standards-based reform ideas. Moreover, these grants emerged at a time when economic upheaval gripped state economies. While states had formal discretion to participate in the grant competition or not, economic conditions incentivized states to apply.

From the perspective of organizational infrastructure, the *Race to the Top* grant application process benefited from well-established precedent: the federal government had jurisdiction to offer competitive grants, and experience doing so. Competitive grants in education have emerged at various points, including the *Even Start* family literacy program in the 1980s and 1990s, grants to support *Comprehensive School Reform* designs in the 1990s, and more recently through competitive grants as part of the 2020 *CARES Act* that made awards connected to COVID-19 responses. The federal government, in general, has established processes for competitive grants; and the US Department of Education had experience with establishing award criteria, making awards, distributing funds, and overseeing the use of those funds.

The *Race to the Top* grant initiative provoked little political controversy when it was announced and during the early years that the federal government awarded the grants. Predictable complaints emerged from states that did not receive grant awards. But chief stakeholders—state administrators, civil rights organizations, parent organizations, and teacher unions—appeared relatively cohesive. In some ways, the grant competition marked a stark departure from the direct, federal heavy hand that characterized *No Child Left Behind*—a departure that disparate stakeholder groups welcomed. At the national, state, and district levels, little evidence of stakeholder controversy or divergence appeared initially.

From a mezzo-level perspective, however, *Race to the Top* burdened operational infrastructure. Application criteria were extensive and required lots of planning on the part of state departments, notoriously stretched thin in terms of time and resources.<sup>11</sup> The grant applications also asked for states to provide detailed plans for or evidence of experience with more extensive alignment within the elements of instruction—standards,

materials, professional learning opportunities, assessments—than had been part of many states' prior experience with standards-based reforms. This asked state planners to press beyond their conventional expertise.

Concurrent with the federal Race to the Top competitive grants, three organizations—the National Governors Association (NGA), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and Achieve—put forward a plan and opportunities to help states align their core elements of instruction to be consistent with the terms of the Race to the Top grant expectations.<sup>12</sup> These organizations, together with their partners, worked to develop a common set of grade level subject matter standards called the Common Core State Standards Initiative. In addition to the standards that articulated the content expectations for students at each grade level, the organizations helped promote assessment consortia—named PARCC and Smarter Balanced—that would align student assessments with the content standards. These two parts of the Common Core State Standards Initiative provided a pathway to remove a portion of the burden states faced in trying to meet the terms of the Race to the Top applications: establishing a rigorous set of standards and having those standards aligned with student assessments. Signing on to the Common Core gave states a way to meet the grant application criteria.<sup>13</sup>

The timing of Common Core's appearance on the scene was no coincidence. Its sponsoring organizations drew on experiences with No Child Left Behind, as had the sponsors of the Race to the Top grants. While some members of the sponsoring organizations cautioned against linking the federal grant with the state consortia, those links prevailed.<sup>14</sup> In 2009 and 2010, states quickly signed on to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, adopting common content standards and joining one of the testing consortia.<sup>15</sup>

Consistent with McDonnell and Weatherford's account of the Common Core, experiences from No Child Left Behind informed federal-level policy through the Race to the Top grants, informed national-level non-governmental action in the Common Core State Standards Initiative, and informed state-level policy making.<sup>16</sup> As one policy maker put it:

this is the story of states as laboratories of democracy, discovering . . . that they actually have common problems with their standards and tests . . . and realiz[ing] themselves that they'd rather solve it once well, rather than fifty times over by themselves and not nearly as well. And that, in some sense, is how we got to the . . . Common Core.<sup>17</sup>

Reforms in the context of agency connections and stakeholder convergence enabled Common Core ideas to spread quickly into state Race to



the Top plans and state legislation.<sup>18</sup> These reforms, however, collided with weak subnational infrastructures. Political controversy followed implementation challenges. As mezzo-level policy makers began the hard work of developing their policies to put Common Core into practice, the political convergence of the Race to the Top era dissolved, for reasons ranging from differences of professional opinion to holy wars, depending on geography.

#### NATIONAL POLITICS IN THE COMMON CORE ERA

Federal, state, and district administrators drew on previous experiences to address some of the shortcomings that had manifested with previous versions of standards-based reforms; and they reformed the reform. After state-level adoption of the Common Core State Standards spread rapidly among states submitting Race to the Top applications, stakeholder divergence and backlash ensued. While support had emerged for many of the general ideas, some state legislatures ignited over the fine print:

attitudes towards the Common Core . . . a lot of people thought it was a great idea, but . . . that had zero impact on what happened in the legislative process.<sup>19</sup>

Stakeholders diverged on several fronts. Groups of teachers and their representatives opposed some states' rapid rollout of teacher evaluations linked to students' performance on common assessments.<sup>20</sup> Groups of parents opposed aspects of state assessment procedures.<sup>21</sup> Ideological opposition emerged in response to perceived federal government overreach into state and local educational decision-making.

National surveys and public commentary began to suggest the Common Core had become a "ruined brand."<sup>22</sup> State administrators and policy makers also shied away from the term, while holding on to the underlying ideas.

The "common" part of the Common Core is gonna get a lot less attention [in California], as the Common Core idea runs into political difficulties in other states . . . people in California, and particularly [Superintendent of Public Instruction] Tom Torlakson says, "We're not gonna talk about the Common Core anymore, we're going to talk about California's new higher, more rigorous standards."<sup>23</sup>

While a majority of the public expressed support for the general idea of common standards and aligned instructional components, that sup-

port plummeted when the label “Common Core” was attached to those standards.<sup>24</sup>

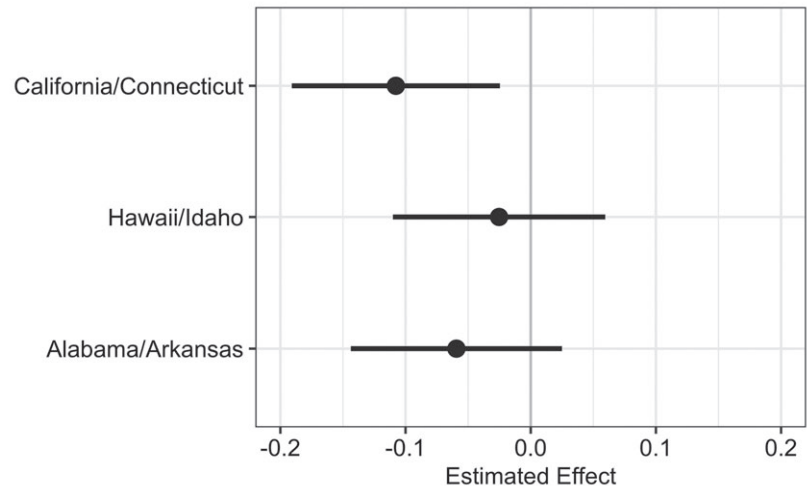
Since national stakeholder divergence can reverberate into subnational politics and policy making, we probed this phenomenon more deeply to assess some possible underlying determinants for opposition to the Common Core, including the roles of federalism and racism that have been part of the development of American public schooling for hundreds of years: crucial institutional legacies that form the inherited terrain of school reform. Since general support for “standards” but opposition to the “Common Core” was well established in prior scholarship, our surveys did not ask specifically about the Common Core; instead we asked about generic support for states working together to develop common standards and common tests. As the Common Core “brand” became “ruined,” and associated with federal government overreach, we probed whether it also became entangled with American ideological divisions. To unpack the potential impact of red-state / blue-state divisions, we drew a sample of 1,000 respondents, randomly assigned them to four different groups, and offered each of the four groups one of the following four prompts.<sup>25</sup>

- Recently, some states have adopted common standards . . .
- Recently, some states like California and Connecticut have adopted common standards . . .
- Recently, some states like Hawaii and Idaho have adopted common standards . . .
- Recently, some states like Arkansas and Alabama have adopted common standards . . .

One prompt made no reference to particular states, a second referred to two blue states (California and Connecticut), a third referred to a blue state and a red state (Hawaii and Idaho), and a fourth referred to two red states (Arkansas and Alabama). After randomly receiving one of those prompts, respondents were then asked: “which of the following statements is closest to your own views on educational standards:

- States should develop their own education tests and standards
- States should work together to develop common educational tests and standards

Our results (figure 5.1) found that respondents were significantly less likely to support “states working together” when two Democratic states (California and Connecticut) were the reference states. This suggests that



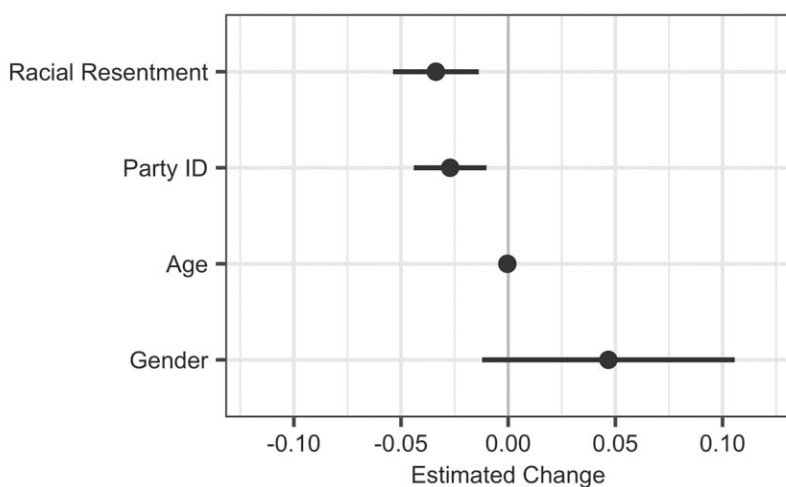
**Figure 5.1.** Public support for common standards, 2018.

*Source:* Taubman Center for American Politics and Policy Fall 2018 survey, conducted by YouGov, 1,000 nationally representative respondents.

stakeholder convergence and divergence depends in part on how public perceptions are primed. As table 5.1 and figure 5.2 suggest, we see a significant partisan split on general support for states working with each other, which is consistent with other scholarship. Given this history of American public education, we probed more deeply to examine the extent to which opposition to common standards went beyond partisan divisions to reflect racial attitudes as well. Controlling for partisanship and other factors, our results suggest that racial animus predicts unwillingness to work with other states.<sup>26</sup> Individuals who scored higher on the “racial resentment” index were significantly more likely to oppose common standards. This leads us to believe that the stakeholder divergence over the development of common standards was not just a matter of “federal over-reach,” but also tapped into the American tradition of racial resentment and animus.<sup>27</sup>

These survey results contribute to the portrait of fragility and conditionality in stakeholder support for the general idea of common educational standards.

We further probed the difference between the general idea of common standards and the specific Common Core brand by looking at Twitter.<sup>28</sup> While Twitter became a platform to rage against the Common Core, some mezzo-level policy makers found it an important site for sharing ideas and materials with other professionals. Some noted that they found Twitter



**Figure 5.2.** Public support for common standards by party ID and racial resentment, 2018.

*Source:* Taubman Center for American Politics and Policy Fall 2018 survey, conducted by YouGov, 1,000 nationally representative respondents.

**Table 5.1. Public Support for Common Standards by Party ID and Racial Resentment, 2018**

	<i>Support for Standards</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Racial Resentment—Single Item	-0.031*** (0.008)		
Racial Resentment—Index Sum		-0.008*** (0.003)	
Racial Resentment—Index Mean			-0.034*** 0.010
Party Identification	-0.030*** (0.008)	-0.027** (0.009)	-0.027*** (0.009)
Gender	0.044 (0.030)	0.047 (0.030)	0.047 (0.030)
Age	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.0004 (0.001)	-0.0004 (0.001)
Constant	1.853*** (0.070)	1.846*** (0.070)	1.846*** (0.070)
Observations	959	959	959
R <sup>2</sup>	0.059	0.057	0.057
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.055	0.053	0.053
Residual Std. Error (df = 954)	0.461	0.462	0.462
F Statistic (df = 4; 954)	15.045***	14.361***	14.361***

*Note:* \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

more helpful than official government-sponsored platforms, which were “too antiquated.” One mezzo-level policy maker observed:

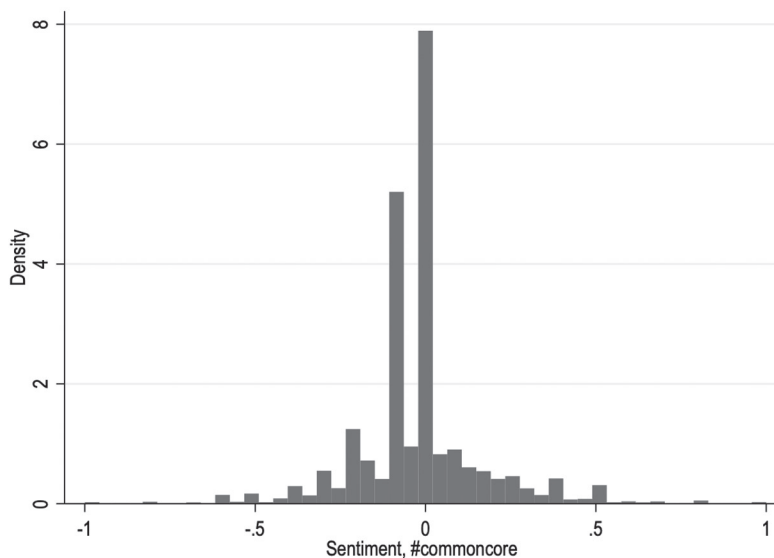
To find anything, it was so nested in folder after folder after folder. So, to get any information, I just wouldn't get there. . . . It just seems like one more layer where you could get the information elsewhere or I could just go to Facebook. Then, half of the folks I want I follow with Twitter . . . Twitter is my professional learning, you know, just following the threads every day . . . I would go to it before I'd go to Collaboration in Common [the government site].<sup>29</sup>

Others commented how, after sifting through Twitter rage against the Common Core, they could find substantive comments about the content and instruction:

in a way the whole anti-Obama war that rose up in 2008 . . . coincident with Twitter . . . some viral Common Core problem would go on and I would watch the conversation and at some point, I started to notice people saying [about math] . . . “I figured . . . out how to do that later in life. I wish someone had taught it to me” and every once in a while these conversations would get away from Obama and circle in on . . . the math.<sup>30</sup>

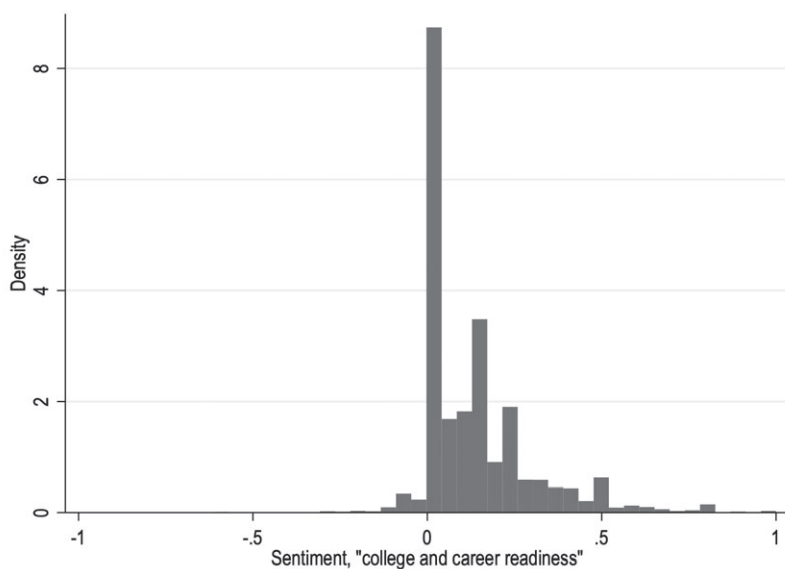
To probe national stakeholder divergence further, we performed sentiment analysis on 40,667 tweets from 2017 and 2018.<sup>31</sup> We then aggregated individual sentiment scores by state, using geographic data from geotagged tweets and user location in the user bios for 12,457 tweets using the *#commoncore* hashtag and for 5,424 tweets using “college and career readiness.”<sup>32</sup> We tracked the sentiment scores of user tweets from July 2017 to October 2018 in the *#commoncore* and “college and career readiness” samples. Figures 5.3 and 5.4 show the distribution of sentiment scores across the two samples, and figures 5.5 and 5.6 show the average for the sentiment scores by state for geolocated data. We found that sentiment scores for the “college and career readiness” sample were largely positive. The distribution of the histogram of sentiment scores is right-skewed, or positive, with a high density of tweets categorized as “zero.” In contrast, the histogram for *#commoncore* tweets is closer to a normal distribution, with sentiment categorized as both negative and positive.<sup>33</sup>

Next, we examined the sentiment score breakdown by state to further unpack variation in sentiment within the *#commoncore* and “college and career readiness” conversations online. We matched Twitter users to their state using biographical data and geolocation tagging for 39 percent



**Figure 5.3.** Common Core sentiment score histogram, 2018.

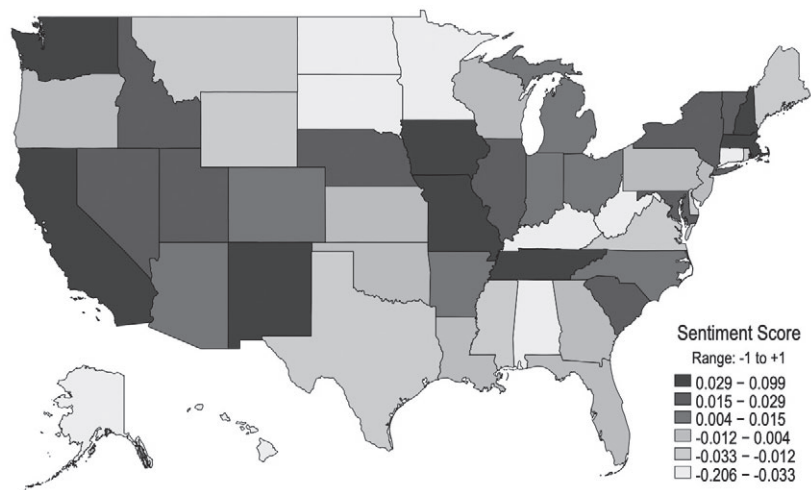
Sentiment analysis on 12,457 tweets using the #commoncore hashtag from 2017–2018.



**Figure 5.4.** College and career sentiment score histogram, 2018.

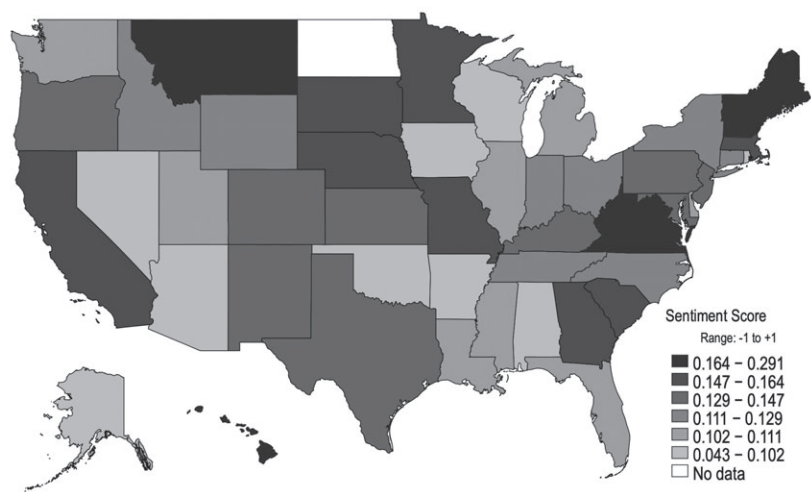
Sentiment analysis on 5,424 tweets using "college and career readiness" from 2017–2018.

of the #commoncore sample and 63 percent of the “college and career readiness” sample. Figures 5.5 and 5.6 show the average annual sentiment score by sample across states. Examining sentiment scores by state demonstrates significant differences in positive and negative sentiment score by location, suggesting clear partisan divides in the #commoncore



**Figure 5.5.** Common Core sentiment score histogram by state, 2018.

Sentiment analysis on 12,457 tweets using the #commoncore hashtag from 2017–2018, averaged by state.



**Figure 5.6.** College and career sentiment score histogram by state, 2018.

Sentiment analysis on 5,424 tweets using “college and career readiness” from 2017–2018, averaged by state.

sample. The average aggregated sentiment scores for the #commoncore hashtag maps onto partisan state politics: sentiment scores are largely negative in conservative states. In contrast, the sentiment scores for the phrase “college and career readiness” show no such partisan divide; the average annual sentiment is positive across the country and shows no clear partisan patterns.

To illuminate key participants in the policy conversation on Twitter, we looked at who was contributing to the conversation by sorting users’ biographical descriptions into categories. We then used network analysis of hashtags by sample to illustrate which policy issues or terms were being discussed together.<sup>34</sup> Table 5.2 shows clear discrepancies in the charac-

**Table 5.2. Categorization of Sample User Bios, 2018**

<i>User Category</i>	<i>Common Core</i>		<i>College and Career</i>		<i>Keywords</i>
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Percent</i>	
No User Bio	3,593	11.2	1,123	13	
Uncategorized	14,096	44	2,579	29.8	
Conservative	4,694	14.7	34	0.4	constitution, constitutionalist, conservative, republican
Liberal	1,149	3.6	216	2.5	liberal, democrat, dem, progressive
News	1,048	3.3	88	1	reporter, journalist, editor, columnist
Educator	1,567	4.9	1,703	19.7	teacher, principal, educator, instructional, high school, middle school, superintendent, counselor, administrator, public school, chief academic officer, curriculum, ISD, school district, city schools, learning coordinator
NGO	1,540	4.8	669	7.7	education consultant, association, organization, organizer, advocate
Parent	3,605	11.3	1,359	15.7	family, student, parent
Post-secondary	729	2.3	866	10	professor, post-secondary, university, PhD, doctoral, college
<i>Total</i>	32,027	100	8,640	100	



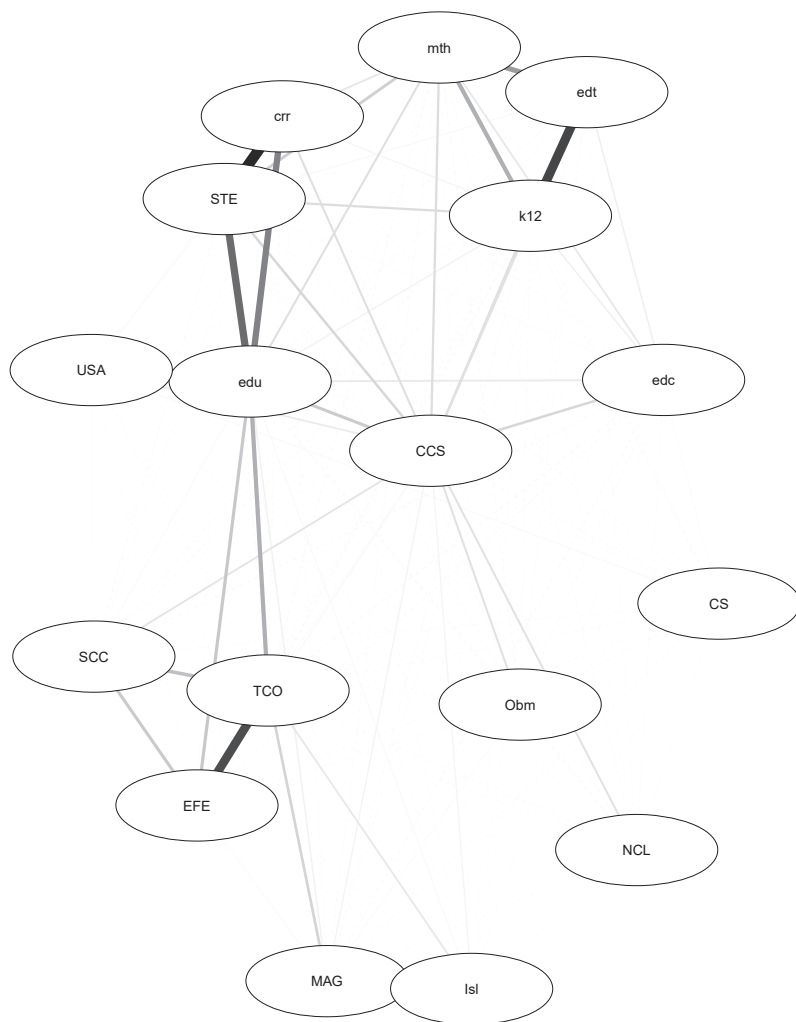
teristics of users in the #commoncore and “college and career readiness” samples. Users who identified as conservative constituted almost 15 percent of the #commoncore conversation online. Liberals constituted only 3.6 percent of the sample. Users who identified as educators constituted 4.9 percent of the sample and users who identified as representing an NGO constituted 4.8 percent of the sample, suggesting that a small group of frontline implementers continued to use the #commoncore hashtag. Users who identified as parents accounted for 11.3 percent of tweets. While there were additional participants, like educators, nonprofit organizations, and parents engaging with the #commoncore hashtags, the largest identifiable group was partisan.

In contrast, users who identified as educators constituted 19.7 percent of the sample in the college and career readiness conversation on Twitter, and users who identified as affiliated with an NGO represented 7.7 percent, suggesting that the phrase “college and career readiness” was used by professionals in the field of education. In contrast to the #commoncore hashtag, the conversation related to college and career readiness was significantly less partisan: only 0.4 percent of users identified as conservative, and 2.5 percent identified as liberal.

We then turned to network analysis of hashtags to understand which ideas were framing the debate and defining the narrative related to the phrases #commoncore and “college and career readiness.” Figure 5.7 shows a partial correlation network between the top ten most prevalent hashtags in the #commoncore sample.

It is clear from our analysis that there is a divisive online narrative: there are strong connections between the hashtags #TCOT (TCO), or “Top Conservatives On Twitter”; #EndFederalEd (EFE), #StopCommonCore (SCC), #MAGA (MAG), and #Islam (ISL). A significant portion of the online narrative related to #commoncore was associated with partisan hashtags, particularly on the right. There were high degrees of correlation among partisan hashtags.

Evidence also suggests a strong network of users using the #commoncore hashtag to discuss education policy and instructional practice. As evident in figure 5.7, significant connections existed between discussions focused on #education (edct), #STEM, #edu, #curriculum, and #edchat, and distinct connections existed between #edutech, #math, and #K12. Users were referencing the #commoncore hashtag in conjunction with hashtags related to instructional practice. However, there were few nodes bridging tweets that were partisan and tweets related to content and pedagogy. This suggests a divide among users in the #commoncore sample: tweets that are partisan were highly correlated, and tweets that were related to instructional practice were highly correlated, but the overlap

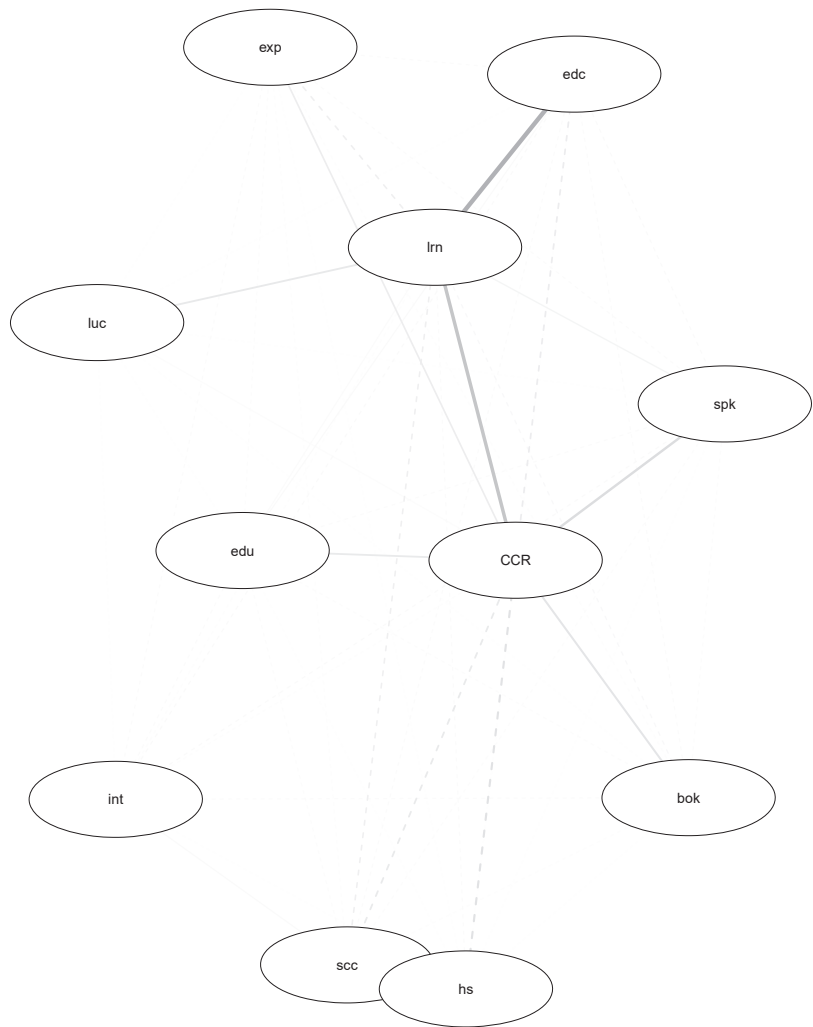


**Figure 5.7.** Network analysis of top Common Core hashtags, 2018.

Partial correlation network between the top 10 most prevalent hashtags in the #commoncore sample, based on 12,457 tweets using the #commoncore hashtag from 2017–2018.

between the two groups is minimal. The network analysis depicts a divided conversation using the hashtag #commoncore.

As figure 5.8 illustrates, network analysis for top hashtags related to “college and career readiness” was less clearly connected to segmented policy discussions. Hashtags that consisted of variations on the term “college and career readiness” (CCR) were the most centrally connected node. Generic hashtags like #learn (lrn) served as bridging nodes to more



**Figure 5.8.** Network analysis of top college and career hashtags, 2018.  
Partial correlation network between the top 10 most prevalent hashtags in the “college and career readiness” sample based on 5,424 tweets from 2017–2018.

specific hashtags related to instructional practice and management, such as #edchat (edc), #expert (exp), and #leadupchat (luc). Hashtags related to school counseling (scc) and high school (hs) were significantly and closely connected. Overall, the sample was associated with hashtags popular among practitioners that are related to sharing information on instructional practice. The #commoncore hashtag did not appear among the 100 most prevalent hashtags, suggesting that tweets referencing “col-

lege and career readiness” shifted focus away from Common Core State Standards.

In tracking the sentiment, characteristics of users, content of #commoncore and “college and career readiness,” and network analysis, we found evidence of dual narratives surrounding the Common Core State Standards. Although the aggregated sentiment scores show a clear partisan divide at the state level, we see a significant portion of positive tweets. While they remained a minority, educators and parents continued to use the #commoncore hashtag. In addition, the network analysis revealed significant, highly correlated networks of tweets referencing instructional practice within the #commoncore hashtag sample.

Consistent with what we heard from our mezzo-level policy makers, frontline practitioners may have used the #commoncore hashtag to help build communities of instructional practice, despite its “ruined” brand. Beyond Twitter, other “spontaneous” online teacher communities developed where teachers shared videos of their lessons, shared their curriculum, commented on each other’s work, and focused on putting the Common Core into instructional practice. It is difficult to imagine that these online communities would have or could have emerged in the absence of the Common Core, “because they wouldn’t have [had] a common foundation, language.”<sup>35</sup>

Prior scholarship has demonstrated how opposition to the Common Core State Standards Initiative arose from states’ implementation of their CCSSI-related policies, with or without the Race to the Top Grant funding. Studies found the collision between frontline implementation circumstances and the standards-based reform ideals embodied in Race to the Top and combined with the Common Core Initiative contributed to the erosion of political support.<sup>36</sup> Empirical studies of Race to the Top grant applications and criteria matched with states’ fiscal circumstances found states that fared better in the 2008 Great Recession were significantly better at implementing the Race to the Top criteria.<sup>37</sup> Though advocates of both Race to the Top and Common Core argued that these efforts would help remedy aspects of economic inequality, implementation studies suggest that they may instead have reinforced underlying economic inequalities.

We are not the first to recount this national narrative. We do so, however, to elucidate core aspects of stakeholder divergence. We turn now to the mezzo level to consider the implications of reforms that, like Common Core, emerge without stakeholder convergence. The absence of convergence can be as debilitating to mezzo-level policy makers as active divergence, with notable implications for inequality.

## Overload: Instructional Materials in California

In remarkable ways, California avoided the political firestorms that engulfed Common Core in other states. While considerable national attention focused on controversies surrounding assessments, California tempered political conflict. Rather than develop its own assessments, California signed on with the Smarter Balanced testing consortium. Joining a consortium for testing was politically divisive in some states. Yet, after enduring political battles surrounding California state-specific assessments in the 1990s (i.e., CLAS), joining an assessment consortium provided the state some political cover in 2010. Moreover, in contrast to states like New York, California did not explicitly connect its student assessment regime to teacher evaluations.<sup>38</sup> These two state-level policy choices, combined with the state's decision to adopt its Local Control Funding Formula approach, did a great deal to keep explosive stakeholder divergence at bay in California. Yet the absence of stakeholder divergence did not create political convergence for the development of instructional materials—a key component of standards-based reforms. The problems of overload that ensued created significant burdens for mezzo-level policy makers.

Even though assessments drew considerable attention in national discourse, other components of the Race to the Top applications and subsequent Common Core State Standards Initiative occupied policy makers' attention at intermediate levels in California. In addition to the standards that defined the content students were expected to learn in each level, standards-based reforms called for instructional materials aligned with those standards. Instructional material choices have implications that reverberate across states. Materials like textbooks are big business. And publishers have a long history of producing materials that appeal to major markets:

One of the . . . big patterning effects . . . [comes from] textbooks and curriculum, and if you've got New York, California, and Florida, and Texas, more or less on the same page in terms of standards and curriculum, the country's going to go that way, cuz they're [the publishers] not going to do new textbooks for Iowa.<sup>39</sup>

California schools educate one out of every eight American public school students; the state's market for textbooks and materials is enormous. Some states delegate textbook and materials choices to districts. California has a long history of housing formal authority at the state level for textbook adoption, which shapes the terrain of instructional materials

in the state and in the country.<sup>40</sup> Even though California wields considerable muscle in the textbook terrain, textbook publishers were slow to adjust to California's shifting content standards in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, some accounts suggest that the California State Board of Education caved to publishers' pressure not to revise textbooks in ways that were meaningfully aligned with the state's 1985 mathematics content standards.<sup>41</sup>

While textbooks were modified only slightly to align with the 1980s California standards, the California Department of Education (CDE) incentivized the creation of topical "replacement units."<sup>42</sup> The CDE contracted to create replacement units to generate educator support for the new materials.<sup>43</sup> The replacement units became popular with teachers and began to proliferate across different publishers and providers, even after the state stopped funding their development.<sup>44</sup> Though the state played a significant role in encouraging the development of replacement units, it lacked the authority to oversee, monitor, or regulate the quality of the materials that ensued.<sup>45</sup>

#### REFORMING INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS: ORGANIZATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND SHIFTING POLITICS

These experiences informed California's policy approach to materials adoption in the Common Core era. Over the course of thirty years, instructional materials policies in California have been informed by the Instructional Quality Commission, which provides advice on curriculum, frameworks, and instructional materials to California's State Board of Education.<sup>46</sup> While standards identify the content students are expected to learn at each grade level, curriculum frameworks provide road maps for translating standards into instruction; instructional materials provide key tools for teachers to translate road maps into instruction. In California, the Instructional Quality Commission played a central role in that translation process—moving from standards to road maps to tools for instruction.<sup>47</sup> This constitutes a chief area where reforms have been reformed over time. One interviewee explained:

We have lots more resources and guidance even from the early standards movement, which wasn't in place when I first started teaching. I think we've provided a lot of resources at the state level, both standards and frameworks, to guide teacher practice. . . . I'm not sure they're all being used as strongly and as effectively as they could be, but I certainly think

there's a wealth of resources that are very thoughtfully developed at the state level, as good now as ever.<sup>48</sup>

Jurisdiction over curriculum frameworks resides solidly at the state level. Aspects of California's textbook adoption process also reflect centralization.<sup>49</sup> Article 9, section 7.5 of the California state constitution requires the State Board of Education to adopt a list of instructional materials for California educators to use in classrooms in grades K–8, after a specified materials review process.<sup>50</sup> In the period leading up to the Common Core, the materials markets were tightly limited and constrained.<sup>51</sup> Post–Common Core, however, California districts did not have to use the materials from the adoption list; they could instead choose to use materials that were aligned with the state standards, which had undergone a specific review process.<sup>52</sup>

Some evidence emerged during the Common Core era suggesting modestly greater congruence between California's standards and other components, such as curriculum frameworks and instructional materials.<sup>53</sup> Our survey of California teachers in January 2018 found that more than a third of respondents (35 percent) perceived that “a little improvement” had emerged over the preceding three years in the alignment between California's content standards and instructional materials. The same proportion (35 percent) thought the alignment between standards and materials had remained about the same.<sup>54</sup> Another 13 percent of respondents thought alignment between standards and instructional materials had “improved a lot” between 2015 and 2018, and 15 percent perceived less alignment.<sup>55</sup>

Similar perceptions of modest improvement appeared in teachers' responses to questions about the quality of instructional materials between 2015 and 2018. More than a third of the teachers (36 percent) noted “a little improvement” in instructional materials over the course of three years, with an additional 15 percent perceiving a lot of improvement. Approximately 32 percent of teachers reported that quality stayed about the same, and 16 percent reported declines in the quality of instructional materials.<sup>56</sup>

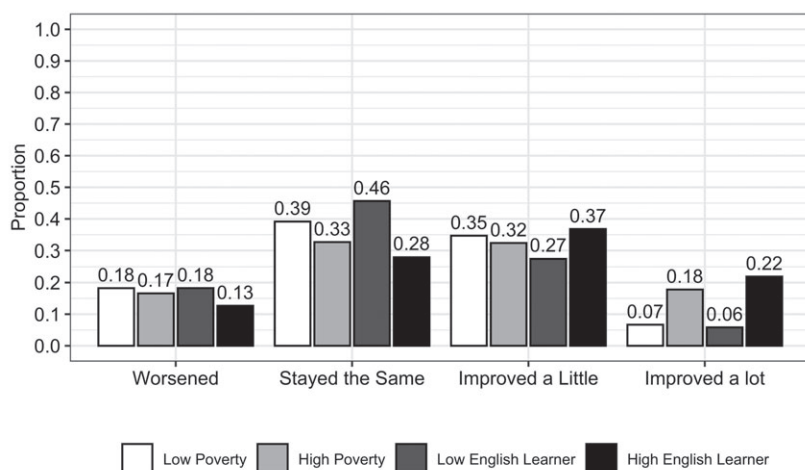
Mezzo-level policy makers in California mirrored frontline educators' tepid view of alignment between standards and instructional materials.

I think as a state we still struggle with how we do instructional materials and the adoption of that. I think a lot of that's driven by, we used to be a state where we said “you have to adopt from the state list.” Now we've done a lot of flexibility, but I don't think we apply a rigorous enough process to the instructional material, so that they're still pretty hit and

miss for the local level. That's a thing that we could do a better job of and it's completely within our control at the state level . . . we don't hold the publishers to a high enough standard, so therefore they don't have to truly adjust authentically fully because they don't have to, to get through the system. . . . Most of the districts, as far as I know, are still buying their main materials off of that list anyway and then supplementing a lot with online materials.<sup>57</sup>

Teachers' perceptions of instructional materials and their fit with standards varied in important ways, as depicted in figure 5.9.

Materials for students who are EL, particularly among teachers who teach in schools with high concentrations of English Learners, constituted one area where respondents perceived improvement. Our survey of California teachers in 2018 found that teachers who teach in schools with a high concentration of English Learners were more likely than teachers in schools with low concentrations of English Learners to perceive improved alignment between California's grade-level standards and instructional materials, and more likely to report improvement in the quality of instructional materials between 2015 and 2018. Differences in perceptions appeared both between teachers in schools with high and low concentrations of English Learners and between teachers in schools with high and low concentrations of poverty.<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 5.9.** Perceptions of alignment, 2018.

Source: RAND Corporation America's Teacher Panel, January 2018. Survey conducted for *Getting Down to Facts II*. Sample drawn from California. Question asked: "Alignment between instructional materials and CA grade-level standards has. . . ." Weighted sample, High and Low Poverty N = 147; Low EL N = 145; High EL N = 146.



Some evidence suggests that California policy has reflected some lessons from experience and improved integration between English Language Arts (ELA) and English Language Development. Better instructional materials for English Learners have emerged:

[At first], there wasn't a lot of good materials for the struggling learner or English Learner . . . if you fast forward to now, we're doing better. I don't know if we've perfected, or we've got it right yet.<sup>59</sup>

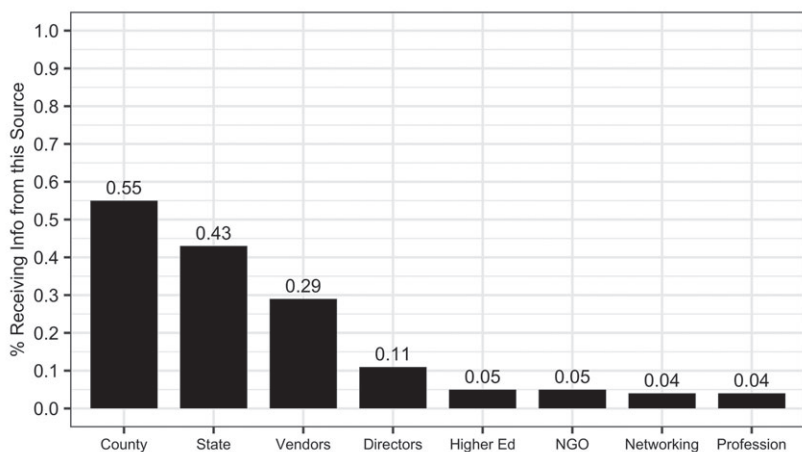
In our surveys of California teachers, however, we found that teachers in schools with high concentrations of English Learners were significantly less likely than other teachers to report that their instructional materials were appropriate for their students' needs.<sup>60</sup>

how do we meet the needs of English Learners? Because, as a state, we have struggled with that . . . if we can't get our brightest minds on a subject matter [as a state] to figure it out, how do we expect your average LEA to figure it out?<sup>61</sup>

Though the Instructional Quality Commission and the State Board of Education have authority to narrow the instructional materials terrain, in practice the state did little to curate the terrain of options, pushing the policy making decisions down to the district level.<sup>62</sup> We draw attention to instructional materials in California in part because they did not generate the extensive political heat and polarization that assessments did both nationally and in some other states. Yet the absence of political polarization does not necessarily pave the way for stakeholder convergence. Like the lack of stakeholder convergence that emerged in Tennessee over professional development policies (which we discuss below), lack of convergence contributed to options for instructional materials that reflected the vast and varied interests in California:<sup>63</sup> a lack of convergence conducive to mezzo-level overload.

## PROBLEMS OF OVERLOAD

As they make decisions about which items to use from California's extensive list of approved materials, mezzo-level policy makers at the district level deployed a range of strategies. Our interviews of district superintendents revealed that they were most likely to look to county offices of education and to the state agencies for guidance on which materials to select and use. We found that 55 percent of respondents looked to their county offices for information and 43 percent turned to the state (fig. 5.10).<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 5.10.** Superintendents' sources of materials information, 2017.

*Source:* Structured interviews conducted with a stratified random sample of California school district superintendents between June and October 2017. See Appendix for selection information and interview protocol. The data presented are categorized from an open-ended question: "Where do you receive information about standards-aligned curriculum and instructional materials?" Respondents often listed multiple sources.

The technical know-how at the mezzo level to select instructional materials and support their use in practice varies widely. The process can be time- and resource-intensive, placing significant demands on district policy makers, which in turn can place significant demands on teachers.

We just adopted the language arts program for next year. What we do is we utilize the expertise of our teachers. We brought a group together over the course of 24 months, researched all the materials that were available and aligned to standards. It was really driven by teachers, and they got feedback from their colleagues. So that was the process we utilized to ensure that the practitioners are getting the opportunity to preview and test drive materials that are out there to determine if they're effective. . . . They [the teachers] actually built a process whereby data was collected from teachers that were piloting materials, and they brought back and analyzed the results they got, quantitative and qualitative results from classroom teachers. Piloting went on for about 18 months, so it was very comprehensive.<sup>65</sup>

This district leader's portrayal of how the district selects materials is, on the one hand, deeply impressive. It demonstrates a commitment to incorporating teachers' expertise; a commitment to reform, gathering data and using those data to inform district policy choices; and thoroughness

and perseverance, devoting 24 months to reviewing the materials. On the other hand, the story reveals a pathway for overload, and for overload to manifest in ways that can exacerbate inequality. While large and well-resourced districts might be able to manage this kind of extensive review process, it is unclear how or whether small or under-resourced districts are able to do so.

Some mezzo-level policy makers reported that their districts collaborated with others to help sift through the materials:

We have a curriculum department and they're connected with other curriculum departments across the state and beyond. There's a fairly robust conversation among curriculum and instructional folks about how people are implementing the new state standards.<sup>66</sup>

And some counties provide support for curating materials.<sup>67</sup> Yet, curating the terrain of materials can impose significant time and resource burdens on districts, and can evoke frustrations over the mixed quality and relevance of materials on the list.<sup>68</sup> A significant number of mezzo-level policy makers called for assistance vetting the vast amount of instructional materials to be able to make appropriate policy choices.

There is so much out there that there needs to be more vetting in the sense of what is state approved.<sup>69</sup>

There's a lot out there but it's not all good. We're looking at links into lesson plans . . . that take a teacher directly to the resource that they need that's been vetted and approved for use.<sup>70</sup>

The state also has a list of approved materials, which is useless because some of the material is quite lacking in terms of quality . . . we are dependent on our own internal analysis.<sup>71</sup>

A big area that is missing is curation: trying to figure out how to teach mathematics curriculum, where do we go for good information? People shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel. . . . People go to Pinterest and get overwhelmed.<sup>72</sup>

Developing systems of instruction and instructional guidance that are internally coherent and consistent depends on districts to marshal extraordinary effort and expertise. Frustrations manifest both with state-approved lists and with the information that districts receive from materials providers and publishers.

They also get a fair amount of information from the publishers of the curriculum. That's where you get the real disconnect between someone who says their materials are aligned but now we need to talk about what your definition of alignment is. They're attempting to sell a product, schools are trying to fill a need, there's not an unlimited amount of time and resources, and so everyone tries to get the best info they can.<sup>73</sup>

For small districts and for under-resourced districts, the financial and time burdens that material selection impose can be significant.

A 3,000-student school district does not have the capacity to judge 25 approved math materials. It's just not possible. You have to have some kind of sieve, and then you have to figure out a way, when they select materials, to actually give them some level of support. There's no infrastructure in California for them to do that.<sup>74</sup>

Given the time and resource burden accompanying materials selections, national studies suggest teachers in under-resourced districts appear more likely to rely on online rather than in-school or in-district supports to select materials and lesson plans.<sup>75</sup> Our surveys of California teachers similarly found that teachers working in under-resourced schools and teachers working in schools with high concentrations of English Learners were more likely than other teachers to use online materials and sources; they were also more likely to use districts' print resources.<sup>76</sup> While using resources from a wide variety of sources might reflect choices and diversity, "people get overwhelmed," as the superintendent above noted, and as studies of the early implementation of Common Core in California also revealed.<sup>77</sup>

There are so many resources out there around any given topic. And they are not curated. They are not organized. They are not bundled and pulled together . . . put yourself in the place of a site principal. So where do you go to get your Cliff notes and have it all pulled together? That doesn't exist.<sup>78</sup>

In the case of instructional materials in California, mezzo-level policy makers faced both the overload that arises from an uncured terrain and the interdependence between instructional materials and professional development.<sup>79</sup> Evidence makes clear that quality materials alone are insufficient to improve instructional practice. Instead, teachers need both high-quality materials and sufficient opportunities to learn how to use those materials.<sup>80</sup>

The new standards are wonderful, especially math standards, but folks will need a lot of assistance to make that shift. . . . Oftentimes, when new standards come in, the next step is how we are going to provide instructional materials, and this requires a fair amount of professional development. The professional development needs to be ongoing, and we need to keep returning to it so we can implement standards.<sup>81</sup>

The interconnectedness between instructional materials and professional development augments the burden that under-resourced schools and districts face. The superintendent quoted just above continued:

If you make a [materials] selection that would require a level of professional development that you do not have the resources for and your staff is not prepared, you are going to run into issues there.<sup>82</sup>

When the lack of meaningful stakeholder convergence yields a relatively uncuration list of materials for districts and practitioners to wade through combined with constraints in time and expertise, overload ensues:

we hear this so often up and down the state. The schools and districts often don't have the time to drill deeper into actually helping teachers make sense of all the information they just got and how that's going to change or improve their practices.<sup>83</sup>

This leader continued:

There's so much going on right now . . . what teachers say over and over and over and over again, in addition to the support they feel they want, they just want the time to be able to do it. . . . A 45-minute late-start day does not take you very far. . . . Especially now, with all these new standards and frameworks and new adoptions, how do you give them the time just to sit and work with each other on making sense of it for their kids?<sup>84</sup>

In addition to under-resourced districts and districts with large concentrations of English Learners, overload also manifests in small and rural districts.

As a superintendent of a small district, I really [understand] the number of demands upon us, the number of roles we play. . . . At the end of the day, you are one or two people trying to fulfill every role. . . .<sup>85</sup>

Technical know-how is a matter of sufficient time, knowledge, and staff: the capacity to put policy into practice is fundamentally relative:

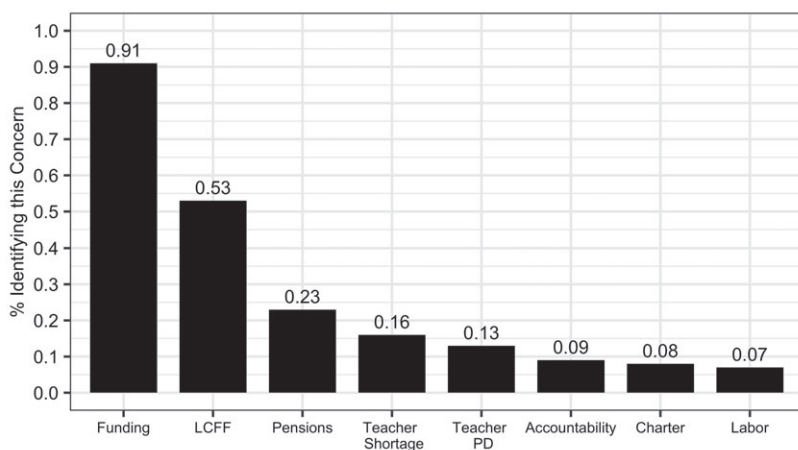
implementation is not always as easy in a smaller school. With only 8 certificated staff, 7 are full time teachers, it is tough to hit all the buttons in a high school but still comply with sometimes unrealistic necessities or levels of achievement that are expected at, say, a school of four thousand with 75 staff.<sup>86</sup>

The circumstances that predict problems of overload intersect with economic conditions. Studies suggest states that struggled economically in the 2008 Great Recession struggled to implement elements of standards-based reform reflected in the Race to the Top criteria. The economic impact that emerged across states manifests within states as well.

We are pretty much faced with financial turmoil. . . . Curriculum is not even on our radar when it comes to a sense of priority, it's the budget.<sup>87</sup>

Our interviews with California superintendents found funding concerns ranked at the top of superintendents' priorities.<sup>88</sup> Matters central to instructional practice, including professional development and materials, generated little superintendent attention, as figure 5.11 illustrates.

When it comes to instructional materials, California has an architecture



**Figure 5.11.** Top superintendent concerns, 2017.

*Source:* Structured interviews conducted with a stratified random sample of California school district superintendents between June and October 2017. See Appendix for selection information and interview protocol. Respondents listed multiple concerns.

of relatively robust organizational infrastructure. As a “textbook adoption” state for grades K–8, the state has the potential authority to curate the space of instructional materials. The lack of convergence, however, has yielded a mile-long list. Another dimension of stakeholder divergence manifests between mezzo-level policy makers and educators, with an apparent lack of constituency interest in curating the space.<sup>89</sup>

#### FEEDBACK FROM OVERLOAD

Overload is neither benign nor neutral. Classic accounts of street-level bureaucrats flag overload as a chief contributor to the rationing of services, in ways that might discriminate or might not comport with program objectives. Our interviews suggest that overload was keenly felt in small districts and in under-resourced districts. The lack of meaningful curation at the state level shifts the burden to the district level, to districts that are differentially situated to shoulder that burden. In ways, this creates a version of the lemons-on-the-lot problem, putting the burden on the consumer to discern which of the products are lemons.<sup>90</sup> This can feed into downstream inefficiencies and inequities.<sup>91</sup> Nongovernmental organizations like EngageNY, Student Achievement Partners, and others provided tools to help curate the space, stepping in to support states, counties, and districts.<sup>92</sup> Yet the scope of NGO coverage limits its potential to support curation, which we discuss more fully in chapter 6. The problems overload poses to mezzo-level policy makers—thanks to the absence of stakeholder convergence, not just active divergence—manifest in Tennessee also in the context of professional development policies.

### **Overload and Tennessee Professional Development**

Like instructional materials in California, professional development policies in Tennessee embodied reforms to the reform. And as with California’s instructional materials, professional development for teachers in Tennessee emerged over time with supportive organizational connections relative to the task. Also like California, reforms produced problems of overload: Tennessee professional development policies layered on top of each other as stakeholders struggled to converge on a particular course of action.

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN TENNESSEE: ORGANIZATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND SHIFTING POLITICS

While California was an early leader in state-level standards-based reforms in the late twentieth century, Tennessee became a focal point for

standards-based reforms in the 2000s. Consistent with Congressman Garfield's 1867 wish for evidence to shame "delinquent states" into action, bad news propelled policy momentum for standards-based reforms in Tennessee. For Tennessee, the bad news came from comparisons of Tennessee with other states enabled by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and appeared in the 2007 US Chamber of Commerce report *Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness*: Tennessee's grades in the report reflected statewide performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that was lower than the national average.<sup>93</sup> The report awarded Tennessee a D for overall student achievement in the state, an F for achievement among low-income and/or minority students, and an F for overall student college and career readiness.

The report helped ignite political mobilization that nudged Tennessee policy makers to pursue several components of standards-based reforms.<sup>94</sup> This reform approach identified fragmentation in the elements of American instruction as contributing to low and unequal performance, and maintained that more ambitious and more equitable student performance would arise from closer alignment between state educational standards, curriculum, and assessments.

On the heels of the report, Tennessee joined the American Diploma Project Network and launched the Tennessee Diploma Project.<sup>95</sup> The national network connected Tennessee with Achieve Inc., a nonprofit organization leading the initiative, and twenty-nine other states who were trying to align high school standards, curriculum, assessments, and accountability policies with college and career demands. The Tennessee Diploma Project was led by a committee of business and educational leaders as well as state and local government officials who sought to "build public and stakeholder support for raising education standards in a manner that rises above politics and partisanship."<sup>96</sup>

Shortly afterward, in January 2010, the Tennessee state legislature passed the "First to the Top Act," requiring that student achievement and growth data be incorporated into teacher evaluations.<sup>97</sup> Heralded as the largest piece of education legislation in the state since the early 1990s, it carried impressive bipartisan support as well as backing from the teachers' association.<sup>98</sup> Tennessee followed this up with an application for a federal Race to the Top grant, which would provide federal funding for elements of standards-based reform. The application carried the support of all of the school districts in the state, the Tennessee Education Association, and all of the state's gubernatorial candidates looking to replace then Governor Phil Bredesen. The "Expect More, Achieve More Coalition" formed in 2012 was an alliance between business and community



members to support standards-based reforms. Stakeholder convergence, however, did not last long.

As part of its Race to the Top commitments, Tennessee took steps toward incorporating assessment results into teacher evaluations, which sent shock waves through the state's system of public education.

At the time, educators were reeling from new state tests, first administered in 2009 before Huffman's arrival, that dropped student proficiency rates in grades 3 to 8 from about 90 percent to about 35 percent in math and 45 percent in reading. Those scores would now be included as part of teachers' evaluations, leading many teachers to panic.<sup>99</sup>

Tennessee was rewarded financially, however, for resolutely moving down the path of standards-based reforms. Shortly after the passage of the "First to the Top Act," Tennessee received one of the first Race to the Top grants from the US Department of Education, obtaining \$501 million from the federal government to pursue standards-based reforms. The Tennessee legislature went on to adopt the Common Core State Standards in the summer of 2010, with support from all school districts in the state.<sup>100</sup> The extent of school district support was impressive, considering underlying concerns about the steep declines in student scores after Tennessee's 2009 assessment adoption and simmering educator concerns about having their evaluations linked to students' achievement on those assessments. Tennessee announced it would join the PARCC assessment consortium, along with states including New York and Florida, to assess students' progress toward achieving the standards specified in the Common Core.

What mezzo-level policy making emerged? After receiving federal funding through Race to the Top grants, Tennessee pursued sets of reforms around standards and assessments, data systems, and teacher and leader effectiveness. A central part of state agency policy making in this era focused on providing professional development for teachers, and having that professional development connected with the content of the state's educational standards.<sup>101</sup>

When mezzo-level policy makers survey their organizational landscapes, they also assess whether and how their organizational components connect with each other to get work done: what agency connections exist to transmit knowledge between and among units responsible for developing policy and putting it into practice. In Tennessee, an important part of this organizational connective tissue emerged in 2011, as the Tennessee Department of Education reorganized and reimagined the work of its eight regional service centers, the Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE). These regional offices are arms of the state department—different from

the autonomous county offices that exist in many other states.<sup>102</sup> The state organized them to align with the core elements of instructional support, and coordinated state policy implementation in partnership with them.<sup>103</sup> The Tennessee Department of Education also developed and invested in a Division of Research and Strategy, providing it with funding and staff to enable evidence-based answers to pressing policy questions facing the state agency.<sup>104</sup> And it sought advice from a leadership council composed of respected school and district leaders,<sup>105</sup> and partnered with research universities, including the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning and Vanderbilt University's Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation, and Development.<sup>106</sup>

In this fast-changing terrain, the 2011–2012 school year brought many of these state-level policy decisions into classrooms and quickly revealed the fragility of stakeholder support. In particular, significant backlash emerged in response to the state's new teacher evaluation system, which was part of the First to the Top legislation. Teachers and administrators raised concerns over many features of the new system. Some concerns focused on the fact that the majority of teachers, including those who taught untested subjects and grades, would have school-wide student achievement data used for 35 percent of their evaluations. Other concerns were that the new system placed considerable demands on administrators' time in the form of classroom observations, pre- and post-observation conferences, and additional paperwork.<sup>107</sup> These challenges made national headlines, prompting questions among some policy makers as to whether Tennessee's experience with teacher evaluations would prevent other states from taking on such policies.<sup>108</sup> By December 2011, only a few months into the implementation of the new teacher evaluation system, Tennessee Governor William Haslam (R) had the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) conduct a statewide "listening tour" and independent review of the policy.<sup>109</sup> Piles of policies began to accumulate.<sup>110</sup>

## POLICY LAYERS AND OVERLOAD

In addition to policies focused on teacher evaluation, another stream of policies focused on standards: mezzo-level policy makers and practitioners moved forward with the Common Core State Standards, starting with the youngest grades. The same year Tennessee implemented the new teacher evaluations, teachers in grades K–2 were responsible for implementing the CCSS. Before the school year began, the Tennessee Department of Education convened six summer sessions about the standards for school administrators (over 4,000, a significant majority, participated) and eight sessions for K–2 teachers (more than 1,200 participated).<sup>111</sup>

Another stream of policies focused on and invested in teachers' professional development: Tennessee invested an additional \$2 million beyond the \$3.2 million Race to the Top funds to offer professional development. The professional development process began in the spring of 2012 by recruiting 200 coaches drawn from fifty-six districts. These "Core Coaches" received training on how to train other teachers to teach in ways consistent with the grades 3–8 math standards. Those 200 coaches went on to train 11,000 teachers in the first year of the summer program, reaching teachers in all but one of Tennessee's school districts.<sup>112</sup> The Tennessee Department of Education recruited even more coaches the following year—700—and provided summer professional development to over 29,000 Tennessee educators, effectively reaching almost half of the state's educators. The summer training continued into 2014, reaching even more Tennessee educators.<sup>113</sup>

The policy making flurry continued.<sup>114</sup> The Instructional Partnership Initiative launched in 2013 through a peer-to-peer study that matched teachers based on the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) rubric and expanded to ninety-three schools by 2014. A similar program for principals began as well. Other efforts to expand teacher-coaches worked through the Teacher Leadership Network, which began in six districts and consisted of teams of four people from each participating district working directly with the Tennessee Department of Education to develop district plans. Supported by the regional CORE, the number of participating districts grew to fifty-nine by 2016–2017.<sup>115</sup>

While stakeholder support for the general approach of standards-based reforms persisted, specific components of the Common Core State Standards Initiative encountered blowback.<sup>116</sup> One part of the blowback focused on the assessment. In 2014, the Tennessee state legislature delayed PARCC testing and opened up a competitive bidding process for the assessment that would be used to measure student achievement, effectively ending Tennessee's participation in PARCC. The new commissioner, Candice McQueen, launched Tennessee Succeeds: a "Tennessee-specific plan" rather than the Common Core.<sup>117</sup> While similar to the Common Core standards in many respects, the standards emerged from extensive processes to elicit and consider stakeholder perspectives on the content of the academic standards Tennessee would use. Tennessee educators played central roles in the standards development and review process. From a mezzo-level perspective:

[the State Board has] a small staff, but I think the lion's share of the work is really [done by] our educators. That's why they're such a critical component in the process and the success of the standards. . . . Their buy-in, their expertise, their willingness to commit just countless hours and come

together as teams, often who will disagree, but in a healthy productive way. I mean, I think the biggest role, and it's an important role, that [the State Board staff] play is facilitating and making sure that, when they come together, that their time is as well spent as possible.<sup>118</sup>

The ensuing Tennessee standards sought to rebuild stakeholder convergence<sup>119</sup> around ambitious standards:

we've got standards, not only that we think are pressure tested and really represent the richness and the rigor that we want our students to be learning, but we've had so many educators and so many stakeholders, and so many just public voices involved that people's understanding and awareness of the standards has really increased as well.<sup>120</sup>

Involving educators deeply in the process of standards development, as well as in the process of peer professional-development, constituted a crucial pathway for forging stakeholder support for the general idea of standards-based reforms and the specific policy decisions emerging from the Tennessee Department of Education and State Board.

I think all of the educators that we work with who've played a pivotal role in the review process itself, whether they were on one of our review committees or whether they were part of the standards recommendation committee, uniformly those were teachers, and educators, and sometimes they were administrators or other central office staff, said that it was some of the best professional learning they ever had . . . we saw some significant difference in those who were really deeply involved. I think for those individuals, and it wasn't a small number really. I mean you look across the four areas [Math, ELA, Social Studies, Science] it was a pretty significant number of teachers. We continue to hear really positive, constructive feedback about the process.<sup>121</sup>

Amid the flurry of policies—some of which focused on professional development and others of which focused on standards-based reforms more generally—came additional policies focused on specific types of teachers' professional development needs, such as a pilot program focused on micro-credentialing and Tennessee's Read to be Ready program, designed to support literacy instruction in the early grades. Two-thirds of Tennessee's districts opted into the Read to be Ready program, which funded coaches for three years. The state trained 200 coaches, who in turn trained 3,000 teachers.

State mezzo-level policy makers also worked with The New Teacher

Project (TNTP) to develop better instructional materials and incorporate those materials into teacher training. For segments of professional development policies, like Read to be Ready, mezzo-level leaders learned from early experiences. After the program's first year in operation, mezzo-level leaders in the state agency recognized that teachers embraced the program's ideas, but they did not see significant changes in teachers' practice or in student learning.

[The Office of Academic Strategy and Operations] had done some analysis of folks who attended the training. Did they have higher levels of student growth or achievement the next year? By and large that wasn't showing up. It showed up for the folks that facilitated those trainings because we did a train the trainer model. If you were a facilitator, you taught the topic several times in a row you actually did see positive effects. For somebody who just spent two to four days over the summer, there was no real noticeable effect. Which makes sense when you think about the PD [professional development] literature.<sup>122</sup>

These tepid results emerged despite palpable enthusiasm and stakeholder support for the trainings. As one state leader noted,

I've been in Tennessee 13 years, it was the one time that I felt like there was really a unified, strong, collaborative partnership statewide also based on the same outcome.<sup>123</sup>

Mezzo-level policy makers, drawing on emerging evidence, sought to learn from experience and consider alternative policy strategies.

as the state was transitioning to Common Core, we had what we call the TN Core Trainings where we had Race to the Top money. One summer was training 30,000 teachers, 50,000 [at the] other. Big, exciting, glamorous work. Don't have the money for that anymore. There was some funding, a reasonable amount, put aside from the general assembly to carry out standards implementation trainings. The department had, I wanna say, three or four million dollars for the ELA trainings. It's probably 1.5 to 2 million for science. I think it will be about a million for social studies, maybe \$500,000. . . . The challenge was we've done the big scale direct-to-teacher training before. Don't have that money [now], and also don't always know that it got the most bang for their buck.<sup>124</sup>

In the context of this support and awareness that teachers' practices were not changing in significant ways, policy makers started "really zero-

ing in on the types of questions and tasks teachers were using with their students,”<sup>125</sup> which then led to the creation of “unit starters”:

designed to build conceptual knowledge, as well as to provide models and exemplars of how . . . a unit of instruction can be delivered where it embraces or reflects all of the aspects of literacy instruction.<sup>126</sup>

Yet, even at the end of Read to be Ready’s third year, this produced new problems: misuse of the unit starters, particularly by teachers who did not have a coach to help guide them in their intended use; confusion over the state’s position on phonics; concerns about the curriculum materials used by teachers; and interest in influencing the preparation of new teachers entering Tennessee’s schools.

Another approach entailed focusing more specifically on building district capacity:

The way that the training was designed last year was to think through using the district as the lever. How can we increase district capacity to train their own teachers? What is it that they need? We realized . . . there’s a huge variation in capacity. You have some places like Metro Nashville that might have five people at central office devoted just to ELA and math. Then you have our smaller, more rural districts where one person’s the academic dean, or the academic superintendent for everything, plus does federal programs, etc., etc. They tried to design it where districts could pick and choose what they were taking from the state.<sup>127</sup>

Building district capacity entailed, in part, supporting heterogeneous district needs, drawing on the CORE offices to help:

the department called district team trainings where in each of the eight core regions, the field service regions that we break up the state in, there was a training for district teams of about six people including assistant superintendent of instruction, and ELA or math specialist, a PD specialist. . . . At those trainings they really walked through why are there new standards, what was the process of getting them, what’s the high-level overview of what’s changed about ELA and math, and then how do those things connect to things like the instructional materials you adopt and the benchmark assessments you adopt. Because it really just can’t be, “Here’s some new standards. Good luck,” for teachers. It needs to be how does this integrate with everything else we do. It concluded with the different professional development options that the state was providing to districts. Districts, at the end of it sat down and made their own what looked like little

flow charts. . . . They're different models to choose from. Then districts got the chance to sit down, and to work with specialists at the core office and say, "What are my needs, and how do I wanna approach this . . . ?"<sup>128</sup>

Despite tremendous efforts, starting in the late 2000s, to build and sustain a political infrastructure for a collection of standards-based reforms in Tennessee—like Read to be Ready—the challenge of sustaining stakeholder convergence plagued the state's policy efforts. The state had three governors and five commissioners of education<sup>129</sup> in the 2010s. Along with these changes in top-level policy makers came a steady stream of policies, drawing on evidence and experience; but the accumulation of all of these state-level policies created a multitude of layers for mezzo-level policy makers to sort through and navigate as they produced mezzo-level policy.<sup>130</sup>

Above and beyond the policies specifically focused on standards, assessment, and teacher coaching came additional professional development efforts, including the Leading Innovation for Tennessee program, focused on thirteen district superintendents,<sup>131</sup> and efforts to learn systematically through the Tennessee Education Research Alliance. And yet, policies and programs continued to accumulate.<sup>132</sup> Some policies came and went: funding for Read to be Ready was not renewed after its initial three years and came to an end in 2019 under a new governor and education commissioner. The challenge for mezzo-level policy makers was not just policies coming and going, however, but also prioritizing the piles of policies in place at any particular point in time. Such accumulations of policies interfere with sustained investment in particular policy directions.<sup>133</sup>

some of the work that we're trying to do is deep and requires a depth of knowledge that needs to be built over time. You're not going to see the kinds of outcomes that people want to see in a two, three, four-year effort. I mean it's going to take a sustained focus. I think what district schools and the state needs to do is persist. Pick what it's gonna focus on and do the deep work and persevere through the hard times and obviously modify and use data along the way to inform and continuously improve, but I think consistency is what is really needed for us to really begin to move the needle in some of this work.<sup>134</sup>

## FEEDBACK FROM REFORMING THE REFORM

Tennessee offers a model of ongoing reform that accompanied repeated shifts in political leadership and state politics. Lack of stable convergence

around a coherent set of specific professional development priorities meant that policy makers initiated a range of professional development approaches but didn't build a stable infrastructure that would abet coherence among the different approaches or invest continuously in those approaches.<sup>135</sup> Standards-based reforms, for instance, launched with interest and support from business leaders in students' college and career readiness. That interest has shifted, as business leaders look to other points of leverage:

the combination of the slow pace of education reform . . . compared to the pace of change in the business community . . . financial pressures, particularly . . . the recession . . . business guys have other things to do with their time, it's harder to find ones who want to be part of something like this.<sup>136</sup>

Sustaining stakeholder convergence is notoriously difficult, especially when reform reveals intertwined rather than quick-fix problems.

Lacking coherence and investment in sustainment is conducive to what Suzanne Mettler calls the "policyscape"—or a landscape littered with policies that lack the resources for subsequent development and maintenance.<sup>137</sup> The mezzo-level policy maker's plea noted above contains several elements. One element is to have a focal point: "Pick what it's gonna focus on." A second element is investment: "do the deep work." A third is stability: "and persevere through the hard times." A fourth is to learn: "obviously modify and use data along the way to inform and continuously improve." And a fifth is, ultimately, improvement: "I think consistency is what is really needed for us to really begin to move the needle in some of this work."<sup>138</sup> The littered "policyscape" inadvertently imposes additional costs on mezzo-level policy makers who have to pay the price of navigating the multiple policies started by higher levels of government, but not sustained. Some districts look to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to help them navigate the terrain. Some such organizations have taken root in Tennessee precisely because the state has not sustained its investment in professional development or in helping districts develop the capacity they need to bring ambitious teaching and learning into all classrooms.<sup>139</sup> Working with NGOs to provide the support that might otherwise come from state or district sources, however, comes with a price tag attached, which districts are differentially positioned to afford.

## Conclusion

Organizational connections are crucial for ideas to spread across states and within states. But organizational connections—or centralization—



alone do not solve the ongoing problems of reform when ideas outpace stakeholder convergence at the mezzo level. Nevertheless, calls for greater centralization abound alongside indictments of “top-down” approaches to education reform. Yet, organizational solutions alone may not yield stakeholder convergence.<sup>140</sup> Politics matters. We can’t design politics out of policy, nor would we want to. Contestation is the lifeblood of democracy. Yet contestation comes with consequences, especially for mezzo-level policy makers who typically operate outside the limelight of political spectacles. We highlight the implications of contestation here.

In the fractured terrain of American federalism, it’s remarkable that meaningful organizational connections manifest at all. Even with meaningful connections, the burden of overload falls on under-resourced shoulders. Those burdens amplify further in the absence of organizational connections, which we consider next in problems of pockets of policy making.

## 6 \* Problems of Policy Pockets

WITH CADENCE WILLSE

Rapidly spreading reforms lead to one class of problems. Reforms that struggle to go anywhere or struggle to go far lead to another. The infrastructure to support reform hinges on both political and organizational capabilities: converged political support, organizational connections, and the know-how to do what the reforms aspire to do. In the absence of connections across organizational components, mezzo-level policy makers can spend a lot of time reinventing wheels their neighbors have already constructed.

Connections across organizational units can help mezzo-level policy makers develop the wherewithal to address new circumstances. In the midst of the chaos that defined the COVID-19 spring of 2020, “picking up the phone” emerged as a theme across our conversations with mezzo-level policy makers. Superintendents with prior connections and relationships with other district superintendents spoke about sharing their knowledge with their peers:

I think people really stepped up in a difficult time to try to do what needed to be done, and that was impressive to see . . . that’s the good about the county office networks, they know each other well across the state. They are used to collaborating. Then that grew into other priorities, which I think again, allowed the district teams and schools to concentrate and know that there was support there when they needed it. They could easily pick up the phone.<sup>1</sup>

Some county offices in California had strong relationships with the districts in their county, paving the way for support in the midst of COVID. Superintendents in both of our states tapped other superintendents they had worked with before:

my peers. I can text them, call them, email them, whatever, and say, “What are you all doin’ for this,” and we have a quick little side conversation on it.<sup>2</sup>

Yet these mezzo-level policy makers also spoke about wishing they had more or different kinds of connections that would enable them to learn other things, from other people outside of their usual networks.

I would like to know how they have dealt with this in other parts of the country. . . . What'd everybody else do with their K-2? What are you looking at doin' differently? Those are the platforms that we don't get a lot of specifics. What did y'all do? What are you doing? . . . That's what I'd like to see. In different parts of the country, what are they doing? Because we communicate with each other, and we communicate with people that we know in surrounding counties that do the same jobs we do. We have no idea, beyond a 100-mile radius, what other people are doin'. I would like to know 'cause it may be somethin' we could learn from too, and we've got none of that.<sup>3</sup>

This sentiment—"What are you doing . . . I would like to know 'cause it may be somethin' we could learn from too"—goes to the heart of reform.<sup>4</sup> Recall, reforms seek to change the status quo in durable ways. Reforms are not one-off changes, but ongoing efforts at transformation, even if they're niche. Weak organizational connections put boundaries on the scope and reach of reform aspirations.

As we learned from chapter 4, boundaries can be good things. Boundaries can help harness energy in areas where supportive infrastructure is in place. Electricity that leaps beyond those boundaries—exceeding the power source infrastructure—can bring down the whole reform operation. Going off the grid constitutes a different form of boundary. The benefits from reforms off the grid, however, may be limited to the area within a particular boundary and keep reforms from going to scale.

Pockets of policy making, operating off the grid, can appear in small areas, but may be unable to expand more broadly beyond those pockets, so that other mezzo-level policy makers can learn "what other people are doin'." Knowledge and know-how are crucial to reform.<sup>5</sup> Yet, without connective tissue to link practitioners, it is hard for that knowledge to spread. Inequities lingering from the inherited terrain of previous policy choices can set the stage for isolation; reforms can strive to address this isolation, but may exacerbate it nonetheless when organizational infrastructure is lacking. We examine the problems of policy making pockets nationally and at the state level in California and Tennessee. We examine pockets nationally through federal-level investments in Comprehensive School Reform designs in the 1990s, made possible through the Obey-Porter Act. We also examine pockets through Tennessee's CORE offices and California's efforts at professional development. In all three cases, stakeholder

support converged—at least for a time—to support the reforms, but the lack of organizational connections discouraged the reforms’ spread.

## Problems of Pockets

### THE INHERITED TERRAIN FOR POCKETS AND COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM

From the vantage point of American federalism, the content of public school instruction and the elements that support instruction are state and local responsibilities. Federal-level policy, however, can bear on those responsibilities, and has done so through a handful of reform-oriented policies from the past fifty years.

Some policy approaches, like the accountability portions of standards-based reforms that have been part of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act’s reauthorizations, have assumed that instructional improvement will follow more explicit incentives for student academic performance. These rigid accountability approaches appear to have affected instruction by limiting the subject matter that teachers teach and students have exposure to. But they have not yielded impressive evidence of instructional improvement. Other policies, like Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, have provided state and local education agencies with financial resources, but have largely taken a hands-off approach to instructional support. States have generally used Title II funds to bring more adults into children’s classrooms: hiring more teachers or teachers’ aides.

Federal-level policies that have focused more explicitly on supporting instruction through instructional materials or professional development have been relatively rare, but they have been important. At around the same time the National Assessment of Educational Progress began to develop in the 1960s, the National Science Foundation invested in an effort to augment the scientific rigor of science curriculum. It convened panels of scientific experts which produced a critically acclaimed set of curricular materials titled *Man: A Course of Study*. Though it produced new instructional materials, the effort failed to take root: teachers who received the new materials did not know how to use them, or use them well, or see reason to invest their time in learning to use them.<sup>6</sup>

Over the next thirty years, the federal government was largely hands-off with respect to both instructional materials and teachers’ knowledge of how to use those materials, leaving those policy decisions to states and localities. While states required teachers to earn continuing education credits, that continuing education was rarely deeply connected to class-

room practice, nor were district professional development policies closely connected to the instructional materials they purchased. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, private textbook publishers constituted key suppliers of teachers' professional development. But publisher-provided professional development was typically limited and brief.

As the ideas underlying standards-based reforms began percolating in the 1980s, several federal-level policy threads emerged and converged. Notably, the ideas conveyed in standards-based reforms began to manifest in the signature federal policy: Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, reauthorized in 1988 and 1994. Federal-level policy began promoting the idea of high standards and accountability for schools to meet those standards, though the incentive structure in 1988 and 1994 was mild compared with the punitive versions that took shape in the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act. The idea that improvement should focus on entire schools also emerged as a core component of standards-based reform. It is useful to pause for a moment to underscore the importance of this development. For decades, federal policy had been built on the idea of the child as "the problem," or as the unit of intervention.<sup>7</sup> This idea had roots, at the time, in pedagogical practice and in the culture of American racism. It also helped create clean audit trails. Focusing services on particular children in particular classrooms facilitated state and federal financial oversight.<sup>8</sup> This began to pivot with the influential work of Mike Smith, who began his work on transforming education in the Carter administration and whose later scholarship in the 1980s called to change the approach to whole-school interventions.<sup>9</sup> While school-wide Title I programs had been technically possible in the late 1970s, they faced steep administrative barriers, and schools rarely pursued school-wide approaches, at least initially. The 1988 reauthorization of Title I both made school-wide programs more administratively feasible and began to embed ideas about having ambitious expectations for all children.

Along with this pivot toward whole-school interventions came renewed attention to the elements of instruction and the elements that support instruction. Some of this attentiveness arose at the intersection of public-private partnerships. Notably, the New American School Development Corporation took off in 1991, thanks to \$130 million in public-private funding, with the charge of developing "break the mold designs" for whole-school reforms.<sup>10</sup> This effort received a significant boost in 1997 with the passage of the Obey-Porter Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Act, which established a \$150 million (annual) competitive grant process to which states could apply and with which states could combine some of their Title I funds.<sup>11</sup> A subsequent competitive grant funded through the Reading Excellence Act (REA) put more money on the

table for states and schools, along with the incentives for improvement that No Child Left Behind ratcheted up.

The Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) designs that emerged took different approaches to whole-school reform. Some models, like Success for All, consisted of highly scripted elements that provided teachers with explicit directions for conducting their classes, along with the materials they should use. Other models, like the Accelerated Schools Project, built on the idea that comprehensive school reform needed to emerge organically: deliberative processes at the school level would determine the content direction of the effort, and the nature of the instructional support elements. Still other models, like America's Choice, which focused on writing, offered elements of instructional infrastructure, but with less of a script than Success for All.

The Comprehensive School Reform designs brought impressive technical know-how to the table,<sup>12</sup> and criteria in the competitive award process sought research-based or research-validated reforms. Research-based award processes are not impervious to manipulation.<sup>13</sup> But like the NSF curricular efforts of the 1960s, the Comprehensive School Reform designs sought to base the reform designs on a knowledge base that could be examined, refuted, refined, and validated.

Unlike the NSF science curriculum efforts of the 1960s, however, the CSRs sought to extend technical know-how throughout the process of putting the curriculum into practice. While the designs ostensibly reflected technical know-how at the development stage, they explicitly sought ways to develop technical know-how for users and administrators, consistent with learning from the limitations of the NSF curricula and its failures to get off the ground in a meaningful way.

Also in contrast to the NSF curricula, the CSRs enjoyed several strands of stakeholder convergence. The reforms generated bipartisan support in Congress. States supported the competitive grant approach, making the reforms optional but not mandatory. Locally, the reforms required votes of at least 80 percent buy-in from teachers and administrators to ensure local receptivity to the reform effort.

#### WEAK ORGANIZATIONAL CONNECTIONS

The CSRs reflected reforms of prior reforms. Yet, these reforms collided with a weakly connected organizational terrain. The reform designs emerged through public-private partnerships, inserting the space of non-governmental providers into the terrain. Nongovernmental partnerships with public education agencies have been part of the education landscape for centuries. These partnerships bring both technical expertise and

opportunities to stitch political stakeholders together. Yet, along with these partnerships come loose agency connections, which can be amenable to spreading ideas but can also pose barriers to changing all of the interconnected elements of instruction embedded in social and economic contexts.<sup>14</sup> The experiences from the three CSRs that Cohen, Peurach, Glazer, Gates and Goldin examined are instructive.

Of the three designs that Cohen and colleagues examined, Success for All managed to sustain and spread over time. SFA began in the late 1980s, and as of 2020 was operating in over 1,000 K–6 elementary schools throughout the United States. Focused on students' reading, the program provides specific instructional materials for teachers to use to teach reading. Moreover, in contrast to the problems that arose with the NSF curriculum in the 1960s, SFA provides teachers with extensive opportunities to learn how to use the SFA materials, including ongoing assistance for teachers that occurs in schools, continued opportunities for professional development, and opportunities for teachers to connect with other teachers in the SFA community of practice. SFA has amassed a record for effectiveness. Several studies have found that participation in SFA significantly improves students' reading comprehension and phonics abilities.<sup>15</sup> One study suggests the academic improvement SFA displays is about twice the level of improvement that typical programs funded by Title I provide.<sup>16</sup> Given all the barriers to improvement, these are impressive results, occurring in a range of geographic locations. On the one hand, reaching 1,000 schools is an impressive accomplishment. On the other, this represents a tiny fraction of the more than 87,000 public elementary schools in operation in over 13,000 school districts. For the 1,000 schools where it operates, SFA demonstrates both instructional support and student achievement. Its reach, however, remains quite limited.

The reach of the other two interventions has also been limited. America's Choice, which focused on writing, also provided support for the elements of instruction in ways that combined high-quality materials with ongoing professional development. America's Choice was well-designed and well-implemented. As it moved into scaling, however, it struggled. Pearson bought the not-for-profit and changed its approach to professional development, no longer offering ongoing, sustained learning opportunities taught by educational professionals. As of this writing, America's Choice no longer operates as a distinct intervention, nor is its intensive support model available through Pearson. The Accelerated Learning Project, unlike the other two, failed to demonstrate discernible improvement of teaching and learning. While the design focused (admirably) on the organic identification of problems and assets and on tailoring the program to specific schools, it did not offer sustained, consistent support for the instructional

core. The project has taken on several forms and several institutional homes, and it has operated in 1,700 schools over its lifespan. Again, however, this represents a tiny fraction of American public schools, and therefore addresses only a tiny fraction of the need for instructional support.

Investments in Comprehensive School Reform designs reflected elements of reform. Moreover, student and educator learning have also manifested in the geographical and institutional pockets where Success for All and America's Choice operated. Yet without ongoing connections across organizations,<sup>17</sup> the pockets of learning the CSRs produced struggle to sustain and struggle to spread. A similar struggle faced Tennessee's Center of Regional Excellence.

### **Pockets: Tennessee Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE)**

Tennessee embodies state-led but locally dependent public education. When compared with California, Tennessee appears much more centralized in terms of state-level guidance and support for districts through professional development and teacher evaluations. Yet the state depends vitally on local districts to do the work of school governance. As standards-based reform policies emerged at the state level in Tennessee, state-level policy makers sought to thread the needle of state-led but locally dependent public education in key aspects of instructional support and improvement.<sup>18</sup> As one interviewee remarked,

the state's role to support districts in the initial rollout of standards is important. . . . Then ensuring that districts take the baton and run with it is also something that we have to encourage and facilitate. We [the state] can't be the ones that are solely responsible for ensuring teacher understanding and application of standards.<sup>19</sup>

In sharp contrast to California, however, which left teacher understanding and application of standards to districts and counties, the state developed coordinated regional support centers to systematically help districts with their work.

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL CONNECTIONS THROUGH TENNESSEE'S CENTERS OF REGIONAL EXCELLENCE**

Tennessee's Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE) offices were originally field service centers used for federal monitoring and compliance. Under Commissioner Hoffman's leadership, these eight regional sites switched from compliance to support: a monumental accomplishment.



I think what we realized through beginning the Race to the Top work was that we had mechanisms for the carrot, right, incentivizing behavior, and the stick, the monitoring the accountability, but we didn't have a robust support mechanism.<sup>20</sup>

Renamed in 2012, the CORE offices were intended to become a robust support mechanism, providing instructional support to the districts within each region. Though charged with an ambitious mission, the transformed CORE offices began with a minimal but consistent cadre of staff positions: a CORE director, a data analyst, and a math consultant. CORE staff expanded in later years to include an English Language Arts (ELA) consultant, a career and technical education consultant, an interventionist, a Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) evaluation coach,<sup>21</sup> and an administrative assistant.

The early work of the CORE Offices focused on building relationships with the districts in each region:

At the very beginning we had a lot of work to do to build trust and relationships.<sup>22</sup>

This wasn't easy. The staff members at the regional offices were still state-level employees. After years of compliance-oriented state-district interactions, it took time to establish the trust needed for new and different kinds of relationships:

We had that we're the state, and they didn't want us to come in and help. They weren't being transparent with their data and what their needs were. I would say the first two years was really just whatever they wanted us to do, we did, trying to build those relationships.<sup>23</sup>

This early work was also focused on raising student test scores.

When we first started, it was very much focused on how is your region moving the numbers for students? Is your region moving the percent proficient—was the language we used at that time—moving the proficiency of students to get a certain mark.<sup>24</sup>

Those involved in these efforts remarked that they were "building a plane in the sky as it was flying,"<sup>25</sup> and commented that the different regions were generally operating independently of each other and without significant guidance from the state, even though each was an arm of the state.

Really, it was good in that we were free to look at our regions and say, “Okay, this is what they need.” The problem . . . with that model is that we were working so independently of each other, that many times the voice was not same.<sup>26</sup>

Mezzo-level policy makers drew on these experiences and modified the CORE offices’ work and approach to embrace and encourage more uniformity across the offices.

We started to realize, “Okay, yes, maybe there was a reason to operate this way, but now we’re not being really strategic with our time and our resources.” We’re very reactive . . . I felt strongly that all of the offices across the state, if we’re going to meet the goals that we have in the state, need to be rowing in the same direction, and doing the same work, versus these completely independent little consultant shops, right, that we’re operating. We started shifting towards some common priorities and pushing those into districts, flipping that script a little bit to push into districts.<sup>27</sup>

This effort to align their work across regions and with the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) led to stronger organizational connections between the eight CORE offices and with the Tennessee Department of Education, helping establish the CORE offices as extensions of the department.<sup>28</sup>

As far as the CORE offices are concerned, we are the department. We do not see ourselves as separate entities.<sup>29</sup>

Simply building those organizational connections to the Tennessee Department of Education, however, did not translate into improved instructional support. While the CORE offices shifted their approach, delivering more aligned content, mezzo-level policy makers were not convinced that this shift was having the desired impact on their districts.

I think what it became in that period was everyone wanted the CORE office to be their solution for delivering the information that they needed to deliver. I think that’s some of why—that’s the time period I described where we were just doing a lot of presenting and training. No one’s really changing anything.<sup>30</sup>

To move beyond presentations and training, the CORE offices built stronger technical know-how to help them work differently with districts. Under Commissioner McQueen’s leadership, the CORE offices began per-

forming “learning walks” in math and literacy.<sup>31</sup> They worked with The New Teacher Project (TNTP) to bring observational tools into these learning walks. And they collaborated with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning to create the Tennessee Early Learning Network to engage in continuous improvement work.

These efforts to build stronger technical know-how in the CORE offices can be seen in the ways that they describe their work.

Our primary focus . . . is engaging deeply with districts around continuous improvement, and so around the instructional core, right? . . . We’re really focused on improving [the instructional core] and engaging with districts in cycles of continuous improvement, starting with diagnosing needs, planning, implementing, and monitoring.<sup>32</sup>

Attending to continuous improvement and the instructional core, the CORE office staff pursued work that looked little like the earlier compliance work the regional centers conducted. Instead:

We spend a lot of our time diagnosing district need and collaboratively planning with districts to try to improve student outcomes. We implement those plans, and we monitor the impact of those plans. Formatively along the way, and then summatively. Make sure that we are doing work in the best interest of students—improve student outcomes. In a nutshell, that would be it.<sup>33</sup>

Mezzo-level policy makers saw this work as critical to moving beyond the delivery of information and helping districts build capacity for improvement.

We’re facilitating [districts] in making decisions and learning in more authentic ways about the work and building their capacity to then lead improvement in their districts.<sup>34</sup>

We’ve tried to push them past [professional development] for stronger and deeper support. It’s worked in some places and not as much in others. That is an area that we’re really trying to push forward. Yes, there is a time for professional learning, but then what?<sup>35</sup>

## PROBLEMS OF POCKETS

The transformation of the CORE offices was, in many ways, extraordinary. Departments of education in other states have become mired in their compliance work and have shown scant evidence of reorienting to

support instructional improvement. Tennessee's transformation provides a model for what agency restructuring that focuses on instructional support can look like.

Yet this work of diagnosing, planning, implementing, and monitoring does not happen with all of the districts across the state.<sup>36</sup> CORE office involvement varies by district and within districts.

We have those [districts] that are comprehensive. We're in there quite often. Then, we have something called targeted districts. That part of the targeted district could be anywhere from, we see them once every other month, once a quarter, once a semester, just dependent on what their target area's need is. We have some—they're just there for consulting. They'll call me if they've got a question or something like that. We don't really have an active role in their district, just dependent on where they are and what they wanna use us for.<sup>37</sup>

For some districts, CORE office involvement is "light," more like "touchpoints" than deep instructional support.

Then we have levels to where—for instance, I have districts that I just do basic touchpoints. I make sure that they have communication, they know what's going on, but my team isn't necessarily in their districts working with their schools or working with the district office. If we host regional events, they'll come to those, but they are just light touchpoints. There's the variability of support that we offer within our districts.<sup>38</sup>

For other districts, CORE office involvement is much more extensive.

We have the partnerships where it's more comprehensive. We have some partnerships that are kind of the next level down, where we're supporting them in some ways that they may be in a place where they're able to carry a lot more of that early on. Maybe we're helping them diagnose the problem and think about planning, but then they're moving forward with that on their own, or maybe they need help with identifying how do we track this throughout the year? Here's what we're looking at doing. That would be something where it's not—it's still hands-on, but not as in-depth.<sup>39</sup>

The CORE offices also offer regional assistance.

Then, we have the last level of support that is more for like things we do regionally, where all [of our] districts are involved in that. That would be,

we do support districts in their district-level planning every year. We do some regional sessions to help them get started with that.<sup>40</sup>

Altogether, this means only some of Tennessee's 100-plus school districts receive the most comprehensive support from their CORE office. Some of this variation stems from different levels of need: not all districts may need the same level of instructional support. But some of this variation also stems from differences in district priorities and willingness to invest in instructional support. Ultimately, this means that the CORE offices' continuous improvement work with districts to support instruction appears only in pockets. Some of this is a function of limits on CORE office wherewithal to provide support:

We can't work with everybody. We just can't. We just don't have enough people. We don't have the capacity in the offices to do that.<sup>41</sup>

Some of this is a function of variation in district interest in receiving instructional support.

Well, I have a great relationship with all of the district leaders within [my CORE Region], but there are some that just, as leaders, like to do their own thing and maybe have more of a closed system of support. With that, again, they're the ones that just want you to make sure—"Keep them in the loop;" that's a quote that I received from a particular director of schools. "You are supporting me when you're just keeping me in the loop of communication and making sure I need to know what I need to be turning in as far as deadlines, et cetera." That's where he wants to keep his support, to where there are some where my team's in every week.<sup>42</sup>

Though the CORE offices are an arm of the state agency, they cannot require districts to work with them, and the state does not provide financial incentives for districts to work with their CORE offices. Instead, the connections between the CORE offices and the districts are voluntary: the CORE offices are dependent on districts' willingness to participate in the work with them.<sup>43</sup>

I'm not writing people checks over here, and all I've got is influence. I called it RTI squared, relationships, trust, influence and inspiration. If I can't inspire somebody, or influence somebody to do something that makes sense for student outcomes, then I've got problems.<sup>44</sup>

I tell my team this all the time, “We have absolutely no power.” We don’t. We only have influence. Then mostly we have it through us being a resource, an asset to districts. The only way we can continue to be that way is to essentially continue to get results that the district desires to achieve as a result of partnering with us. That’s really the selling-point.<sup>45</sup>

Because the work depends on informal relationships rather than hierarchy, it is sensitive to turnover at both district and CORE office levels.

I think the biggest challenge I face is those districts that have a lot of turnover. We find ourselves having to start anew quite often, which can be frustrating, because you train up, and then visually you build a capacity. Before you know it, they’re gone. You do this more frequently than you like. It becomes a little discouraging, because you think there’s so much potential or opportunity there, once you have someone trained up. Then, for that person then to no longer be a part of that district, you create some concerns. You can’t get the momentum that you know. It’s there because of all these false starts.<sup>46</sup>

Working with “those that are willing”<sup>47</sup> was a central feature of the support the CORE offices were able to provide districts. The CORE offices are clear that while they were able to develop strong organizational connections between the Tennessee Department of Education office in Nashville and the eight regional offices, their work with individual districts is much more dependent on individual relationships and connections they have created.

In some parts of the state, CORE really is in there with them and helping to design their agendas and making recommendations on what kinds of things they could do together. In other regions, they are more independent and want to do their own thing. There’s variation in effectiveness there.<sup>48</sup>

## FEEDBACK FROM POCKETS

Like the Comprehensive School Reform designs, the structure of the CORE offices was anchored in aspects of reforming the reform: an understanding that instructional improvement would need to depart markedly from the compliance-oriented approach of previous arrangements. Like the Comprehensive School Reform designs, the CORE offices provide support to the willing and interested. And like the Comprehensive School Reform designs, the CORE offices have struggled with reach: providing

comprehensive instructional support, grounded in continuous improvement, to all of the districts that would benefit from such support.

Unlike the Comprehensive School Reform designs, the CORE offices had the benefit of a centralized state structure. As arms of the state department of education, they could enjoy some continuity and coherence. The CORE offices were not, for instance, left to their own devices to marshal funding support from foundations, and thus they have the potential for more organizational stability than nongovernmental organizations.

Yet, as arms of the state government, the CORE offices were limited by the same institutional forces that limit state government involvement in the US: centuries of embedded local control, especially for matters of instruction. Even with greater centralization than some other states, local control defines Tennessee teaching and learning. And though governmental organizations often embody stability over time, they are also susceptible to changes in leadership and in political priority. Just as Governor Haslam's priorities helped transform the CORE offices from compliance organizations to instructional support organizations, CORE's mission in instructional support is not cast in amber. Subtle shifts in priorities appeared in the COVID-19 spring of 2020, from district perspectives:

the CORE offices were really—I don't wanna say hijacked, but the State Department pretty much picked them up, took them off of their regular duties, and have them doing the PBS lessons and things like that, that were on television. I don't want to sound like I'm knocking them because I'm not because they were communicative with what they knew and what they were allowed to do.<sup>49</sup>

What the pivot in CORE office attention meant for this mezzo-level policy maker, however, was that they needed to look to each other—rather than to CORE—for the support they needed to navigate the COVID landscape. What starts as pockets of learning can pivot to isolation. The mezzo-level policy maker continued:

My greatest support came from my peers that are in the same position that I am.<sup>50</sup>

### **Pockets and Silos: Professional Development in California**

Compared with Tennessee, California is home to an even less auspicious organizational infrastructure in terms of having a state government agency focused on professional learning.<sup>51</sup> At times, California state-level

policies have invested in some professional development opportunities.<sup>52</sup> Efforts including California's Subject Matter Project and Communities of Practice reflected impressive technical know-how. Yet both of these initiatives struggled to spread that know-how between and within organizations. Some districts and individual teachers do good work, but that good work struggles to make connections to anything else that could abet widespread reform or improvement.<sup>53</sup>

#### THE INHERITED TERRAIN OF CALIFORNIA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

California has been home to policy efforts to support teachers' opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills.<sup>54</sup> Alongside the development of content standards in California in the 1980s came some efforts to support teachers' opportunities to learn so that their instructional practices might be aligned with school improvement efforts. To this end, the governor and legislature formed the California Staff Development Policy Study to produce recommendations on teachers' learning opportunities.<sup>55</sup> Among its findings, the study highlighted the accomplishments and design of the California Writing Project (CWP) and the California Mathematics Project (CMP).

The California Writing Project and Mathematics Project trace their roots back to the 1970s, when James Gray created the Bay Area Writing Project in 1974 through his work at the University of California, Berkeley. Building on the work of the Bay Area Writing Project, the California legislature allocated state funds to support the California Writing Project in 1979 and the California Mathematics Project in 1982.<sup>56</sup> These teacher professional development programs focused on intensive summer institutes in which public school teachers could engage with university faculty on subject matter teaching and learning. The 1987 release of the California Staff Development Policy Study highlighted that: "The CalWriting Project has demonstrated that a teacher-driven model of professional development, built on university-school collaboration and firmly fixed on student learning, can be both effective and efficient."<sup>57</sup> Following the study group's report, the California legislature enacted Senate Bill 1882, titled the Professional Development Act, with a charge to support "a comprehensive, consistent policy toward staff development to the end that each level of the elementary and secondary educational system has an effective staff development component tied directly to an organization improvement plan."<sup>58</sup>

In addition to state-level funding for professional development, SB 1882 codified a network of professional development projects modeled



after the California Writing and Math Projects. SB 1882 expanded beyond mathematics and writing to include nine subject matter projects.<sup>59</sup> SB 1882 also funded regional assistance centers and consortia to provide support for schools' and districts' efforts to build professional development. Some of this professional development linked specifically to the replacement units that had been developed in the 1990s to help align instructional materials with California's standards.<sup>60</sup>

The California Subject Matter Project continues to operate in approximately ninety regional sites, thanks to their reauthorization in 2011.<sup>61</sup> And their continued operation provides a version of reforming reforms.<sup>62</sup> Evaluations have highlighted their virtues, including how their design "puts California in a unique position among the states of having a professional development infrastructure that can respond quickly and flexibly as needs change."<sup>63</sup> Yet, shifting political terrains rendered it difficult for professional development through arrangements like the Subject Matter Project to expand to scale.<sup>64</sup> Some estimates suggested that, even in the 1990s, less than 6 percent of teachers participated in the California Math Project's opportunities for professional development.<sup>65</sup> Shifting political interests have yielded more variability in the CSMP's funding, and lower levels of funding for professional development overall.<sup>66</sup> Even though California did, indeed, invest in teachers' professional development in the 1980s and 1990s, those investments were modest relative to what the standards-based reforms of that era expected and what teachers needed to improve their instructional practice in ambitious ways.<sup>67</sup>

#### EXPANDED NEEDS AND LIMITED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORTS

Those needs skyrocketed with California's adoption of the Common Core State Standards.<sup>68</sup> Along with California's adoption of the Common Core State Standards came vastly more ambitious expectations of teachers' instructional practice. This included new demands for instructional support, including professional development.

So that we continue to improve . . . that's going to involve coaching . . . and intentional technical assistance and real, in-depth examination of the instructional core around the teachers, the students, and the content. This examination needs to involve preparation programs as well so that they are built on similar assumptions.<sup>69</sup>

While vestiges of prior policies persisted from earlier reforms, these vestiges collided with an instructional terrain that lacked the organiza-

tional connections to produce commensurate professional development support for teachers across California.<sup>70</sup>

The thing is, those [prior] standards did not call for huge shifts in instructional practice in the way that the Common Core standards are calling for, yet we haven't made that same kind of investment in professional development that we did back in the early 2000s.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, California's pivot to Local Control Financing Formula and Local Control Accountability Plans codified and reinforced professional development as a mezzo-level policy decision—at both county and district levels—instead of guiding those policy choices at the state level.<sup>72</sup> Along with other LCAP responsibilities, districts are charged with having their professional development plans aligned with their LCAP needs and priorities. On the one hand, evidence of isolated reform has manifested in some districts' pivoting away from bringing outside experts in and toward cultivating ongoing communities of practice within and between districts.<sup>73</sup> Along with building shared communities of practice come potential opportunities for sustained follow-through and for teachers to learn with each other.

It [has become] much less about who's out there that can come and tell us what to do. . . . It's [now] that real instructional core of how I'm trying to think about these issues with my colleagues in my department or my grade level, and that I want to share some of my learning. I've gained some things . . . I think it's much more about how we move forward together. It's, I think, a good direction as opposed to the 1882 days when it was so much about the folks came in. . . . They shared info. Sometimes there was follow-up. A lot of the time there wasn't. Then two months later, we had some other topic where it came on.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, though, many of the professional development opportunities in California in the instructionally ambitious Common Core era and the era that preceded it were “short and superficial,” and disconnected from standards, curriculum, and instructional materials.<sup>75</sup> Overall, the terrain of professional development in California has been vast and varied,<sup>76</sup> with policy for teachers' professional development residing in county and district hands. Some mezzo-level policy makers invested in the kinds of professional development that evidence suggested would improve instructional practice.<sup>77</sup> Many others did not.

The problem right now is that everybody says they have a professional learning community, but very few people really do. Professional learn-

ing community, to me it means . . . when a team of people get together to problem solve about what it is that their needs are, and then come up with solutions as a team, truly as a team, and then work through all of that together to then put it into practice. That's when things—it's kind of like one of those "well yeah of course" kind of moments—but it doesn't happen as often as it should.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, shifts in national and state policies also require counties and districts to develop new and different policies, which is a matter of both learning and unlearning the previous regime: both building and dismantling. Following the punitive No Child Left Behind regime, which required mezzo-level policy makers to enforce strict accountability consequences on schools, our respondents expressed the challenge of pivoting to support models of engagement with schools and with educators, especially around professional development.

It takes several years of beating the drum of "we're not just here to do this **to** you anymore, we're here to do this **with** you" and that's a message, that's a real paradigm shift coming from No Child Left Behind and that kind of 'you shall' type of approach to things to "how can we work on this together?" There's a different feeling that's percolating up. I wouldn't say that everybody understands it yet, but it's happening.<sup>79</sup>

Along with shifting national and state terrains come changes at the mezzo level that can resemble fits and starts rather than a linear, sequential version of reforms.

We're never able to keep evolving things. We stop. [We say] "OK: that one is over. It was a good idea. We thought maybe it would help. It didn't. We're done." I think [we need] the capacity to keep fine-tuning, and changing, and modifying, as opposed to just, "Okay, we're done. Worked. It didn't work. Now we've got this other new thing." It's exhausting for school staff.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the fits and starts of reform that manifested in some mezzo-level policy making, state-level policy in California during the Common Core era invested little in professional development that reflected emerging knowledge about what it takes to improve instructional practice at the front lines. Evidence emerged nationally that teachers *could* improve their instructional practices if they had sustained opportunities to learn the instructional material, along with quality materials.<sup>81</sup> Yet very few teachers had professional development opportunities that looked like the kind that

had promise of improving teachers' practice; and California state-level policy did little to reflect this evidence. Policy makers at the state level recognized the problems from the vast marketplace of options, but state policy struggled to curate that marketplace.<sup>82</sup>

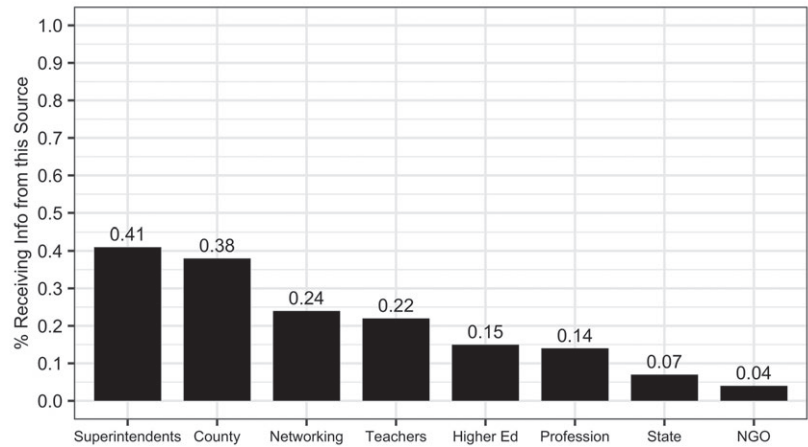
It is the role of the government to do quality assurance . . . but I heard this several times [from the state] "we're not going to give a list out of qualified providers." . . . You do have some essential principles, at least from the literature, that say what high-quality TA is supposed to look like. It doesn't have to be perfect TA, but defining that and then holding people accountable on the other side for providing it I think is . . . important.<sup>83</sup>

California's state-level decision *not* to provide a list of professional development providers it deemed "high quality" reflected learning from experience. Efforts to provide lists of supplemental support providers in the No Child Left Behind era notoriously backfired. But learning that lists did not work in the NCLB era did not yield new practices or pathways to help curate the space of professional development or incentivize the opportunities for districts to purchase high-quality professional development in ways that were both sustained and connected to instructional materials. Put differently, mezzo-level policy makers learned what *not* to do because of NCLB, but this did not translate into paths forward about what *to* do. Lacking organizational infrastructure for what to do cultivated conditions of isolation for mezzo-level policy makers to develop their own paths forward.

#### REFORMS OUT OF REACH: PROBLEMS OF POCKETS

We asked our sample of state superintendents how they perceived the terrain of professional development in the state and where they turned for guidance. Figure 6.1 summarizes their perceptions.

The superintendents we interviewed reported that they looked to their informal contacts—other superintendents—more frequently than to any other source of professional development information.<sup>84</sup> Put differently, figure 6.1 suggests a terrain in which the modal mezzo-level policy maker looks to other mezzo-level policy makers for support. Beyond looking to each other, 38 percent of superintendents reported looking to their county office of education for support. Though the California Teachers Association union has started working in the space of professional development through its Instructional Leadership Core, few superintendents we interviewed reported that it provided district-level support or guidance for professional development policy.<sup>85</sup> Even fewer mezzo-level policy makers



**Figure 6.1.** Superintendents’ sources of professional development guidance, 2017.

*Source:* Structured interviews conducted with a stratified random sample of California school district superintendents between June and October 2017. See Appendix for selection information and interview protocol. Respondents listed multiple sources.

reported that they turned to the state agency for guidance. Altogether, the superintendents’ replies depict a terrain with a hodgepodge of support for mezzo-level policy makers when it comes to professional development.

The shift to LCAP/LCFF, combined with shifting national priorities as NCLB gave way to ESSA, heightened the primacy of the mezzo level as the key venue for professional development policy in California. Identifying professional development policy making as a district responsibility in California rendered it susceptible to financial fragility. The recession of 2008 hit districts hard, one interviewee told us:

when I talked to assistant superintendents of instruction, what they tell me is . . . “remember we started from a very low point, that we really got hit during the recession, and that our capacity within the school district, to do in-house professional development, and to have the staff that can get their head around the Common Core in a hurry, it was severely hampered, and so it’s going to take us a while to build back,” and I believe that to be the case.<sup>86</sup>

How districts adjusted to the 2008 recession depended, in part, on the professional development policies they had in place before the recession:

[Common Core implementation] came on the heels of the big recession, so just implementing the first two subject areas, reading language arts and math, was a real struggle for most of the districts because they didn’t have

the wherewithal to do . . . professional development if that was even in their culture in the first place. It's an interesting phenomenon because the high-functioning districts in this state, they would not even think of dropping professional development as a major focus because they realize that's their lifeblood of having their staff understand what they're supposed to be doing, but in the places that don't have any of that culture, it's just—it's a throwaway. When the budget is cut, anything that's not personnel, just goes . . . out the door.<sup>87</sup>

Budget pressures, moreover, can interact with union relationships, which also vary by district. Though teacher unionization is strong overall in California relative to other states, the relationships between local unions and districts vary considerably, with implications for mezzo-level policies for professional development:

the district I was in, no one would have even given a thought to cutting professional development. In fact, in those [budget-cutting] circumstances, you would add professional development: it was just in the culture. Whereas in other places, there'd be huge wars with the unions about, "wow, why are you hiring all these consultants . . . give us salary increases." . . . Support providers to a degree can ameliorate that, but you can't substitute for districts investing in the release time and the sub time and . . . the summer training. You can't graft on some Band-Aid that makes the teachers more adept . . . [union relationships are] really variable, particularly with the big districts.<sup>88</sup>

California's size and geography adds to the isolation problem.<sup>89</sup> The state has more than 1,000 school districts, and the majority of those districts are classified as small and/or in rural locations, but a majority of public school students in California attend schools in urban or suburban areas.<sup>90</sup>

Districts have to be selective about what they participate in. So, it becomes a challenge for our small districts. If you are the superintendent or principal, you can't possibly be attending all these different [opportunities]. Nor do you have a large enough staff to delegate and send folks. So how can we consolidate some of that information and get it out so that it gets to our small schools?<sup>91</sup>

The end result can be isolation, when agency connections are weak.<sup>92</sup>

I really feel that we are left to figure it out on our own. Education now is solely focused on mandates, and it [the state] really isn't a source of sup-

port. The county doesn't have resources, or doesn't use resources, for staff development. We have a lot of different things happening across the state in isolation, but it is sort of hit or miss.<sup>93</sup>

To some extent, county offices in California have the potential to operate like Tennessee's CORE offices and provide organizational capacity through connective tissue that shares expertise through those connections, to help mitigate the isolation problem. Like Tennessee's CORE offices, some county offices of education help districts curate their professional development choices, steering them toward choices the county offices see as holding more promise and away from others, especially one-shot workshops that lack opportunities for follow-through.

we [the county office] get all kinds of calls and requests and . . . we push back a lot of times with districts because it feels like that "one-and-done" kind of professional learning that they're asking for like, "Can you come out and give us a two-hour one-on-one session on NGSS [Next Generation Science Standards]?" . . . The pushback would look like "well, we can, but we would rather come out and work with a leadership team or work with your administrators to talk about what does NGSS look like long-term and how can we support, how we might think about improvement over time rather than just hoping people get it during a two-hour block after school during the minimum day." That sort of thing, so there's that kind of pushback that happens often.<sup>94</sup>

County-level support appears vital in rural areas:

When you're dealing with a rural county . . . the county office becomes a real critical player in providing instructional support.<sup>95</sup>

County offices are not alone in offering organizational support: non-governmental organizations also have the potential to provide crucial services that extend beyond what governmental agencies could provide alone.<sup>96</sup> But few superintendents reported looking to NGOs for professional development guidance. Moreover, some spoke of how county office support appears essential in rural areas in part because these areas are less well positioned to receive support from either nonprofits or for-profit organizations.

I think one thing that we always forget that with nonprofit and for-profit providers, their services tend to be more aligned in the urban areas because that's where the most fitness is.<sup>97</sup>



**Figure 6.2.** Distribution of California nonprofit education service organizations, 2015.

*Source:* National Center for Charitable Statistics Core Trend Data, 2015 geocoded by zip code in ArcGIS. Map produced using ArcGIS. See the Appendix for more source information.

We explored this concern further, examining the distribution of nonprofit education service providers in California in 2015, and our findings are depicted in figure 6.2. While this portrait is not restricted to professional development, it is suggestive of the distributional challenges that arise when geographic disparities restrict access to nonprofit expertise and offers evidence for why such a small percentage of superintendents listed nonprofits as providing helpful sources of professional development guidance.

While our mezzo-level policy makers who worked with NGOs and foundations mentioned their importance, they also expressed frustration over durability and reach.

The lack of that kind of infrastructure . . . in relation to the dissemination and expansion of local innovation is the biggest problem in California. . . . I think the foundations have helped exacerbate this . . . because even when they fund things like Math in Common and those things, they often . . . do not disseminate the lessons from them in any consumable way. . . . They'll fund it, but they don't put any money into dissemination and replication . . . dissemination, replication, quality assurance. . . . Those three things together in a system would be amazing to see in California.<sup>98</sup>



The variability of NGO support, again, puts the onus on county offices to provide the professional development support that the state does not provide and that district offices need.

We know that there are 58 counties, 35 are rural, so if you want high quality support to be available in say Tehama County, Siskiyou County, Del Norte, Humboldt, you have to invest in a county office structure. That is not to say that nonprofits and for-profits don't have a role in any of this work . . . as a state we have a responsibility to ensure that every district in our state has access to high quality support for their students and the free market right now will not provide that because we know that's not the way business works.<sup>99</sup>

Unlike in Tennessee, however, where every district has the potential to connect with CORE office support, the absence of state-sponsored organizational capacity in California leaves districts vulnerable to isolation. Though the county offices have the potential to provide connective tissue, unlike Tennessee where the CORE offices are state satellites with consistent state funding and staffing across the offices, county offices in California vary considerably, despite some degree of state funding.<sup>100</sup>

We have the county offices of education who for the most part provide top-notch support. It's not true across every county.<sup>101</sup>

Some [county offices] are just so small. . . . They don't have very many people. The people that are there, who may be very good, just have quite a lot of responsibilities, very similar to small school districts.<sup>102</sup>

Ultimately, this feeds back into the hodgepodge of support depicted in figure 6.1. Or, in the words of one of our mezzo-level leaders,

some of the county offices have very good providers. Some of the textbooks come with some high-quality professional development. There are a lot more collaboratives than there used to be, which are funded, some in part by foundations, some in part by the districts, the districts themselves, which—and then there have been some good collaborations between and among districts. . . . There's some good stuff out there, but not nearly enough.<sup>103</sup>

This hodgepodge leaves mezzo-level policy makers without clear or coherent guidance for professional development when they need help.

How are those pieces really going to fit together in a coherent way that allows districts to experience valuable technical assistance? How does a district team know who to call and what to do for support, not sure there is clarity on the processes now?<sup>104</sup>

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic that superintendents discussed in our introduction to this chapter, mezzo-level policy makers faced predicaments of whom to call and what to do for support.

#### FEEDBACK FROM POCKETS OFF THE GRID

Isolation feeds back into mezzo-level policy making in two ways. For individual leaders and teachers, their learning ends with them. The mezzo-level leaders and teachers who aren't connected and don't have the opportunities to learn get less, reinforcing the cycle of perpetual privilege.<sup>105</sup> One interviewee commented:

we just ran some terrific mathematics collaborations. It was partly funded because we wrote grants. We were able to do a little more. When you have that kind of initiative, that helps, too. It's also some of the rich get richer and then the poor—because you've got something to build on. You've got momentum. You've got results. You get more. You get additional grant money where another struggling group never quite can get there.<sup>106</sup>

A key missing component of professional development in California is a stable and significant role for state agencies in making sure quality professional development opportunities reach throughout the state. This is not new.<sup>107</sup> The second way in which isolation at the mezzo level feeds back into the policy making process is by framing professional development as a district rather than a state issue. Keeping it at the district level risks keeping it relatively invisible or as a relatively low priority for state-level policy making. One manifestation of this emerged in California's recent Dashboard system, which provides eight indicators to flag the quality of district-level performance. Missing from the Dashboard, however, are measures of quality teaching:

to me, the heart of the matter is high quality . . . teaching . . . in every classroom . . . very skilled in delivering the curriculum that they're supposed to have been trained in and who gets continual refreshing of their training as new material comes along and gets evaluated in a way that they're prompted to improve . . . that's almost invisible on the dashboard as a priority so people aren't. . . . It's almost invisible.<sup>108</sup>

Along with this invisibility comes continued isolation and continued missed opportunities to develop an infrastructure to support instructional improvement. The mezzo-level policy maker continued:

I think the missing link is really explaining to people, explaining to the public how important it is that the teacher—not just be a low class size and all of this, but that the teacher really be up-to-date and skilled.<sup>109</sup>

Reforming the reforms in California manifested in particular models of professional development—like the California Subject Matter Project—without reflecting the central point of “how important it is that teachers throughout California ‘be skilled.’”

## **Conclusion**

Problems of isolated pockets manifest for mezzo-level policy making following reforms that fail to provide organizational infrastructure commensurate with the reform ambitions. Our cases here—Comprehensive School Reform designs, CORE districts in Tennessee, and professional development in California—enjoyed relative political support, all things considered; yet problems of pockets emerged. Different problems emerge in the context of stakeholder divergence coupled with organizational silos. This combination can yield both the absence of policy and an abundance of policy. The absence and abundance of policy can both exacerbate inequality.<sup>110</sup> We turn now in chapter 7 to those and their implications for mezzo-level policy makers.

## 7 \* Problems of Policy Sparks

The structure and operation of American governance and policy stack the deck against durable reform, and instead privilege the status quo.<sup>1</sup> Fragmentation within and across branches and levels of government create ample opportunities for opponents to block reform.<sup>2</sup> Weak investments in the public sector impair implementation. Ultimately, school funding remains unequal. Students from minoritized communities remain less likely to have access to educational opportunities. Teachers remain weakly prepared for the content they teach, in the circumstances they teach it in. “Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose” remains a common refrain. Why is the status quo so sticky?

We focus here on the ways in which the status quo persists through reform efforts thanks to infrastructure fraught with stakeholder divergence and weak organizational connections. Returning to the refrain, “plus ça change” elucidates part of the problem arising from too much being done. Policies cycle through in seemingly rapid progression. Lots happens, but little seems to change. To explain the “plus c’est la même chose” portion, we look to mezzo-level policy makers who can’t keep up with the change or who lay low until the heat of reform passes. We see this as two manifestations of sparks: intensity that doesn’t yield meaningful change. Reforms in these conditions flare up, but little gets done, because mezzo-level policy makers are either scrambling or ducking for cover.

We take up the issue of sparks here to clarify the specific sets of conditions in which they manifest: we do not mean to suggest that policy sparks define the entire US public education system. Rather, we see sparks as more likely in the context of weak political and organizational infrastructure. At the federal level, we see these conditions manifesting for various efforts at national testing. National testing reform sparks fizzled, which meant the assessment issue was punted from the federal level to the state level.

We then pick this narrative up at the state level, with a look at assessments in Tennessee. While stakeholders converged around the broad idea of assessments in Tennessee, organizational silos and political divergence

yielded ongoing shifts in assessment approaches, each struggling to become established. In Tennessee, a lot of assessment activity occurred, but in the absence of political and organizational infrastructure, each effort struggled to endure during the time of our study. We extend our examination of sparks to California, with a look at how the state has approached their System of Support for high-needs districts.<sup>3</sup> Here again, stakeholders converge on the general idea of providing assistance to high-needs schools. But organizational silos and political divergence confronted subsequent mezzo-level policy making. We then look more closely at how stakeholder divergence around a particular part of the System of Support in California—the roles, responsibility, and funding of the state department of education—has produced inertia within a key part of mezzo-level policy work. In conditions of weak political and organizational infrastructure, policy sparks can mean little meaningful change happens.

## **Problems of Sparks at the National Level**

### THE INHERITED TERRAIN AND REFORM EFFORTS FOR EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

Gathering data on school districts has a long history in American public education and in the federal government's role in public education in particular. Systematically assessing student performance across states and across the nation, however, has emerged more recently.<sup>4</sup> As we discussed in chapter 4, the development of the National Assessment of Educational Progress marked a watershed in several respects. It forged a significant new direction for assessment design and operation in the United States. Federally funded, but housed outside the federal government, it opened new terrain to measure student performance in ways that garnered technical and political legitimacy. As NAEP evolved, its design allowed for state-level performance to be compared, but not individual students or schools. Some states, like California, began to conduct statewide assessments in the 1970s, which generated evidence that allowed comparison of schools within California, but not with schools outside of California.<sup>5</sup> Other states, like Vermont, pursued alternative assessment approaches, including portfolios.<sup>6</sup>

A different approach to assessments and how to use assessments began to take shape in the 1980s, alongside a larger movement toward performance-based accountability that was emerging in private and public sectors. While the 1960s and 1970s had become known for process-based or input-based accountability (i.e., are schools following the right procedures, using funds in appropriate ways), the 1980s saw a move to-

ward accountability for outcomes. The deal was that policy would grant flexibility on some aspects of process and inputs, but would hold funding recipients accountable for results. The challenge became how to measure schools' performance in accomplishing results. Implicit in some aspects of standards-based reform ideas, moreover, was the assumption that assessments could help "drive" teachers toward other instructional components, including standards and materials aligned with the assessment.

The first national-level installment appeared in the 1988 Hawkins-Stafford amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Statutory language included provisions stipulating that districts would be responsible for assessing local educational programs for their "effectiveness in improving student performance," with the states establishing the assessments that would define "effectiveness."<sup>7</sup> Districts deemed ineffective would need to develop plans that specified how they would improve. Measuring "improving student performance," however, posed significant challenges. While legislators might have converged around the vague idea of accountability for results, reforms were silent on the organizational and political infrastructures that would abet such assessments at the state level. There was no equivalent of NAEP that could test children in subject matter content at each grade level. And while politics converged sufficiently to include the accountability provision, stakeholder divergence meant the federal government could not wade into the space of requiring a particular form of assessment. The resolution for this was to let locals choose which assessments to use, to aggregate them at the school level, and to deem any improvement greater than 0 "improvement."<sup>8</sup> The resolution, put differently, was to use existing tests without meaningful accountability, absent an infrastructure for reform.

Momentum for different kinds of assessments to gauge student performance persisted. Policy makers reformed the 1988 reforms, recognizing that giving them no teeth and relying on existing tests produced neither meaningful accountability nor discernible improvement. These reforms collided with the inherited terrain to produce new problems: reforms continued along the path of the prior policy. Throughout the 1990s, national and federal efforts sought to insert more teeth into the performance-based accountability.<sup>9</sup>

One installment emerged in the Goals 2000 Educate America Act, which among other things created the National Educational Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC).<sup>10</sup> While the Act and Council did not require states to develop standards and assessments, its charge included evaluating the standards and assessments that states submitted for voluntary review. The 1994 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, then titled the Improving America's Schools Act, made the

allocation of state grants contingent on the states having state-level content standards and assessments to measure progress toward those standards. The effort to establish national goals erupted in controversy and disagreement. National Goals Panels and NESIC unraveled.<sup>11</sup> States began moving in the direction of standards and assessments, but the federal-level legislation lacked enforcement mechanisms.

Stakeholder support began to emerge around standards-based reforms as part of federal-level school improvement efforts. Stakeholder divergence, however, resided in the details. The next installment for assessments came in 1997, when the Clinton administration sought to encourage states to participate in voluntary national tests focused on just two grades, and one subject in each of those grades: eighth-grade mathematics and fourth-grade reading. The proposals policy makers put forward attempted to reform prior reforms, yet they went nowhere. A national panel and council proved unable to break the logjam. Policy makers then looked to the legitimacy of the gold standard in US assessment: the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The Clinton plan proposed basing the national tests on NAEP frameworks, but keeping the tests separate from NAEP.<sup>12</sup> Unlike NAEP, the Voluntary National Tests would assess individual students (rather than rely on NAEP's matrix sampling). The plan, however, sought to use NAEP's credibility to win stakeholder support.<sup>13</sup> Opposition quickly mobilized when the specific details of the Clinton Voluntary National Test plan became clear. In the words of former Assistant Secretary and former National Assessment Governing Board chair Checker Finn, "liberals . . . hate the word testing and conservatives . . . hate the word national."<sup>14</sup> The Clinton administration proposal had given the federal Department of Education some oversight responsibility for the design and administration of the Voluntary National Tests, along with contractors and advisory boards. After stiff opposition emerged to a federal department role in test development, the Clinton administration suggested that the National Assessment Governing Board, generally perceived as independent and bipartisan, could oversee the Voluntary National Tests. The National Assessment Governing Board proceeded with the consultation, review, and design of Voluntary National Tests. Yet stakeholder support for VNT remained tenuous in Congress. While the legislation gave the National Assessment Governing Board authority to proceed with planning and developing the voluntary tests, subsequent legislation passed in 1999 prohibited the use of federal funds to support piloting or field testing the assessments.<sup>15</sup> This prohibition effectively ended this installment of assessment reform.

Assessments as a core part of standards-based reform, however, continued elsewhere. Within the framework of standards-based reforms,

assessments served multiple purposes. One purpose was instructional alignment: for the core components of instruction—standards, materials, assessments, professional development—to share consistent elements and to work in concert with each other. Another purpose was accountability: assessments constituted the chief strategy for creating incentives to attend to student learning and holding schools accountable for student performance. Having learned that national-level standards and tests appeared politically infeasible, policy makers shifted the responsibility for both alignment and accountability to states. The sparks at the federal level created mezzo-level responsibilities, which is not uncommon in American politics.

#### POLITICAL CONTROVERSY AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRAIN AT THE MEZZO LEVEL

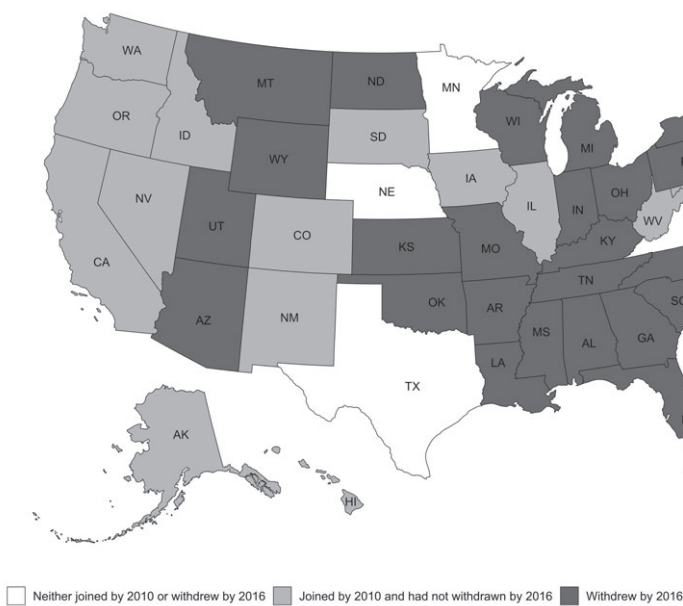
Federal policy created strong incentives for states to do what the federal government could not do. It attached federal Title I funding—notably through the No Child Left Behind version of the program—to states' use of standards and assessments. The Race to the Top competitive grants maintained a central role for state assessments, which the Common Core State Standards Initiative continued: one of the areas within the broader Common Core initiative that experienced keen stakeholder divergence.<sup>16</sup>

Stakeholder divergence over assessments moved from the federal level to the state level. Groups of parents organized to oppose their children's participation in Common Core-aligned assessments, particularly assessments affiliated with the PARCC testing consortium.<sup>17</sup> Some teacher groups organized to oppose linkages between student assessments and subsequent teacher evaluations. Some states joined testing consortia but then dropped out; others did not join at all. Some states stayed the course. Figure 7.1 depicts this heterogeneity. States shaded dark gray withdrew from a testing consortium by 2016. States in white neither joined by 2010, nor withdrew by 2016. States shaded light gray joined by 2010 and had not withdrawn by 2016.

When political divergence at the national level meant the prospects of federally sponsored or national testing came to a standstill, reform responsibility moved to states.

when it comes to college and career readiness, states . . . are flying blind, they have no idea how well they're doing, in that they measure everything from . . . graduation rates to college . . . to remediation rates . . . let alone career readiness, which they don't measure at all. . . . They measure it in wildly different ways . . . both with regard to the indicator and also with





**Figure 7.1.** State testing consortia participation, 2016.

regard to the denominator. . . . So they really have no idea how well they’re doing. But to the extent that they have any clue as to how well they’re doing based on their inadequate data, not very well at all . . . flying blind and not doing well.<sup>18</sup>

Even in the COVID era, the Biden administration required states and districts to follow through with state-level testing, required through NCLB’s replacement, the Every Student Succeeds Act. The reforms to the reforms that had occurred over the course of twenty years continued to reinforce assessments for accountability and continued to pass responsibility to states and district mezzo-level policy makers. At each stage, reforms addressed some problems, but collided with old terrains to create new problems—problems compounding problems—especially for mezzo-level policy makers with weak political and organizational infrastructures.

**Surges and Sparks: State Assessments in Tennessee**

REFORMING STATE ASSESSMENTS

As mentioned earlier, Tennessee’s poor performance on NAEP and its failing grades from the US Chamber of Commerce’s *Leaders and Laggards*

report in 2007 helped catalyze its adoption of more ambitious academic standards and a connected set of policy reforms including new student assessments. The state's failing grade in the category "Truth in Advertising About Student Proficiency" played a key role in propelling the state toward a different assessment approach. Tennessee ranked last amongst states in this category,<sup>19</sup> which compared students' performance on state math and reading exams to their performance on NAEP. Tennessee's large differences in percent proficient could be seen in 2005, for example, when 87 percent of Tennessee's eighth graders scored proficient on the state's reading and math tests, but only 26 percent were considered proficient in reading and only 21 percent were considered proficient in math on the NAEP that same year.<sup>20</sup>

The portrayal of these assessments results initially helped mobilize stakeholder support for the state's adoption of the Common Core State Standards in 2010 and their participation in PARCC (the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers), which was one of two multistate consortia developing Common Core-aligned assessments. Tennessee's Commissioner of Education, Kevin Huffman, served as one of the governing board members for PARCC, and he played a key role in helping Tennessee pivot toward PARCC's assessment approach. Participating in PARCC also provided much-needed organizational infrastructure the state lacked for developing and administering online assessments. The state intended to replace existing Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) tests for math, reading/language arts, and writing with the PARCC assessments in the 2014–2015 school year.<sup>21</sup> This change provided an opportunity for Tennessee to assess their new Common Core State Standards and a potential pathway for addressing their Truth in Advertising grade.

#### THE STRUGGLE TO DEVELOP AN ASSESSMENT INFRASTRUCTURE IN TENNESSEE

As they prepared for PARCC, Tennessee piloted the assessments, and districts worked to ensure they were ready for the computer-based tests. But political controversy over Tennessee's participation in the testing consortium erupted, with opposition emerging both from interest groups and from educators.<sup>22</sup> Opposition was not uniform, but instead reflected divergence that state-level policy makers had not anticipated:<sup>23</sup>

I was struck . . . with all the pushback on over-testing . . . grassroots . . . regular old folks . . . were quite happy with all the testing that they're doing . . . they saw a lot of value in it . . . the biggest, the only test that

anyone raised questions about was, um, about the test they use for their RTI [Response to Intervention].<sup>24</sup>

In the spring of 2014, the state legislature delayed the implementation of PARCC by one year and opened a competitive bidding process for the state's standardized testing. Though the legislation was a blow to PARCC and to proponents of Tennessee's participation in PARCC, withdrawing from the consortium appeared to be a way to maintain Tennessee's adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which were the target of separate state repeal legislation at the time.<sup>25</sup> In addition, while this new legislation effectively ended the state's relationship with PARCC, it was not a rejection of statewide student testing tied to the state's new academic standards. Yet, leaving PARCC meant losing a lot of potential infrastructure to support reform that Tennessee was relying upon.

Nobody, when the legislature decided that we were gonna do this ourselves, really understood how tremendously difficult it was.<sup>26</sup>

The decision to withdraw from PARCC and have the state department oversee assessment development produced and exposed several forms of infrastructural weakness. Organizationally, the pivot put the assessment in the hands of a contractor that lacked statewide assessment experience and existing connections with the component parts to develop and operate the assessment smoothly. The state awarded Measurement Incorporated, the lowest bidder, the assessment contract in October 2014, though the firm had never designed an entire state's online assessment program before. Upon receiving the Tennessee contract, the firm had just over a year to develop both the assessment and the organizational operations to field and score the exam.<sup>27</sup>

The pivot to put the assessment in the hands of the lowest-bidding contractor, regardless of that contractor's lack of statewide assessment experience, had implications for access to the technical knowledge of item creation, selection, and placement crucial to assessment development. In collaboration with the Tennessee Department of Education, the contractor quickly got to work to create the tests and recruited four hundred Tennessee teachers to help write and review test items. Mezzo-level policy makers reflected on how demanding this process was:

Another learning was how hard it was to create an assessment that was really strong. It took so much work. We worked some people into the ground, really. There had to be a better way to do that, but we were tossed into it because the legislature decided that in the fall we were gonna.<sup>28</sup>

Measurement Inc. rolled out the assessment, named TNReady, in February 2016. On the first day of the online test, students across the state had trouble as they tried to log in. It turned out that Measurement Inc. did not have the server capacity to handle all of Tennessee's test takers, and by the end of the first day of testing Tennessee's Education Commissioner, Candice McQueen, canceled the online test entirely, saying, "we are not confident in the system's ability to perform consistently."<sup>29</sup> Moving to a paper-and-pencil version of the test for that year, Measurement Inc. rushed to print and ship five million documents to schools and districts across Tennessee. The company experienced significant delays delivering the testing materials to districts, disrupting testing schedules for both part 1 and part 2 of the assessment.<sup>30</sup> The delays were so severe that the state's Department of Education suspended testing for grades 3–8 and pulled their contract with Measurement Inc. that same year.<sup>31</sup> Mezzo-level policy makers reflected:

You have vendors that aren't capable of delivering on what they said they would deliver. It took a lot of everybody's time and energy. If we hadn't had to focus so much time and energy on that assessment, I wonder what we could've done.<sup>32</sup>

The state then awarded the assessment contract to Questar, the company that had come in second in the original bidding process, and told them to develop and administer TNReady for the 2016–2017 school year. That year the testing was primarily paper-and-pencil-based and things went more smoothly, although challenges emerged with scoring errors and delays in delivering test scores.<sup>33</sup> Then in the spring of 2018, as more of the state shifted back to an online platform, a host of problems plagued Tennessee's assessment once again. On the first day of testing, trouble with the login system prevented thousands of students from accessing the test. On day two, more technical difficulties, first thought to be the result of an outside cyberattack but later determined to be the fault of Questar, caused a statewide suspension of testing.<sup>34</sup> Technical difficulties related to the online platform continued in the following days and weeks, and other challenges, like a severed fiber optic line near Knoxville, created connectivity issues for some schools and districts. In addition, 1,400 students' tests were invalidated across thirty-nine districts when a system design error administered the wrong grade-level tests to students.<sup>35</sup>

In sharp contrast, California's administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment, part of the assessment consortium, unfolded nearly glitch-free to millions of students across the state's vast terrain.<sup>36</sup> California's experience with Smarter Balanced stands in sharp contrast to its troubled history of previous state-developed assessments. California's first attempt

at a standards-aligned assessment—the California Learning Assessment System—appeared in 1993.<sup>37</sup> It didn't last long.<sup>38</sup> Students failed the assessments at a high rate, and the state stopped using them in 1995.<sup>39</sup> Stakeholder support for some form of assessment persisted, leading to the adoption of the California Standardized Testing and Reporting Program, followed by the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. Following the emergence of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, California joined the Smarter Balanced testing consortium, which provided a way to relieve California of pressures on state technical and organizational capacity while working within stakeholder support.<sup>40</sup> In particular, California did not act on linking statewide student assessment to teacher evaluations during the Common Core rollout,<sup>41</sup> with implications for subsequent stakeholder convergence.<sup>42</sup> California also invested in the IT to support computer-based assessments.<sup>43</sup> The state's approach helped generate stakeholders in higher education, some of whom moved toward using Smarter Balanced results for college admissions<sup>44</sup>

Tennessee came to the idea of pressing the pause button on linking assessments with teacher evaluations much later than California, and in a much more modest way. In light of TNReady's development and administration failures, the Tennessee legislature stepped in and took action to limit the ways in which that year's assessment data from TNReady could be used in the accountability systems for schools, teachers, or students. Representative Eddie Smith, a sponsor of the bill, told the press, "We're still going to move forward with our accountability system. We'll still see what the data shows this year. But we want to make sure the data isn't skewed. We want to make sure it's reliable." He emphasized that the bill was meant to protect teachers, students, and schools while the state worked to get the assessments right.<sup>45</sup>

Both politics and administration bear on the infrastructure for reform. From a mezzo-level perspective:

The mark that we missed is that we have two different definitions. There is the definition of a politically viable test, and there's a definition of a good test. What a shame that you can have a bad politically viable test, and a good test that's not politically viable. If there was anything I could undo from history, it would be that. . . . They should have measured it for a while before it had any triggers, and that kind of thing.<sup>46</sup>

These reforms to the reforms yielded sparks for mezzo-level policy makers in the state department and in districts: sparks that ultimately equated to stasis. Little substantive work that relied on assessments for information was possible.

## FEEDBACK FROM SPARKS

Stakeholder divergence continued, extending from the state's participation in PARCC to its participation in the Common Core State Standards Initiative in any form.<sup>47</sup> As the feedback process ensued, it extended to other parts of instructional improvement, including teaching evaluations and accountability lists that determine which schools are flagged for intervention. The mezzo level was keenly aware of how the pieces of the reforms intertwined, and how weaknesses with the assessments could affect other aspects of reforms.<sup>48</sup>

Mezzo-level policy makers perceived the risk of a spark transforming into a fire that could burn down the whole reform. The case of assessments reveals how infrastructural weakness in one part of a complex system can have reverberating implications in other parts and threaten reform trajectories.

From a mezzo-level perspective, the state's approach to instructional improvement struggled when the state pulled out of PARCC.<sup>49</sup> Mezzo-level policy makers understood the interdependence: that the various pieces of instructional support depended on each other. This produced both frustration that Tennessee was moving away from established assessments into the unknown and hard work on the part of the state department to make the new and untested assessment system work:

there were good assessments developed already. . . . It's easy to look in hindsight, but when you're in the middle of it, you're just scrambling as hard as you can go to turn out something that's good . . . the team that was working on these questions and the assessment pieces were very committed to quality. They knew that if the assessment did not test what we intended it to test that the whole thing fell apart. They worked really hard.<sup>50</sup>

Sparks are not permanent. Political and organizational infrastructures can develop, as happened in California with assessments through Smarter Balanced. This was ostensibly part of the motivation for Tennessee to join the PARCC consortium, which would provide the organizational infrastructure the state and other mezzo-level policy makers lacked.<sup>51</sup> Yet the absence of political and organizational infrastructures contributes to both a passive and an active manifestation of modest accomplishment. It is not just that "nothing gets done," but that the lack of infrastructure prevents policy from taking root:

We've gone from moving to where all the testing was gonna be done online to now this year we're gonna be paper and pencil across the board tryin'

to get back to online testing to having different vendors and different platforms to deliver the assessment. There's just been a lot of change the last, I would say really, the last five to seven years. You go further back even more. I guess from a policy standpoint it would make our work easier if we got some standards that we felt comfortable with and stuck with 'em for a little bit and found a testing vendor we felt comfortable with and stuck with them for a minute. If we committed to online assessment. When we make changes like that it makes our work more difficult.<sup>52</sup>

While overarching support for the idea of assessments remained in Tennessee, shifting assessment policy choices rendered it difficult for technical and organizational capacities to accumulate.

There's just this continued ebb and flow of new initiatives that come and go, and come and go, and come and go. I think that has been the great detriment of public education. I don't think it ever allows teachers to learn something new, actually perfect their craft and implementation before the next wave of change comes down the pipeline. I think that, again, recognizing that some of the work that we're trying to do is deep and requires a depth of knowledge that needs to be built over time. You're not going to see the kinds of outcomes that people want to see in a two, three, four-year effort. I mean it's going to take a sustained focus. I think what district schools and the state needs to do is persist. Pick what it's gonna focus on and do the deep work and persevere through the hard times and obviously modify and use data along the way to inform and continuously improve, but I think consistency is what is really needed for us to really begin to move the needle in some of this work.<sup>53</sup>

The intensity that accompanies policy sparks yielded lots of action but inhibited meaningful change.<sup>54</sup> California's System of Support similarly reveals passive and active manifestations of sparks. It is not just that "nothing gets done," but that the lack of infrastructure prevents policy from embedding and transforming.

## **Problems of Sparks: Intensity and Stasis in California's System of Support**

### **THE INHERITED TERRAIN OF REFORMING SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT**

State-level assessment aims, in part, to help identify districts that are struggling to help students learn. The accountability process that started

taking shape in 1988 and continued through the NCLB era entailed using assessments as accountability devices: using student scores to set in motion various types of consequences. No Child Left Behind stipulated several types of interventions states could pursue with districts that failed to demonstrate adequate yearly progress on state assessments.<sup>55</sup> These included intensive interventions where states would take over administrative and financial responsibility for schools, reconstitute schools' teaching forces, and "other" less punitive interventions developed by the district and state.<sup>56</sup>

As NCLB fell under mounting criticism for its punitive approach to schools, which appeared increasingly inconsistent with improved student learning, calls emerged to shift states' use of assessments to trigger investments and capacity-building in struggling districts instead of punishment. Reforms to the reform in struggling districts—whether punitive and/or investments in capacity-building—offer portraits of intense policy attention, but modest substantive change.<sup>57</sup>

California has taken different approaches to providing intensive support to high-needs districts.<sup>58</sup> Starting in 2013, the state adopted a three-tiered approach to district support, connected to the 2013 creation of the Local Control Funding Formula. The first tier was Level 1 services for all districts. This later became connected to the state's "Dashboard," which assesses district performance according to several priorities or metrics, including academic achievement, English Learner progress, chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, suspension rates, and college and career readiness (which includes eleventh-grade assessment results).<sup>59</sup> Put differently, the reforms aimed for all mezzo-level policy makers to attend to the Dashboard indicators:

The basic concept of even the Dashboard is that those are results that aren't just used to identify who's the lowest of the low, but the Dashboard's intended to be used by everybody, with the idea that everybody can get better, everybody has things that they need to improve, so everybody oughta be using the Dashboard to improve themselves.<sup>60</sup>

The second tier, Level 2 services, involve interventions from a district's county office to identify sources of problems and paths toward solutions. These state-level reforms aimed at more targeted interventions that would rely on mezzo-level policy makers in some counties and some districts for subsequent actions.

The second level of support, the first line of interaction is with their county office. By state law, the county office is to work with that school dis-



trict that's been identified to do things like a self-assessment, looking at a deeper dive of what the data show on what their needs are, to look at some root cause analysis, and then help them through the LCAP process to identify how they're gonna use resources to address those needs. That's the second level of support.<sup>61</sup>

Districts deemed most in need went to the third tier and received Level 3 services. This sort of intervention would bring in another layer of policy making.

At some point down the line, for those where the second level doesn't work over a number of years, then there's more of an intervention, if you will, of a third level, which would involve either the superintendent making a recommendation perhaps to CCEE for their involvement.<sup>62</sup>

The California legislature created a new state education entity—the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)—to play a central role in California's System of Support<sup>63</sup> and help districts accomplish the goals they established as part of the Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP).<sup>64</sup> This approach to accountability stood in marked contrast to the NCLB era, with federal or state definitions of adequate yearly progress determining whether a district would face punitive interventions. The LCAP reforms aspired for each district to work with district stakeholders to develop an accountability plan that reflected district priorities, and then match district performance toward those priorities with metrics included on the state's Dashboard. These were ambitious reforms.

The California Collaborative's part in these reform efforts reflected stakeholder convergence and included another process for stakeholders to continue to convene: an attempt to bring the various organizational components together as well as the political components. The governing board for the California Collaborative reflects the effort to cultivate stakeholder convergence, consisting of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the president of the California State Board of Education, one county superintendent, one district superintendent, and one teacher.<sup>65</sup>

The organization, the cross-agency team [for the statewide System of Support] is so important. . . . In my history, that's the first time I've seen all of these . . . entities coming together in a room and sharing their strategies and agreeing upon strategies and sharing their information. . . . This is critical because we're all getting on the same page and we're agreeing upon how we're gonna deliver the system in a collaborative manner so that we're addressing any gaps in services.<sup>66</sup>

The creation of the California Collaborative and the convergence of stakeholder opinion around the need for intensive support reflect an effort to reform the reform. Other sources of support came from county offices of education,<sup>67</sup> which provide “direct and regional support to school districts and serve as the primary implementation arm of the California Department of Education.”<sup>68</sup> Support also comes from the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA).<sup>69</sup> The convergence of stakeholder support, however, came paired with persistently weak organizational and technical capacities. The California Collaborative’s task was enormous, and it was equipped to serve only a tiny fraction of the districts that needed help.<sup>70</sup>

They’re trying to play the continuous improvement card, as opposed to the test and punish card. And . . . conventional education interest groups, lined up behind this . . . University of California, student council, people from school districts, the school boards’ association, the county superintendent, couple progressive people from the unions, they got . . . [the CTC], they’ve got school superintendents, they’ve got this foundation that they’ve set up, the PTA, pretty much everybody in the—sort of what you would think of as being the old school education interest groups, including the two unions, got them marching behind this notion of, “We want to make it possible for schools to get better.” Now the weak link in that in a way, is the mechanism set up to do it, there was this thing called California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, which was supposed to be the replacement for these interventions—the five people get out of a Volkswagen mini-bus and go in and intervene on your school . . . it’s going to take a long, long time, to build up the capacity in these districts to heal themselves. And I just don’t know whether there’s the political patience to do that.<sup>71</sup>

And, after several years of operation, it had reached few high-needs districts.<sup>72</sup>

taking such a strategy to scale across the state would be difficult if not impossible to fund given our size.<sup>73</sup>

Mezzo-level policy makers recognized the disconnect: the ability to identify need did not translate into adequate support to address those needs.

I think in our business, we’re good at assessing “here are some of the areas that are in need of improvement.” We’re not very good at implementing “what we need to do” . . . from the district’s perspectives, okay, “what are

we gonna do? How can you assist us in really delving into the needs of our students?”<sup>74</sup>

The political convergence that led to the creation of the Collaborative, however, was layered on top of decades of political divergence. Political studies of reforms underscore the importance of reconfiguring interest group terrains so that ambitious new reforms can take root.<sup>75</sup> Strong stakeholder support can enable that reconfiguration—clearing the underbrush, so to speak. While sufficient stakeholder support emerged to create the California Collaborative, it did not fundamentally reconfigure the political or interest group terrain. The implications of the weak political infrastructure then manifested in county office and state department efforts to provide meaningful systems of support.

#### SPARK AFTER SPARK

Policy makers cast about to adapt the approach, continuing with the California Collaborative, but directing more funds for the Collaborative

to work with county offices of education to provide assistance to school districts, and when necessary, provide direct assistance to school districts in specified extraordinary circumstances.<sup>76</sup>

The 2018–2019 budget directed more funds specifically to county offices to “facilitate the improvement of school districts identified as being in need of differentiated assistance.”<sup>77</sup> The adjustments reflected learning from experience that county offices differed in their capacities to support district improvement.<sup>78</sup> Recognizing that some county offices might be better able than others to provide assistance both inside and outside county boundaries, the 2018–2019 reforms also included funds for competitive grants, so eight of the county offices could provide support to *other* county offices.<sup>79</sup>

228 districts . . . have been identified for differentiated assistance. County offices are charged to go in in that initial phase between now and roughly the end of March/April to go . . . through an assessment process with districts who’ve been identified for eligibility for differentiated assistance. That has, again, created a question on county offices’ capacity to be able to facilitate that process. This is all what’s rolling out right now . . . how do we build capacity specifically around county offices . . . you would hear these criticisms . . . I think they were fair. There are inconsistencies in one

district's experience with a county office versus someone else in another area of the state.<sup>80</sup>

The county office playing field was anything but level.

We have 58 county offices, right? And they range from LA County Office of Education, which is serving—amongst their district is a 600,000-student district, LA Unified, to Amador, which has, I forget, like 2,700 students in the county . . . we've got county offices with three staff people. We've got county offices with hundreds of staff people.<sup>81</sup>

While each iteration incorporated insights from previous experiences, missing was a long-term strategy that could produce the organizational infrastructure to support that strategy.<sup>82</sup> Those reforms, colliding with old problems in the old terrain, yielded a series of interventions with modest impact.

The last six years in many ways have been a combination of initiative explosion and distraction combined with local control combined with almost an absent infrastructure.<sup>83</sup>

Without robust organizational and political infrastructures, mezzo-level policy makers experience stasis: modest accomplishment despite the “initiative explosion.”

#### STASIS FROM SPARKS: SYSTEM OF SUPPORT VIA THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Policy sparks are not without costs. Repeated spark after spark can wear down an infrastructure that was weak to begin with. This is how we understand the role of the California Department of Education in the state's System of Support. Throughout, we have argued that understanding problems that follow from reforms invites us to examine *policies* in several ways. We focus on the plural to consider the implications of intersecting policies across policy domains: education, health, public infrastructure, etcetera. We also focus on the plural to see what is conventionally termed “policy” in its component parts. “Policy” passed by legislatures typically consists of many policies under the general policy umbrella.<sup>84</sup> Within California's policy for its System of Support, for instance, come a range of component parts. By emphasizing the central roles of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence and county offices, the California Department of Education remained largely on the sidelines for district

support, though it provided some support with coordination.<sup>85</sup> How did this come to pass? By the year 2017,

the belief of the legislature [is] that the California Department of Education is largely useless and broken, there's no actual possibility for the construction of a statewide infrastructure.<sup>86</sup>

Reforming the reform vis-à-vis the CDE manifested in declining investments in the state agency, along with declining agency contributions to instructional support.<sup>87</sup> The CDE had a long history of modest investments in staff and infrastructure to support instructional practice, but that modest investment accumulated and compounded over time: one species of feedback effect.<sup>88</sup> California is hardly unique or alone among states in this modest investment. Like many other states, the California Department of Education has relied heavily on federal funding to support state-level positions. Federal legislation starting in the 1960s and 1970s—both the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975—sent streams of new federal funding to state education agencies to perform oversight work.<sup>89</sup> State agency reliance on federal funding has persisted.

The dirty little secret about the California Department of Education is that it's vastly under-resourced, and there's some reasons for this; one is, that when there were . . . [state] administrations . . . [that] just didn't want to fund state agencies, the other is, that the state department operates largely on federal money.<sup>90</sup>

While federal funding expanded state agencies considerably, it also structured state agency work to focus on compliance—monitoring how local districts spent federal funds to ensure that their expenditures met the letter of the federal law: that local districts spent funds in ways, for instance, that supplemented but did not supplant the federal investment, or that local districts spend funds only on eligible children, for eligible services.<sup>91</sup> This national trend appears vividly in California:

state agencies become auxiliary federal agencies . . . what that's looked like in our California Department of Education is . . . what formerly were deep content managers have turned into grant managers and have turned into more of the facilitators to the field of . . . federal monitoring.<sup>92</sup>

Reviews of the California Department of Education found that it continues to rely heavily on federal funds to support staff positions, with 68 per-

cent of CDE funding in 2014 deriving from federal funding streams.<sup>93</sup> Such heavy dependence on federal funding both consumes staff time and reinforces a “compliance mindset” among the staff:<sup>94</sup>

it’s easy for that federal compliance thing to take over, and it just sort of swamps all this other work that they do.<sup>95</sup>

Staff attentiveness to compliance and oversight can crowd out time for other tasks, like instructional support.<sup>96</sup>

The department staff is just more or less funded on federal funds and is doing federal activities. . . . If we had some room for them to exercise leadership in things like professional development, for example, or in curriculum, where they could offer help and assistance to the community, that would be a positive thing. . . . The situation we’re in is that there’s no money to do that, and there’s no ability to provide leadership for that.<sup>97</sup>

State agency attentiveness to compliance, moreover, means enforcing both federal and state compliance:

I would say the oppressive nature of the compliance work got worse and worse. . . . Both the state and the federal. . . . That was a lot of the impetus for the . . . LCFF was to do away with the 60, 70 state categorical programs, which all had a compliance flavor to them. The federal programs, other than special ed, there’s just not that many of them. The Title I is really the only big one, with the state you had so many of them.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, this “compliance mindset” can be antithetical to the capacity building orientation of instructional support:

moving the California Department of Education, from sort of a federal compliance rule [enforcer], into, “I’m here to help you develop your capacity in the school district,” is very hard, when you’ve got a whole bunch of folks who are civil servants, whose job it is—whose job they think it is—to run this compliance game.<sup>99</sup>

Though California has had a long history of investing modestly in state-level instructional support, that modest investment declined over time, just as ambitious expectations for districts ratcheted upward.<sup>100</sup> Our respondent continued, noting that the perceived uselessness of the CDE stood in contrast with some of the 1980s and 1990s investments:

That [belief that the California Department of Education is largely useless and broken, there's no actual possibility for the construction of a state-wide infrastructure] contrasted quite sharply with what they did during the first standards implementation . . . [in] the '90s when they established the Subject Matter Projects, when they built infrastructure inside the department.<sup>101</sup>

The CDE from the early twenty-first century also stood in sharp contrast to the one that Suzanne Wilson encountered and portrayed in her work from the late twentieth century:

Every time we visited the Department of Education between 1987 and 1990, the place was abuzz with innovation and activity. State department staff were busy calling meetings of committees of educators—most often teachers. Everyone was excited, encouraged by the possibilities, committed to the work.<sup>102</sup>

In the late twentieth century, the CDE supported the Subject Matter Project (discussed earlier) and included several subject-matter content experts (i.e., specialists in mathematics instruction) among its staff. Though the task demands in the 1980s and 1990s exceed the number of content-matter experts in the department, the late twentieth-century department could at least rely on some in-house expertise as the state developed standards, curriculum frameworks, and assessments. By the early twenty-first century, in contrast, the CDE had experienced staff reductions particularly within the domains of instructional support concurrent with the skyrocketing demands of the ambitious Common Core standards.<sup>103</sup> A study sponsored by the California legislature found that between 2008 and 2014, CDE staffing fell by 119 positions. The units within the CDE that focus on areas of instructional support—including Professional Learning Support, Assessment Development and Administration, and Improvement and Accountability—lost nearly 50 of those positions.<sup>104</sup> To support districts, schools, and teachers in putting the Common Core into practice seemed to call for more, not less, help from state agencies. From a mezzo-level perspective,

Common Core implementation requires CDE staff to have more expertise than in past standards implementation efforts.<sup>105</sup>

In states like Tennessee, state-level investment in the government agency accompanied ambitious standards-based reform. This was not the

case in California. Instead, stakeholder divergence meant both fewer staff positions devoted to instructional support in the Department of Education and the absence of new investment to support engaging more deeply with districts and schools embarking on the Common Core State Standards Initiative.<sup>106</sup>

Less capacity combined with even greater challenges can take several forms. Infrastructure is not just a matter of having staff members, but having staff members with expertise in instructional support. From this perspective, CDE remained short on needed technical know-how.<sup>107</sup> Scholars Timar and Carter found that “according to Bill Honig, the CDE had three math specialists for 10,000 schools in the 1990s. Today it has none.”<sup>108</sup>

This lack of investment in the CDE goes beyond the conventional federal-funding story and traces some of its roots to the political battles of the 1980s and 1990s, coinciding with California’s move toward standards-based reforms. Palpable animosity between Governor Wilson and Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig, along with battles in the legislature over the development and implications of California’s assessment CLAS, resulted in defunding the state agency’s role in assessment development and sidelined the department’s content-matter experts, who had been instrumental in instructional support. Along with and after these battles came departmental reorganization plans, which shifted away from an organizational design that in the 1990s had focused on content areas.<sup>109</sup> The agency paid the price of stakeholder divergence. It began from a weak technical position, given the focus on compliance, and weak organizational position, given the state’s decentralization. Political divergence drained even more resources from the agency, leaving it positioned to accomplish little other than to monitor federal grants and oversee the child nutrition program. As stakeholder divergence yielded consistent under-investment and de-investment,<sup>110</sup> the state agency turned to foundations and other partners for financial and human capital support.<sup>111</sup>

Compounding the political battles within and between California’s executive and legislative branches, aspects of prior laws worked against the development of stakeholders or advocates for the agency. This includes Proposition 98, passed in 1988, which was intended to devote more funds to local education agencies.<sup>112</sup> This yielded downstream effects for the Department and its ability to attract resources.

The other thing that makes it difficult for the California Department of Education to gain the capacity it needs . . . is this funding formula, in California, that was intended to put money into schools; the Proposition



98 funding formula, works for money that is delivered to LEAs, and so if you spend an extra \$10 at the state department, that's \$10 that doesn't go to the LEAs, and it doesn't count for the funding formula. And, so, the California Department of Education is in direct conflict with all other state agencies for funding, and that's historically been a hard sell.<sup>113</sup>

Declining investment in the CDE also came bundled together with California's adoption of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The LCFF combined over seventy state-level categorical grants and offered local districts more flexibility in how they used those funds. Along with the reduction in state-level categorical programs came reductions in the need for oversight and monitoring of those programs:

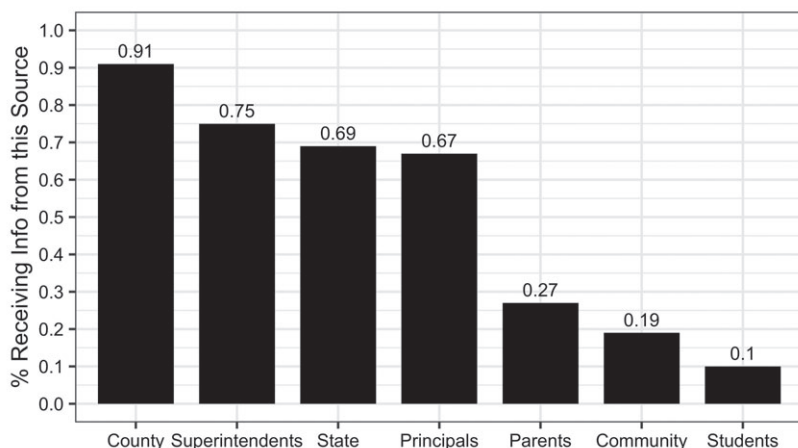
The content expertise is no longer present because we don't have all the categoricals that were all content-oriented around professional learning and development.<sup>114</sup>

As state-level investments in the CDE declined, the agency became unable to keep up with market salaries and pay staff commensurate with what counties and districts could offer. Our analyses comparing CDE salaries with comparable county office or district office positions found that CDE staff receive significantly lower salaries.<sup>115</sup>

A legislative review of the California Department of Education in 2014 concluded that "the CDE's overall staffing level is reasonably well aligned with its existing responsibilities," but that it had "limited capacity to absorb new workload."<sup>116</sup> Up for debate, however, was the extent to which LCFF created new and different workload for the CDE. Even with reductions in categorical grant oversight, LCFF had implications for the CDE's workload, charging it to "compile and disseminate data on districts, schools, staff, and students; oversee development of curriculum frameworks, standardized student assessments, instructional materials, and school facilities standards," and to "oversee county offices of education."<sup>117</sup>

Moreover, large percentages of the district superintendents we interviewed reported looking to the state agency and using state agency guidance for standards, along with county, district and school leaders, as reported in figure 7.2.

Under LCFF, the county offices have a daunting charge in the new regime: both to provide significant support for the districts identified as needing "level 3" assistance and helping all districts develop and implement their local accountability plans. This shift to support is a new role for some counties.



**Figure 7.2.** Superintendents' sources of LCAP/LCFF guidance, 2017.

*Source:* Structured interviews conducted with a stratified random sample of California school district superintendents between June and October 2017. See the Appendix for selection information and interview protocol. The data presented are categorized from the list question: "From the following list, where do you receive guidance and support on LCAP and LCFF?" Respondents were invited to answer yes/no to a list of multiple sources, and to supplement with others.

I could see . . . that we were gonna be moving towards a new accountability and continuous improvement structure within the reforms . . . how we supported districts was going to have a different tone and approach . . . I definitely recall what it was like when schools were going through program improvement. It definitely had that harsh accountability tone, whereas, now, with the recent release of the California School Dashboard and the identification of 228 districts needing differentiated assistance and county offices being on the first-responders going in to provide a level of support and assessment to districts, that has really shifted the role of county offices.<sup>118</sup>

The move toward continuous improvement was daunting for the same reason the shift from compliance to support is daunting for the state agency: providing in-depth support is something only some of the counties had experience doing. The compliance mindset was part of the ethos in some counties, and helping districts develop and implement their LCAPs risked tapping into that compliance approach.

too many districts and probably in a lot of cases, county offices too, are using LCAP, the LCAP planning process as a . . . compliance exercise where it's . . . "let's fill it out, let's do what we need to do to be compliant and then it goes on a shelf, and then a year later we pick it back up and we

start the process again.” . . . It’s changing but it’s changing slowly. This comes along with a lot of trust building that needs to happen between the state and it’s just going to take a while for people to trust that it’s not a gotcha moment . . . LCAP needs to be a strategic planning document. That’s what it needs, that’s what it’s supposed to be. In all cases it’s not that . . . let’s constantly reflect on the process. If we can get to that point, then the LCAP becomes the place that you can point to for the districts that show that really, the growth that’s going on.<sup>119</sup>

For the LCAP to be a “strategic planning document” and not part of a compliance-oriented gotcha trap or hollow procedural policy making exercise requires a lot on the part of counties and districts with variable capacity for such work. And, along with reports of looking to the state agency for guidance and support came a view that the state contribution is and would remain secondary to counties and districts: that the state should pivot to becoming a support agency for other mezzo-level policy makers.

I think the CDE is a group that is extremely important to the entire system. When it comes to the on-the-ground standards work, they play in my opinion, a more ceremonial role where the CDE in our state will never be able to do what the Arkansas Department of Education can do in their state, meaning that in Arkansas they have a team of folks at the Department of Ed that will go out across their state and provide professional development. That’s part of their mission and structure. Arkansas is a state that if you drive three hours from Little Rock, you could hit every corner of the state. In our state it’s not possible. We have to accept that, and we have to also acknowledge that the CDE should grow to be a support organization, but . . . it’s always gonna be indirect support by facilitating the Subject Matter Projects, by facilitating the county office of education, by facilitating nonprofit providers to play that role of increasing the quality of support out there.<sup>120</sup>

#### FEEDBACK FROM SPARKS

Reforms to the reform came to see the CDE both as a potential third rail for political controversy and as a morass where little got done. They also shifted away from ideas that focused on compliance and toward ideas that focused on instructional support. And they drew on the successes that some county offices had demonstrated in supporting their districts. All this left a CDE bereft of infrastructure to support reform. Lack of investment in the California Department of Education created a self-reinforcing cycle: it became the agency that no one trusted to be able to do necessary work.<sup>121</sup>

Subsequent policy and investment continued to look outside the CDE for instructional support. As its legitimacy eroded, investments moved to other existing or new agencies. The legislative reforms to the reform that unfolded in California as standards took root increasingly looked outside the California Department of Education both for technical expertise and to serve as connective tissue. The reforms instead looked to county offices, to other entities like the California Collaborative, to formal and informal networks of districts, and to nonprofit organizations. This, in some ways, paralleled the feedback processes for accountability: when accountability didn't yield results, policy makers interpreted the lessons to mean accountability needed to be more punitive. For instructional support, California policy makers continued down their earlier path: more investment in counties, less at the state level to support instruction.

Even a role as a support agency for other mezzo-level policy makers appeared to be a tall order for the CDE. The reforms to the reform that eroded the role of the CDE have produced a mezzo-level policy making organization lacking an infrastructure to support reform. The problem this version of reform creates is structural stasis: the department is limited in what it can offer, despite significant county and district needs, making it likely that little of any significance will get done.

This stasis passes extraordinarily ambitious expectations on to counties, who are tasked to do what the CDE cannot:

We're trying to build expertise and capacity around those areas as a county office, and, yet, at the same time, we know we will never be able to be the provider of support in every single area.<sup>122</sup>

Altogether, this paints a portrait of sparks that differs from either a conventional picture of "nothing getting done" or one where the political, technical, and organizational capacities are so weak relative to the ambitious expectations that impact remains modest. Leadership in CDE during Governor Brown's administration brought both vision and concrete steps toward agency improvement:

it's not to say that the organization has made a complete pivot . . . but it's moving in that direction.<sup>123</sup>

Yet the task of agency transformation was enormous:

the CDE is definitely in a restructure. . . . What we're still hearing in the field . . . [is] we're not quite there yet in terms of coordinating and creating

a common message across divisions . . . [especially for] LCAP . . . [and] in terms of addressing particularly students with disabilities.<sup>124</sup>

It is also important to discern the difference between stasis-from-sparks as a problem that reform creates and stability, which enables reforms to take root. Staying the course has been a crucial contributor to policy learning from experience in California. Unlike Tennessee, California stayed the course with its testing consortium—Smarter Balanced—and has avoided the sparks that Tennessee's shifts have produced. Unlike New York, California put its teacher evaluation systems on hold until other parts of the ambitious reform agenda, and the LCFF, had time to take root.<sup>125</sup> Mezzo-level policy makers echoed in chorus the crucial role that stability can play in reform and in structural change.

I'm hoping that we maintain stability. . . . I hope that we stay the course. I think both on the financing side, and in terms of the standards, and curriculum, I think we gotta stay the course, and let the system take root.<sup>126</sup>

I hope we stay the course with LCFF and what we're doing and how we do the work. We have to give people time to get better at it. At the same time, we have to keep pushing to make sure people are getting better at it.<sup>127</sup>

Moving back up to the broader policy level, at the intersection of the LCFF and ambitious standards-based reforms, stable stakeholder convergence could enable progress in elements of instructional support to continue to learn from experience in productive ways.

I hope we stay the course in California for a while. I feel like we have made strides in this very short time frame towards improvements. Is it a perfect system? No, but I think there's enough places where improvements have begun to happen, staying with them helps. We need the same assessments. We need the standards; we need the funding system and Dashboard to take hold in the best way so that we continue to improve.<sup>128</sup>

The trick, of course, is how to create sufficient stability to allow the reforms to take root without creating an ossified bureaucracy or constantly shifting to a policy-du-jour:<sup>129</sup>

Right now [during Brown's administration], I would say there's cross-agency collaboration because of the players. There [are] willing players. We all know, depending on political wind shifts, those players may change,

and they might not have the same collaborative spirit. Are there policies or structures that we could put in place? What I am not out to create is another bureaucratic structure. . . . How do you formalize that but without unintentionally creating another bureaucratic system? . . . Let's continue to look at staying the course around LCFF, but I think the new phase right now is the System of Support and how do we look at that in a real thoughtful way over these next few years and not getting to a place of "look at how many districts are now being identified for support. We don't have the capacity to do this. Okay, let's pivot and try something else, a new accountability system." That is not the answer.<sup>130</sup>

The fundamental need for a competent Department of Education persists, though, along with the pressures for state and district agencies to be all things to all constituencies, and the "gravitational pull" back to categorical grants, back to compliance-oriented accountability.

Then there's part of the baggage is just the gravitational pull of the old ways. It continues to be strong. It's easier for people both [in the CDE] and [in the legislature] to slip back into a categorical approach to work. . . . You see a problem and you wanna solve it and you wanna create that solution to that problem, so what do you do? You run a bill through the legislature, you attach some funding to it, and you ask the department to take care of it and then you're back with the categorical program. . . . As opposed to trusting the local districts to be prioritizing the use of funds in ways that they think best serves their communities.<sup>131</sup>

In the absence of organizational and political infrastructure, the mezzo level faces problems of sparks. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

## 8 \* Learning from Reforms to the Reform

For hundreds of years, American public schools have shouldered enormous expectations: to redress societal inequalities, to prepare the workforce, to train citizens, to provide health care, to provide nutritional support, and to do this in the context of America's porous safety net, contested democracy, and unequal playing field. For hundreds of years, American public policy has looked to public schools to be the vehicle for political, economic, and social transformation, despite local control over key aspects of education finance, despite a limited role for the central government, and despite the importance of out-of-school factors.

Along with the central role that public schools play in America's politics, economy, and society have come hundreds of years of efforts to reform schools and teaching.<sup>1</sup> Yet these reforms consistently fall short of reformers' expectations. They fall short of achieving ambitious and equitable teaching and learning. Returning to David Cohen's critique of the political philosopher and education reformer John Dewey: "If Dewey committed any intellectual crime, it was . . . not to have followed through on his remarkable proposals, and not to have carefully investigated the problems of achieving change in schools, the problems of using schools as an agent of social change, and the possible strategies for dealing with such problems. . . . The problems with which Dewey dealt are our problems, as are those he ignored."<sup>2</sup> Our problems, Cohen helped elucidate, were problems of underlying infrastructure: the organizational and political supports that enable teaching and learning. Problems with underlying infrastructure—its weaknesses and absences—manifest in other public sector services. For along with the problems of the underlying and inherited infrastructure are the problems we create whenever we try to repair that infrastructure. Returning to David Cohen's observations:

From the very beginning of the country, the first political argument we had in Washington's presidency was about infrastructure. . . . I don't think anybody really understands how old this problem is. And how it's not going to go away.<sup>3</sup>

It is not going to go away: each iteration of reform creates problems, even as it solves part of the problem. The mezzo-level policy maker we quoted at the end of chapter 7 offered a complementary perspective on the patchwork that produces categorical programs and isolated efforts at solutions:

You see a problem and you wanna solve it and you wanna create that solution to that problem, so what do you do? You run a bill through the legislature, you attach some funding to it, and you ask the department to take care of it and then you're back with the categorical program.<sup>4</sup>

Categorical programs have been supremely important in American education policy, notably Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Yet reforms produce problems, as each policy iteration attends to particular parts of the interconnected infrastructure, leaving others to combine in a new cocktail of problems. This implies two risks that come with reform. One risk entails focusing on the reform without focusing on the problems that reform creates. Each iteration of policy making that links assessments with accountability, for instance, has displayed adaptation from the previous iteration: each has diligently reformed the reform. Yet each iteration kept marching down a seemingly path-dependent route of assessment-accountability, without significant repair to the underlying infrastructure that assessment-accountability aimed to improve.

The second risk entails abandoning what we learn when we perceive the problems that a particular reform produces or the parts of the problem the reform fails to address. As the chorus of critics of standards-based reforms—the extended case study in this book—grows louder, the problems appear to be taking center stage and the learning appears to be receding from view. As we write this chapter, the Tennessee legislature has taken steps to “purge vestiges” of the Common Core from its states’ standards and forbid schools from using instructional materials consistent with the Common Core—even if those materials are of high quality and match the Tennessee standards’ learning objectives. Both risks are important to consider, whether for standards-based reforms or for any other major policy reform that spans decades.

Standards-based reforms, like so many policies, are precisely that: multiple policies, bundled together, which connect with other bundles of policies. Standards-based reforms—contained in the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994, in Goals 2000 of 1994, in the Obey-Porter Act, in the Clinton administration effort to establish Voluntary National Testing, in the No Child Left Behind Act, in Race to the Top and in myriad state-level policies, including the adoption of Common Core State Standards—have



manifested in many policies, at many levels of government. They are far from a unitary “treatment.” They are, instead, a recent installment of centuries of efforts to reform the reform of American public schools.

Aspects of standards-based reforms—in their many forms—drew on evidence and experience over thirty years. Reforms made adjustments that would be politically palatable, though they were not necessarily based on evidence. Reforms reflected changes in ideas and beliefs, again not necessarily based on evidence. In these respects, standards-based reforms are like public policies more generally: multifaceted concoctions of evidence, politics, and social ideas that evolve over time.

Some aspects of standards-based reform connected weakly, if at all, with teachers’ instructional practices. Notably, providing teachers with data on student performance consistently shows little evidence of improving teaching and learning.<sup>5</sup> Other parts of standards-based reform, including having high-quality instructional materials connected with teachers’ sustained opportunities to learn how to use those materials, did produce significant gains in student achievement.<sup>6</sup> Reform both solves problems and produces problems. This is the lesson of standards-based reforms and its recent incarnation in the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The Common Core has neither “succeeded” nor “failed”: these are the wrong metrics. Rather than conclude that it is a “failure” and move on to the next fad, it is important to look closely at the ways in which standards-based reform collided with the inherited terrain, and the problems that collision created.

## **What We Have Learned**

What happens after reform? The framework we offer here suggests the answer is not merely evaluative: success or failure. Moreover, the answer is not merely procedural: more implementation or more politics. To understand what happens after reform, we need to consider the inherited terrain with which reforms collide. That inherited terrain includes institutional legacies (like racism), adjacent policy domains (like housing), and debris that remain from previous policy reforms (like factory-style schooling arrangements). The resources that reforms mobilize combine with these inherited terrains to form some version of infrastructure for next steps, recognizing that infrastructure may be insufficient for the reforms’ ambitions. Put differently, having an infrastructure for reform is not synonymous with having the appropriate infrastructure for reform.

What happens after reform legislation? The infrastructure that manifests from the collision of reforms and the inherited terrain sets the stage for more policy making at the mezzo level: in state, county, and district

agencies, in the space between legislation and frontline practice. Systematic variation in two crucial parts of infrastructure—its organizational and its political dimensions—yield four classes of problems. Even when all goes well, problems ensue.

When reforms succeed at accomplishing aspects of their aspirations, they can spread in unanticipated directions. In doing so, they can exceed the infrastructure that originally helped them operate. In this way, we see reforms like electrical currents with inappropriate power sources. To operate effectively, those reforms need a different infrastructure: a transformer of some kind, even in the enviable situation of strong organizational and political infrastructures. These infrastructures help the reforms to spread. Yet reform “successes” reveal deficiencies elsewhere or become stretched beyond their infrastructural means. This is the downside of spreading reforms: when reforms move beyond the original scope of infrastructure or in unanticipated ways, those extensions can threaten the whole reform enterprise.

Convergence among political stakeholders is by no means a given; and American public schools are no strangers to profound political disagreements. These disagreements were, indeed, stitched into the original design of the reforms that created public schools. This contestation or political divergence translates into overloaded and overwhelmed mezzo-level policy makers. As we noted in chapter 5, someone might win a political war; but smoldering legacies from all sides and over time are typically left behind for mezzo-level policy makers to reconcile and navigate. We draw on the metaphor of circuit overload to illustrate the overwhelmed mezzo-level policy making that manifests when organizational infrastructure is relatively robust, but political infrastructure is weak.

Boundaries, as we note in chapter 6, can be good things. Boundaries can help harness energy in areas where supportive infrastructure is in place, which can be generative for meaningful change. The challenge comes from taking the bounded reform to scale. Pockets of policy making, operating off the grid, can appear in small groups, but may be unable to expand more broadly beyond those pockets, so that other mezzo-level policy makers can participate in reform. While stakeholder support can emerge—at least for a time—to champion the reforms, the lack of organizational connections can discourage the reforms from spreading.

We elaborate on how weaknesses in both political and organizational infrastructures combine and conspire to perpetuate the status quo despite valiant efforts at reform. In the context of weak political and organizational infrastructures, policies cycle through in seemingly rapid progression. Lots happens, but little seems to change, as mezzo-level policy

makers struggle to keep up with the change or lay low until the heat of reform passes. We depict this as forms of sparks, known for their intensity, brevity, and modest impact.

Asking “what happens after reform” and considering the problems reforms create—rather than asking why reforms succeed or fail—offers perspectives on managing those problems from the outset and throughout the life-course of reform. Even “success” yields problems of extension into unanticipated or unprepared terrains. Even “failure” yields opportunities to learn for the next iteration. Our approach embeds opportunities to learn from experience, to use David Cohen’s phrase, in the reform process. We will always be reforming reforms. The question for reform, thus, becomes “what kinds of problems will reform create?” Understanding the problems that reforms create can provide us with guidance on how to manage those problems.

### **Applications beyond Education**

We have offered a deep dive into education reform to reveal the mechanisms that unfold after reforming reforms, and the problems such reforms create. Can education reforms, and the central role of mezzo-level policy making, shed light on other policy domains? We are optimistic that our approach elucidates the process of reforms in other policy domains, while we humbly recognize some scope conditions.

What would it take to apply the insights from our portrait to reforms in other policy domains? Such an application would require, from the outset, a close look at the elements of the reform (the resources the reform brings to the table) and a close look at the components of the inherited terrain (institutional legacies, adjacent policies, policy debris). These steps would be crucial to discern the features of the organizational and political infrastructures the mezzo level has to manage the reforms, and where the mezzo level manifests. While it is perhaps easiest to identify the mezzo level when assessing reforms that unfold in federalist systems, mezzo-level policy makers also manifest in the spaces between legislation and implementation at the federal level, as Carpenter’s classic account of policy making in the Department of Agriculture makes plain.<sup>7</sup>

Our portrait of the inherited terrain builds on and extends work that focuses on the importance of inherited political terrains to the life-course of reforms. Reforms are at risk, Patashnik’s work reveals, when they fail to attend to the underlying political infrastructure: when they fail to reconfigure extant political relationships.<sup>8</sup> We build on this to highlight political configurations at the mezzo level and to add that reforms are also

at risk when they fail to account for the organizational terrain. Yet, again, our framework looks beyond “risk” of success and/or failure to identify the problems reforms generate even when they succeed.

For instance, applying our framework of reforms to the “reform” of government-supported health insurance for children (i.e., Medicaid’s Children’s Health Insurance Program, or CHIP) would need to attend to the institutional legacies of the development of health insurance in the US and the development of the medical profession. It would need to attend to adjacent policy domains such as nutrition support. It would need to attend to policy debris from prior reforms, including shifting eligibility criteria. Such an analysis would need to attend to all of these components of the inherited terrain, along with the specific characteristics of the particular reform.

Careful analysis of the Children’s Health Insurance Program would require its own book. We offer here a thumbnail sketch of some potential problems that may manifest from reforms to CHIP. On a general level, CHIP enjoys a robust reputation as a reform “success” on many metrics. It enjoys broad bipartisan support. It receives credit for helping increase the rate at which children have health insurance coverage: thanks to CHIP, less than 5 percent of American children lack health insurance. CHIP, overall, appears to enjoy the enviable condition of having robust political and organizational infrastructure. Our model, however, invites caution in such circumstances and attentiveness to reforms that extend into other domains, perhaps in unanticipated or unsupported ways: whether and how CHIP may become implicated in or linked to areas of deficiency. One such area may include “parity” provisions that require health insurance providers (like Medicaid) to cover and provide support for mental health care, comparable to physical health care. The rub, of course, is the severe lack of mental health providers in the US, especially for children. Even before mental health needs exploded with the COVID-19 pandemic, less than half of children with mental health needs received care from designated mental health care providers; and 70 percent of counties in the US had *no* practicing child psychiatrists.<sup>9</sup> Less than half of all psychiatrists in the US accept any form of health insurance—Medicaid or otherwise. Mezzo-level policy makers—state administrators—thus face effects from domains (i.e., the availability of doctors) over which they have no control. Mezzo-level policy makers’ ability to cover children’s mental health needs—as health parity became more explicitly required—is fundamentally limited by their inherited terrain.

Reforms, we have argued, are rarely singular; generally they consist of many parts. We have, throughout, called attention to “policies” rather than “policy.” While Medicaid, and CHIP, may enjoy aggregate level po-

litical and organizational infrastructures, closer examination of its various parts may reveal more heterogeneity in those infrastructures. For instance, we would expect shifting configurations of political support for telehealth to yield potential overload for mezzo-level policy makers as they manage layers of new requirements—which providers can provide which services via telehealth—along with lacunae for areas where demand for telehealth coverage outpaces supply and insurance coverage.<sup>10</sup>

Medicaid has a history of state-level innovations that then spread to other states and within states.<sup>11</sup> One such current innovation has emerged through North Carolina’s “Healthy Opportunities” pilot, which is rife with promising reform potential.<sup>12</sup> As we write this, North Carolina is in the process of developing coordinated approaches to health, housing, nutrition, and transportation through its Medicaid Managed Care vehicle. Political convergence can allow innovations like these to spread. Experience from Comprehensive School Reform designs, or CORE in Tennessee, urge careful consideration as to whether and how these “Opportunities” can extend beyond three pilot sites to areas that may lack the organizational connections, or whether these opportunities will operate in isolation from the rest of the state.

Reforms to the reform of Medicaid demonstrate evidence of learning from experience. Yet, as we argue in chapter 3, what happens after reform depends, in large part, on where—geographically—one looks. While many states, like California, have reformed their Medicaid policies to be gender-affirming, many others have not. States like Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas include specific bans on using Medicaid to cover gender-affirming services, including surgical procedures.<sup>13</sup> Other states, like Michigan, neither expressly permit nor prohibit coverage for gender-affirming services, moving the policy making to the mezzo level. Depending on the political and organizational infrastructures in various states, we would expect to find intense policy development coupled with stasis, depending on geography.

We offer this sketch as a framework for understanding reforms and their ongoing adaptations. Medicaid, like public education, vests considerable policy making authority at the subnational administrative level. It is not limited to federal-level policy making, nor is it limited to legislative policy making. Unlike education, it relies heavily on private providers, rather than local-level public sector providers. Our model may be less applicable to policy domains that lack a discernible mezzo level of policy making authority. Federal-level cash transfers like Social Security, for instance, may not experience the problems we identify, when the cash transfer decisions take much of the middle out of the middle, going straight from legislation to implementation. Yet even cash transfers

can experience problems of extending in unanticipated and unsupported ways: they can be loved to death and extended to domains that exceed their infrastructure.

## **Implications for Education Reform**

As David Cohen reminds us, the problems that reform creates are “not going to go away” as we patch together reforms on top of our inherited systems. So, where do we go from here? What can be done to help mezzo-level policy makers—whether in school districts or state environmental agencies or county public health offices—manage the problems of reform and to do so in ways that redress inequities? Reform aspirations often seesaw between proposals for more centralization and proposals for more grassroots empowerment. These are, however, organizational solutions to problems that are only partly organizational.<sup>14</sup> Nor is there a fixed solution: reforming the reform—whether in policy making or in the classroom—is fundamentally dynamic. Yet, knowing what we know about the problems that reforms create, where do we go from here? Where are crucial sites for subsequent education-specific reforms? What puzzles confront the next phase of reforming the reform of public schools?

## **INVESTMENTS IN INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT**

One enduring puzzle asks, what types of investments in instructional support appear suited to manage some of the problems reforms create? Thirty years of standards-based reforms have created a lot of wheat and a lot of chaff. It is crucial to distinguish between the two, lest important lessons from the past thirty years get discarded as the chorus grows louder to pivot away from standards-based reforms. Consistent evidence, across states, across researchers, separate from ideological rancor, makes several things clear.

**TEACHERS MATTER TO CHILDREN’S OUTCOMES.** Evidence remains robust that out-of-school factors constitute the dominant predictor of children’s long-term outcomes. Structural inequalities that have produced limited family financial means, poor housing and neighborhood conditions, and other aspects of children’s life loom large in predicting their long-term well-being. Research makes clear that schools and high-quality instruction cannot in and of themselves compensate for and erase all of the structural factors that produce structural inequality. However, evidence also makes clear that “among school-related factors that bear on student outcomes in life, teachers matter most. When it comes to student

performance on reading and math tests, teachers are estimated to have two to three times the effect of any other school factor, including services, facilities, or school leadership.”<sup>15</sup>

Some research also suggests that teacher quality influences students’ high school graduation rates, their college attendance, and their earnings later in life.<sup>16</sup> Emerging evidence also suggests that teachers impact students’ attendance rates in high school. Liu and Loeb find that students who have “high value added to attendance teachers” have significantly fewer absences from the school day and have higher high school graduation rates.<sup>17</sup> Teachers matter.<sup>18</sup>

**MOST TEACHERS ARE ABLE TO IMPROVE THEIR INSTRUCTION.** While teachers matter to student outcomes, evidence also suggests that teachers have a lot of room to improve their instruction. Some studies focus on the predominance of boring or rote instructional practices. Other studies focus on teachers’ superficial understanding of the content they teach. Yet studies of instructional improvement suggest that most teachers are able to improve their instructional practices in ways that impact student outcomes. In sharp contrast to reform models that call for mass firing of teachers, reports suggest that “between 2 and 15 percent of current teachers cannot improve their practice to an acceptable level and ought to be replaced each year.”<sup>19</sup> The few school districts that have actually demonstrated evidence of successful “turnarounds” following a state takeover (like Lawrence, Massachusetts) have replaced only about 10 percent of their teaching force.<sup>20</sup> Teachers matter. Teachers can improve. And some evidence suggests how to help teachers improve.

**MATERIALS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN HOW TO USE MATERIALS.** What types of investments in instructional support appear suited to manage the problems that reform creates on a micro level or in targeted, niche reforms? Evidence has become increasingly clear that teachers need professional learning opportunities that have both high-quality instructional materials and ongoing opportunities to learn how to use those materials (through sustained coaching or instructional support, for instance). New textbooks alone won’t make for better instruction, nor will canned scripts for teachers to follow. Nor will a one-shot, two-hour Saturday workshop improve instruction. But the combination of better instructional materials and sustained opportunities to learn how to use those materials can make a difference.<sup>21</sup> Sustained opportunities for teachers to learn how to use high-quality materials can entail instructional coaches districts hire to spend a lot of time in particular schools. Other models focus on teachers creating communities

of practice within the school building itself and providing instructional support and mentoring for each other on an ongoing, sustained basis. Intensive instructional support is expensive. Thus, the next generation of research is focusing on how to make instructional support more affordable and more reliably implemented.<sup>22</sup> The next generation is also attending to how to improve the pipeline of teachers—both so they better reflect and connect with the communities they serve and so they have the pre-service training they need to mitigate the need for subsequent instructional intervention.

State standards provide potential connective tissue between those two important instructional elements: quality curricular materials combined with sustained opportunities to learn how to use those materials.<sup>23</sup> As critiques of the reforms from the past thirty years mount, it is crucial to recall what we have learned: teachers matter, and paths toward encouraging more widespread teacher quality are emerging.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE MATTER TO INSTRUCTION. While teachers matter to student outcomes, and teacher quality varies within schools, school and district organizational supports matter to quality instruction.<sup>24</sup> Reform depends on organizational infrastructure (connective tissue) and political infrastructure (stakeholder convergence), as well as technical know-how among educators and leaders. Teaching ultimately entails *someone* teaching *something* (some content) to *someone else*, *somewhere*.<sup>25</sup> This is, in part, what standards-based reforms got right: taking instructional content seriously. Yet all four parts of that sentence are contested, rendering instructional support fundamentally political. Though technical expertise looms large in the ongoing puzzle of investments in instructional support that appear suited to manage the problems reform creates on a micro level, organizational and political infrastructure loom large as well. Put differently, the central importance of instruction and what appears in the classroom invites renewed attention to the mezzo level and its organizational and political infrastructures.

#### RECONSIDER THE PURPOSES AND CONTRIBUTION OF ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A second puzzle asks, how might efforts to reconstitute schools' approaches to assessments and accountability draw on lessons from earlier eras of assessment that hold promise of being both more informative and less toxically punitive? Assessments have played a key role in unraveling stakeholder support for standards-based reforms: in the early 1990s in



California, in the late 1990s for Voluntary National Tests, and in the 2010s with the Common Core assessment consortia. Assessments overall, and especially assessments with consequences for students, teachers, and schools, have morphed into political third rails. Fundamentally, assessments incorporate values into their designs; and along with those values come politics.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, assessments have been fraught with technical difficulties: they are hard to construct in ways that measure the things anyone actually wants to measure. Assessments strain organizations and their relationships with each other: they have been misused as devices for punishing organizations and have offered teachers very little insight on how to improve their teaching practice or students' performance. Despite assessments' political, technical, and organizational failures, David Cohen aptly observed:

Even though most of the tests are really crummy, they have focused people's attention on things that they were not focused on.<sup>27</sup>

This observation connects with the original purpose of the nineteenth-century version of the US Department of Education: to shine a light on disparities and weaknesses endemic in US public education. As the chorus grows louder for movement away from standards-based reform, what mechanisms will operate to shine lights on disparities and on areas of academic weakness, in the absence of assessments? What incentives will operate for the schools and educators who are reluctant to improve to orient them toward improvement?<sup>28</sup> As the chorus grows louder for movement away from standards-based reforms, what mechanisms will operate as linchpins to hold the instructional components together? Part of what helped support pockets of learning has been common languages, common terms of reference, common denominators. As one of our interviewees put it:

Even though they're all coaches and even though they do have somewhat different expectations in each building, we do have common denominators: curriculum, instruction, and assessment.<sup>29</sup>

While the 1867 US Department of Education was formed to gather and release data that would "shame" states into providing public education, data have become increasingly attached to specific accountability criteria and punitive actions. Using assessment outcomes to punish "bad" schools has had a long history of advocates on both the political left and the political right:

everybody from . . . civil rights groups to rising candidates for public office . . . have said, "No, no, we have got to have a list of good schools, and

more particularly, we have to have a list of bad schools. Because if we don't have a list of bad schools, there aren't consequences. So we've got to have a list of bad schools. And you've got to tell us who's on that list."<sup>30</sup>

Evidence points to ways in which this has narrowed schools' courses of study, and the ways schools or districts "game" the tests. The politics of accountability have led to continued investment in assessments.<sup>31</sup> Yet that continued investment has produced a sort of policy feedback on steroids, with each iteration creating new problems and embedding old problems.

The spillover effects of bad assessments and inappropriate consequences for bad assessments have been toxic. They are toxic to the relationship between teachers and administrators: there is scant evidence that individual-level student assessments linked to teacher evaluations help improve teaching and learning. They are toxic to politics: they feed into the us-vs.-them, discipline-punish mindset that permeates twenty-first-century American political discourse.<sup>32</sup> They consume an inordinate amount of mezzo-level policy makers' time that could be spent on more productive interventions. As parents of elementary and secondary students in public schools, we have seen how they can operate in ways that are toxic to our own children.

And yet, it bears remembering the central role NAEP played in assessment reform in the mid-twentieth century. It bears remembering how NAEP has fulfilled aspects of the original design of the US Department of Education: to shine a light on potential inequities and weaknesses, but not have that light tethered to specific consequences. And it bears remembering some of the key assets of NAEP's design. For one, NAEP's matrix sampling design rendered the technical part of assessment design easier and less expensive. The design can work to hold schools accountable, but not students or teachers, removing some of the potent politics. Altogether, matrix sampling designs can relieve some of the organizational demands and pressures that have ensnared individual-student assessments. NAEP was not alone in using this design: it was also used for California's assessments before Governor Wilson insisted on individual-level assessments. California's shift away from matrix to individual-level assessments reflected a species of political learning at the intersection of left and right politics: with the civil rights organizations insisting on student-level achievement data, along with more conservative advocates who wanted to hold teachers accountable. Yet this reform to the reform unfolded in California and nationally in ways detached from learning from experience: actually having the assessments contribute to desired outcomes. And, ironically, this version of reforms to the reform has appeared to help fuel some efforts to incinerate standards-based reforms.

In addition, NAEP's original design relied on educators to develop and screen the assessment items.<sup>33</sup> This served several functions: it brought educators' expertise to bear on NAEP's items, and it cultivated educator buy-in for the assessment. Some evidence suggests educators who participated in the item reviews helped advocate for the assessment and helped keep some of the politics-of-uncertainty and the politics-of-federal-overreach at bay. Though Pearson did use educator review panels for PARCC, Pearson's brand shadowed that engagement and became the face of the assessment backlash in the Common Core era. Beyond politics, though, mezzo-level policy makers in Tennessee repeatedly emphasized to us how educators who were involved with scoring Tennessee's assessment seemed to benefit from the work in terms of their own professional development. A close connection between educators and assessments is not only a matter of good politics: it can also be a matter of good practice, when designed to both tap into and build educators' opportunities to learn.<sup>34</sup>

How might efforts to reconstitute schools' approaches to assessments and accountability draw on lessons from earlier eras of assessment that hold promise of being both more informative and less toxically punitive? The lessons of reform invite policy makers to unpack the learning and the problems that the last thirty years of assessment design, development, and operation have created and the ensuing feedback process: how the punitive approach to accountability linked to assessments became more and more embedded with each iteration, lacking technical and organizational capacity, yielding intense sparks with little instrumental benefit. Yet the lessons of reform also invite policy makers to return to the original spirit of the idea: to shine light on disparities and weaknesses. The lessons extend well beyond educational assessments and tap into broader ideas about abetting accountability and responsiveness in American public institutions and public bureaucracies. The spirit of the 1867 legislation remains: to have ways of seeing when public institutions are struggling, when public institutions are corrupt, when public institutions are flourishing, and when public institutions abet human flourishing. The challenge for reforms will include developing organizational and political infrastructures for mezzo-level policy makers to move beyond compliance and toward support.

## INVESTMENTS BEYOND EDUCATION

A third puzzle includes, what would it take to repair the unequal and inequitable infrastructure on which public education builds? This last puzzle is daunting. Schools matter. Teachers matter. Disparities and

weaknesses in schooling and in teaching matter. Research makes clear that educational investments matter to promoting greater equity in the United States.<sup>35</sup> As we write, the Biden administration is taking steps to shore up key parts of the underlying infrastructure to promote more equity in school finance and opportunities for early learning. What would it take to repair the unequal and inequitable infrastructure on which public education builds?

No school-based reform can eliminate disparities in students' educational outcomes and opportunities: disparities that arise because of fundamental inequalities and inequities in American society, economy, and political processes. No school-based reform can become the balance wheel that rights the wrongs American society has inflicted on its children. American public policy has clung closely to the fiction and fantasy of schools as the balance wheel for over a century, without closely examining what it would take in infrastructural repairs to create the revolution Dewey imagined.

Public schools are poorly equipped to repair the infrastructure they inherited.<sup>36</sup> While Mann, Cubberly, Dewey, and the reformers who followed made manifold contributions to the development of public education, the notion that schools are capable of remedying the harms that society, politics, and economic inequality have wrought on our children sets schools and children up for failure. As one of our respondents said:

The fundamental problem . . . down to classroom level is initiative overload. . . . You can't have teachers trying to take on academic improvement, integrate ELD [English Language Development], try to implement PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports] simultaneously, and include SEL [Social and Emotional Learning] indicators. . . . These are all wonderful things, wonderful things from a policy lens and from a research lens. On a practical level, you're drowning a teaching force, and you're drowning a leading force. . . . You are asking why teachers are leaving or why you cannot recruit people in. You are giving them an impossible job.<sup>37</sup>

Not only do teachers and leaders have an impossible job; so do the eight-year-olds upon whom policy makers seem to depend, if schools are to remedy inequity and injustice. Putting fundamental societal transformation on eight-year-old shoulders is a tall ask. Learning from the problems that reforms create points to the importance of investments in fixing current problems in non-school-based sectors: housing, infrastructure, financial reforms, and investments in the operation of democratic systems. Working to repair the foundation outside of schools appears essential to

provide conditions under which teachers actually have the opportunity to teach, and students actually have the opportunity to learn.

This does not mean that reforms are either fundamentally cyclical or fundamentally doomed. Rather, as scholars of the American political process, we know that big, structural, durable changes can and do happen; and there is plenty of reason to think that durable shifts will happen again. Policy punctuations—or big bangs—do manifest and do disrupt path dependence, although “durable shift” is not synonymous with “progress” or “improvement.”<sup>38</sup> While we see potential for another big bang, we do not see the technical core of instruction or systemic reform in the technical core as likely sites for a big, structural, durable “big bang” that will remake society.

Instead, two of the chief problems David Cohen identified as following from the original reform of mass schooling—limited government and local finance of schooling—seem like more potent and promising points of rupture. Reforms have been trying to solve the “schooling for all” problem that Katznelson and Weir articulated (i.e., access without common experiences) without addressing fundamental impediments to common experiences. Schooling, instead, remains linked to children’s unequal residential options and experiences and limited government help in core domains of student well-being. The feedback that problems from reform create can be pernicious because they compound fiscal inequalities and inequities. Reform after reform layers on top of unequal—and inequitable—foundations. We are not suggesting that money solves everything: it does not. But pivoting to state-level rather than local funding—as Canada has done—and then pivoting to financial comparability across the states—as Canada has done—could create a terrain on which future reforms (and perhaps curricular reforms) have some hope of taking root.<sup>39</sup> Nor are we suggesting that big government solves everything: it does not. But, as the COVID-19 pandemic made plain, competent (or incompetent) public agencies can make the difference between life and death. Nor does the central importance of attending to the underlying social, political, and economic infrastructure upon which education builds diminish the importance of attending to the instructional core of teaching and learning immediately and continuously. Pockets of learning that embody how to improve teaching and learning persist and continue to generate knowledge on which future reform can build. Recognizing—and attending to—the problems that reform produces could enable niche reforms to spread.

Repairing the incomplete US social safety net, however, risks the same problems that have challenged efforts to reform the reform of mass schooling, underscoring the central importance of learning from experience: learning from reforms to the reform.

## Implications for the Study of Reform

Like the electricity metaphor we deploy in this book, we aspire for our framework to be generative and to offer new opportunities for growth and sustainment. Our framework is complex, with multiple moving parts and relationships: reforms + inherited terrains = infrastructure for mezzo-level policy making = problems, with those problems then feeding back into the earlier parts of the equation. This is not the stuff of tidy causal inference.

Yet our complex framework is replete with opportunities for future scholarship to unpack the elements, assess discrete relationships, and offer more guidance for how to manage the problems of reforming the reforms. We hope future scholarship unpacks the elements of the reforms (are there systematic features of those reforms that matter?) and considers their interaction with each of the elements of the inherited terrain and how those relationships can yield systematic differences in the subsequent organizational and political infrastructure. We hope future scholarship digs more deeply into the inherited terrain and systematically assesses the sectoral contributions of inherited institutions (nonprofit organizations? for-profit organizations?) and the racialized contributions of inherited institutions. We hope future scholarship digs more deeply into the role of knowledge and technical capacity in the operation of the mezzo-level policy making infrastructures. We hope future scholarship examines more closely the ways in which the problems that reforms create feed back into the policy making process and when this feedback process exacerbates and embeds inequality. Much work remains.

Learning from reforms to the reform ultimately means recognizing that the process of reform is never-ending. Recognizing that limitations—even failures—are inherently part of the reform process is part of the power that comes from pivoting to the mezzo perspective. Fixating on legislative reforms risks elevating elected officials' credit-claiming and blame-shirking incentives.<sup>40</sup> From a mezzo-level perspective:

in education we have a really hard time. As much as we talk about continuous improvement and we talk about improvement science, and we talk about it's all about getting better, that requires that you admit some failure. . . . In saying "Oh, God, that didn't work out right." As much as we say we're about continuous improvement, that space to say that didn't quite go right is not as present as it needs to be. It's not that failure is terminal . . . I think that we just have a really hard time with that.<sup>41</sup>

Our mezzo-level policy makers acknowledged failures as they sought to learn and reform their reforms.<sup>42</sup> And failure constitutes a powerful propellant for future reform.

The conversations that we have, to me, is what's been so valuable for me 'cause I'm on the tail end of my career. Yet, I can call her and go, "Okay, you did this. I tried this, and that was a straight-up bust. Talk to me about options." We all talk, and she goes, "Well, maybe this would work better in your building than in mine." It's so great to have people to talk with that can help you grow as an educator, no matter how long you been doin' it. . . . We're not afraid to tell them, "We don't know." If a teacher comes and ask a question, we'll be like, "I don't know. Let me call—" especially, I'm learning—math is my area. I'm learning ELA, but I will be callin'.<sup>43</sup>

When it comes to reforming our reforms, our mezzo-level policy makers show us the way, as they learn from each other. This mezzo-level policy maker managed the problems of her own weak know-how by calling a peer (organizational links) within her school system (with comparable political conditions).

The reforms that produced mass schooling in the US have embedded local control and limited government in those reforms: part of the inherited terrain that shapes current infrastructure for reform. This means the problems that emerge from reforms are problems that mezzo-level policy makers have to bear. Beyond public schooling, as David Cohen reminds us, the US has been arguing about infrastructure since Washington's presidency. The problems of infrastructure with which Washington dealt are our problems, and remain our problems—as are those he ignored.





## TECHNICAL APPENDIX A

### Supplemental Tables

**Table A.3.1. County Level Counts from Private Foundations and Grant Recipients (CCS, 2014) by Student Population and Demographic Characteristics**

<i>County Name</i>	<i>PF, per 100k Students</i>	<i>No. of PF</i>	<i>No. of Grantees</i>	<i>Grant- ees, per 100k Students</i>	<i>Total Grant Amount (\$)</i>	<i>Pct of Pop 5–17 in Poverty</i>	<i>Pct of Students, ELL</i>	<i>Median HH Income (\$)</i>
Alameda County	11.1	25	46	104.0	2,126,780	13.4	21.9	81,462
Amador County	24.8	1	25	1.0	4,000	17.2	2.4	55,879
Butte County	6.4	2	3	1.0	1,000	22.6	8.8	45,369
Contra Costa County	10.3	18	19	34.0	420,625	11.6	17.7	83,036
El Dorado County	0	0	4	1.0	1,000	10.4	7.4	75,575
Fresno County	5	10	6	12.0	245,500	33.6	22.6	46,608
Glenn County	0	0	88	5.0	12,950	23.4	23.6	43,584
Humboldt County	0	0	6	1.0	10,000	22.8	7.3	40,739
Imperial County	5.4	2	38	14.0	20,322	32.1	43.3	39,925
Inyo County	38.5	2	77	4.0	40,005	19.2	14.2	51,697
Kern County	4.4	8	7	12.0	354,669	29.2	22.0	51,150
Kings County	0	0	7	2.0	1,500	28.1	21.9	46,440
Lake County	0	0	11	1.0	1,250	30.0	12.3	37,993
Los Angeles County	16	247	26	407.0	14,950,892	22.8	22.7	59,045
Madera County	0	0	3	1.0	1,000	31.1	25.7	46,593
Marin County	60.2	20	108	36.0	907,170	7.7	15.0	99,868
Mariposa County	0	0	54	1.0	1,000	23.2	3.2	44,595
Mendocino County	15.4	2	92	12.0	68,027	25.2	21.2	43,237
Merced County	1.8	1	11	6.0	4,000	36.3	28.3	42,879
Modoc County	0	0	70	1.0	832	26.8	20.2	38,402
Monterey County	14.5	11	32	24.0	280,833	21.5	41.2	60,047
Napa County	33.3	7	33	7.0	65,000	11.0	23.1	72,683

Nevada County	0	0	16	2.0	9,100	14.8	5.3	57,627
Orange County	12.7	63	18	90.0	1,515,688	16.2	26.0	78,002
Placer County	9.9	7	7	5.0	2,456	8.1	8.2	76,203
Riverside County	1.2	5	3	12.0	129,856	21.5	20.9	57,895
Sacramento County	3.7	9	6	15.0	154,283	21.8	18.1	58,735
San Bernardino County	1.2	5	2	10.0	55,333	26.4	19.2	53,526
San Diego County	8.3	42	19	96.0	3,364,400	17.2	22.4	67,053
San Francisco County	108.3	64	186	110.0	3,099,625	14.5	27.8	90,527
San Joaquin County	4.9	7	8	11.0	66,517	23.1	23.1	53,341
San Luis Obispo County	20.1	7	49	17.0	124,420	13.8	15.6	61,761
San Mateo County	46.2	44	85	81.0	1,144,153	9.1	24.4	101,133
Santa Barbara County	36.4	25	64	44.0	485,861	18.8	35.0	63,049
Santa Clara County	23.1	64	49	135.0	3,650,194	8.5	24.1	102,191
Santa Cruz County	12.3	5	34.5	14.0	303,736	16.5	29.4	64,841
Shasta County	3.8	1	11.3	3.0	1,500	24.3	3.3	45,943
Sierra County	268.8	1	268.8	1.0	500	14.5	6.2	47,535
Siskiyou County	0	0	17.5	1.0	2,000	29.2	3.4	37,447
Solano County	1.6	1	9.4	6.0	22,500	14.9	13.8	67,202
Sonoma County	9.8	7	32.3	23.0	327,771	12.8	23.2	66,463
Stanislaus County	3.7	4	5.6	6.0	36,554	25.3	25.0	51,949
Tehama County	0	0	9.5	1.0	10,000	29.5	16.7	40,292
Tulare County	1	1	4.9	5.0	115,000	34.6	28.2	42,637
Ventura County	6.3	9	18.3	26.0	876,862	13.5	23.8	79,285
Yolo County	6.8	2	10.2	3.0	8,500	15.0	21.6	58,766

Notes: These data are derived from several sources: first, we merged the geocoded organization from the Open Center for Nonprofit Research, fiscal year 2014 by ZIP code to the county-level boundaries from the state of California. Next, we merged the organizational data with aggregated county estimates of English Language Learners, from the California Department of Education for the 2015 school year. Poverty estimates are based on the percentage of the population aged 5–17 in poverty, from the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) in 2015. The table excludes counties that do not have service organizations according to our analysis, e.g., any county that did not have organizations geocoded within the county boundary.

**Table A.5.1. Support for Standards, State Pair Treatments, 2018**

<i>States Referenced in Treatment</i>	<i>Support for Standards</i>
California/Connecticut	−0.108** (0.042)
Hawaii/Idaho	−0.025 (0.043)
Alabama/Arkansas	−0.059 (0.043)
Constant	1.705*** (0.031)
Observations	1,000
$R^2$	0.007
Adjusted $R^2$	0.004
Residual Std. Error	0.475 (df = 996)
F Statistic	2.447* (df = 3;996)

Note: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table A.5.2. Common Core Hashtag Legend, 2018**

<i>Hashtag</i>	<i>Abbr.</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
#commoncore	cc	Common Core
#StopCommonCore	SCC	Stop Common Core
#TCOT	TCO	TCOT is an acronym for Top Conservatives on Twitter
#MAGA	MAG	MAGA is an acronym for President Trump’s campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again”
#Obama	Obm	Obama
#EndFedEd	EFE	Advocates for either ending the US Department of Education or curtailing its role
#Islam	Isl	Islam
#USA	USA	USA
#CommonSense	CS	Common sense
#NCLB	NCL	NCLB is an acronym for No Child Left Behind
#education	edu	education
#edchat	edc	#edchat serves as a conversation thread online and can be used by educators to join weekly discussions
#STEM	ste	STEM is an acronym for the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math
#math, #mathchat	math	#mathchat serve as a conversation thread online for Twitter users interested in math education
#edtech	edt	#edtech references educational technology designed to improve instruction in classrooms
#curriculum		curriculum
#k12	k12	K12 is an acronym for kindergarten through 12th grade education

**Table A.5.3. College and Career Legend, 2018**

<i>Hashtag</i>	<i>Abbr</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
#college, #career	CCR	College or Career
#book	bok	Book
#educate, #edu	edu	Education
#learn	lrn	Learn
#edchat	edc	#edchat serves as a conversation thread online and can be used by educators to join weekly discussions
#leadupchat	luc	#leadupchat serves as a conversation thread online for leaders in education
#scchat, #sccrowd	scc	#scchat or #sccrowd serves as a conversation thread online for school counselors
#hschat	hs	#scchat or #sccrowd serves as a conversation thread online for high school educators
#expert	exp	Expert
#speaker	spk	Speaker
#intern	int	Internship

**Table A.6.1. County-level Counts of Nonprofit Education Service Organizations (NCCS, 2015) by Student Population and Demographic Characteristics (SAIPE and CDE, 2015)**

<i>County Name</i>	<i>No. of Orgs, per 100,000 students</i>	<i>No. of Orgs</i>	<i>Total Org. Revenue (\$)</i>	<i>Pct of Pop. 5–17 in Poverty</i>	<i>Pct of Students, ELL</i>	<i>Median HH Income (\$)</i>
Alameda County	8.0	18	12,058,422	13.4	21.9	81,462
Butte County	3.2	1	880,129	22.6	8.8	45,369
Calaveras County	17.4	1	3,500	18.6	2.4	52,471
Contra Costa County	2.3	4	947,982	11.6	17.7	83,036
El Dorado County	3.7	1	99,813	10.4	7.4	75,575
Fresno County	1.0	2	431,122	33.6	22.6	46,608
Humboldt County	5.5	1	3,512	22.8	7.3	40,739
Kern County	1.1	2	7,316,113	29.2	22.0	51,150
Lake County	10.9	1	10,791	30.0	12.3	37,993
Los Angeles County	3.2	50	60,239,091	22.8	22.7	59,045
Madera County	3.2	1	30,437	31.1	25.7	46,593
Marin County	9.0	3	646,730	7.7	15.0	99,868
Mendocino County	15.4	2	78,222	25.2	21.2	43,237
Monterey County	5.3	4	815,778	21.5	41.2	60,047
Napa County	14.3	3	3,163,595	11.0	23.1	72,683
Nevada County	8.1	1	304,861	14.8	5.3	57,627
Orange County	1.8	9	12,220,211	16.2	26.0	78,002
Placer County	2.8	2	620,892	8.1	8.2	76,203
Riverside County	0.5	2	216,846	21.5	20.9	57,895
Sacramento County	2.1	5	4,159,706	21.8	18.1	58,735

(continued)

**Table A.6.1. (continued)**

<i>County Name</i>	<i>No. of Orgs, per 100,000 students</i>	<i>No. of Orgs</i>	<i>Total Org. Revenue (\$)</i>	<i>Pct of Pop. 5–17 in Poverty</i>	<i>Pct of Students, ELL</i>	<i>Median HH Income (\$)</i>
San Bernardino County	1.7	7	6,681,206	26.4	19.2	53,526
San Diego County	3.0	15	15,922,185	17.2	22.4	67,053
San Francisco County	23.7	14	24,514,704	14.5	27.8	90,527
San Luis Obispo County	2.9	1	113,432	13.8	15.6	61,761
San Mateo County	8.4	8	11,336,786	9.1	24.4	101,133
Santa Barbara County	2.9	2	219,505	18.8	35.0	63,049
Santa Clara County	5.4	15	16,231,190	8.5	24.1	102,191
Shasta County	3.8	1	23,169	24.0	3.3	45,943
Solano County	1.6	1	25,973	14.9	13.8	67,202
Sonoma County	2.8	2	1,039,893	12.8	23.2	66,463
Stanislaus County	0.9	1	157,906	25.3	25.0	51,949
Tehama County	9.5	1	50,137	29.5	16.7	40,292
Tulare County	1.0	1	40,299	34.6	28.2	42,637
Ventura County	2.1	3	2,046,385	13.5	23.8	79,285
Yolo County	3.4	1	587,122	15.0	21.6	58,766

*Notes:* These data are derived from several sources: first, we merged the geocoded organization for fiscal year 2015 by ZIP code to the county-level boundaries from the state of California. Next, we merged the organizational data with aggregated county estimates of English Language Learners, from the California Department of Education for the 2015 school year. Poverty estimates are based on the percentage of the population aged 5–17 in poverty, from the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) in 2015. The table excludes counties that do not have service organizations according to our analysis, e.g., any county that did not have organizations geocoded within the county boundary.

## TECHNICAL APPENDIX B

### Methodological Approach

#### B.1 Interviews

**DATA COLLECTION.** We conducted over 250 semi-structured interviews over the course of the study. In some cases, respondents were interviewed more than once, and in some cases more than one respondent participated in a single interview. Respondents came from a wide range of mezzo-level policy makers including district superintendents, county superintendents, regional policy makers, instructional leaders, and state agency policy makers. In California we interviewed leaders in 100 school districts, and in Tennessee we interviewed leaders in 17 school districts. We supplemented the mezzo-level interviews with interviews of leaders from advocacy, research, and educational nonprofit organizations.

For California, we based our mezzo-level interviews on a stratified random sample. The process for selecting districts and their superintendents occurred as follows. First, all California school districts were ranked by district enrollment. Second, the population of districts was divided in half, at the median. Third, 133 districts were randomly selected from the top half of the distribution (the high enrollment districts) and 67 districts were selected from the bottom half of the distribution (the low enrollment districts). Five further rural districts were selected based on the “Rural, Distant,” “Rural, Fringe,” and “Rural, Remote” National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) categorization. In addition, we replaced two districts from the original random sample because the superintendent position was vacant (in one district, the website listed and our inquiries with the district revealed that there was no superintendent in post, and in another the superintendent had retired with no successor appointed). The replacement districts were randomly drawn from either the low enrollment or high enrollment districts; each selection was conducted with replacement.

The research team reached out to the superintendents’ offices in the sample districts by email and telephone, explaining the nature of the study and requesting participation. Interview appointments were made

with those superintendents who agreed to participate (hereafter respondents or interviewees), at a time suitable for participants. A total of 91 superintendents participated in our first round of CA superintendent interviews (a response rate of 44.39 percent).

Of the districts that participated in the first round of interviews:

- 34.07 percent are low-poverty districts, 34.07 percent are medium-poverty districts, and 31.87 percent are high-poverty districts
- 19.78 percent have low rates of EL students, 45.05 percent have medium rates of EL students, and 31.87 percent have high rates of EL students (for 3.30 percent information was not available)
- 29.67 percent are urban districts, 43.96 percent are suburban districts, 10.99 percent are town districts, 10.99 percent are rural districts, and 4.40 percent are “other” districts

For Tennessee, we contacted the universe of districts. For state and county agencies, we used a snowball technique to help identify potential respondents while also seeking out individuals and organizations that were not always identified in interviews. Where appropriate, we tried to attend to regional differences and sought a range of perspectives from across the state.

For most of the interviews, at least two interviewers were present. The interviews took place between December 2016 and July 2020. They occurred in person and over the phone or Zoom. In the case of the interviews that were not recorded, notes were taken during and after the interviews by the interviewers that had been present. Interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes. For each of the interviews, the researchers prepared tailored interview protocols informed by the respondent’s role, organization, and professional experiences. Despite their personalized nature, these protocols covered many of the same topics and included many overlapping questions. These protocols served as roadmaps for these conversations at the onset, but the interviews themselves unfolded in ways that were responsive to the interviewees and the opportunities that arose in the conversation. To protect the anonymity of the interviewees, each individual was given a unique, randomly generated, three-digit ID number between 100 and 900 for every semi-structured interview in which they participated.

**DATA ANALYSIS.** Data collection and analysis occurred in an integrated process, with frequent conversations amongst the research team that allowed us to develop and test hypotheses in response to our research questions.<sup>1</sup> All recorded interviews were transcribed. Partial coding was conducted in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program, and



was carried out by a subset of the research team responsible for the qualitative data collection and analysis. Initial descriptive codes were informed by our research questions and attended, for example, to technical, organizational, and political sources of capacity to support instructional improvement. Refinement of these codes and the addition of categories grounded in the data emerged throughout the process of analysis.<sup>2</sup> Quotes were selected to reflect common themes across the interviews.

## **B.2 YouGov National Surveys**

The national data for our study come from a larger survey of 1,000 respondents conducted by the Taubman Center for American Politics and Policy in the fall of 2018, spring of 2020, and summer of 2020 and fielded by the firm YouGov. YouGov uses matched sampling with post-stratification weights to obtain a nationally representative sample from its online panel.<sup>3</sup> The “median” respondent in our sample was a forty-seven-year old White woman with some college who identifies as being ideologically moderate and a political independent.

## **B.3 RAND’s American Teacher Panel**

The teacher survey data used in this book were commissioned by Stanford University and fielded by the RAND Corporation. The survey was sent to California teachers who are members of the RAND American Teacher Panel (ATP). The ATP is an internet-based panel survey that draws from a nationally representative sample of teachers in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Though the survey is designed to be nationally representative, twenty-two states, including California, are oversampled. There are 794 teachers from California in the ATP. All of these 794 teachers were invited to take the Stanford survey; of those, 444 participated, representing a response rate of 55.9 percent. The survey was fielded between January 8, 2018 and February 4, 2018, with reminder emails sent to prospective respondents on January 16, 23, 31, and February 2.

The results of the survey were weighted using survey weights designed to adjust for nonresponse rates and oversampling, to ensure that the sample is representative of California teachers. The weights adjust for such school-level characteristics as school size, location, and demographics, and such individual-level teacher characteristics as teaching experience and gender. In addition to the survey weights, replication weights were used to calculate uncertainty using the jackknife method. Eighty replication weights were provided for these calculations.

To calculate differences between responses from high- and low-poverty

schools and urban and rural schools, we merged data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES),<sup>5</sup> based on the NCES school ID number that was provided with the survey results. In addition, we incorporated school-level data on English Learners from the California Department of Education (CDE).<sup>6</sup> We were able to match 442 respondents to NCES and CDE data. Data come from the 2015–2016 school year, the most recent figures available. Poverty is calculated using free and reduced-price lunch eligibility. To classify “high” and “low” rates, we divided the weighted survey into thirds, comparing the top third to the bottom third. Statistical analysis was performed in STATA v.14.2.

## B.4 Twitter Analysis

We use a Stanford natural language processing library called coreNLP, which uses a tree model to represent the sentences and neural networks to output a sentiment score.<sup>7</sup> In addition, we utilize the Python library package TextBlob, which performs sentiment analysis word by word, creating a summary sentiment score for each word using both polarity and subjectivity. To determine which sentiment analysis package best mimics human coding, we selected 100 tweets from both the #commoncore and “college and career readiness” categories and assessed their sentiment score. We then calculated the average difference between the hand-coded score and the coreNLP and TextBlob score and found that the TextBlob sentiment score had the smallest absolute difference. In other words, TextBlob most closely reflected human coding.

We automated the process of learning who is participating in Twitter conversations by creating a script which searches and flags keywords by group, including users who identify as partisan (liberal or conservative), users who represent newspapers or journalists, users who are educators or administrators, users who represent nongovernmental organizations or institutions of higher education, and users who are parents. The #commoncore sample has complete biographical information for 89 percent of tweets, and the “college and career readiness” sample has complete biographical information for 87 percent of tweets.

We generated counts for each hashtag used in the #commoncore sample and “college and career readiness” sample and collapsed categories that were close to identical (for example, #commoncore and #CC). Next, we created binary variables indicating the presence of the top twenty hashtags by sample, resulting in a binary affiliation matrix for the most common hashtags. We used network analysis to look for patterns in hashtag usage, to illustrate either heterogeneity or homogeneity of dis-

cussions related to the #commoncore hashtag and “college and career readiness” phrase.

## B.5 NGO/Foundation Mapping

**NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS.** We culled the organization dataset from the National Center for Charitable Statistics Core Trend Public Charities (PC) 1989–2015. The NCCS Core Files combine descriptive information from the IRS Business Master File and financial variables from the IRS Return Transaction Files. Only organizations required to file Form 990 are included in the dataset. There are 6,417,173 observations, and the unit of observation is organization-year.

To create an exhaustive list of education service organizations, we utilized a dual categorization process with data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics. The NCCS Core 1989–2015 PC Fiscal Year Trend dataset includes categorization of organization by major subsection, and we focused on the following categories of interest: 1) research institutes and public policy analysis, 2) special education, 3) libraries, 4) student services, 5) educational services, and 6) remedial reading and encouragement.

Next, we wrote a text categorization formula that excludes colleges, medical organizations, private education institutions, and faith-based organizations. Research assistants reviewed the organizations to ensure they were directly engaged with public schools in California and Tennessee. We excluded organizations with an explicit state, national, and/or global purpose. If we were unable to determine the purpose of the organization, we excluded it from our analysis. This method allowed us to note any organizations that were miscategorized by the IRS and the NCCS.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, we noted if organizations explicitly mentioned serving low-income students or English Learners, to get a sense of organizations dedicated to serving these populations. It is important to note that many organizations do not have formal mission statements or may not mention the population served. Therefore, our categorization is a conservative estimate of organizations focused on low-income students and ELs. Nevertheless, the data suggest that organizations are more often focused on general-purpose support than on targeting these populations. Next, the organizational dataset was imported into ArcGIS and spatially matched with the unified district and county boundaries.

**FOUNDATIONS.** The foundation and grantee data were collected from the Open Center for Nonprofit Research, which houses all nonprofit 990

tax data that has been e-filed through the Department of the Treasury's Internal Revenue Service online system. The Open Center for Nonprofit Research structures the data in XML files in an Amazon Web Server (AWS) Cloud Server. For this project, we scraped all organizations that filed a form 990 PF as a Private Foundation from 2000–2014. We rely on organizational categories from the National Center for Charitable Statistics Core Trend Private Foundations (PF) 1989–2014.

We focus on foundations that filed with the IRS classification working in education (B), and philanthropy, voluntarism, and grant making (T) in 2014.<sup>9</sup> To restrict the sample further, we used a text categorization formula to focus on foundation grant recipients, particularly funds going to schools and school districts. In addition, we excluded religious organizations, private institutions, and colleges and universities.

We spatially matched the data with the county boundary shapefile (2016) from the US Census in ArcGIS.<sup>10</sup> The data were merged with the aggregated data on student demographics from the California Department of Education (2015), and SAIPE (2015) poverty estimates.

## B.6 Media Document Collection and Analysis

**DATA SOURCE.** The research team gathered data on newspaper articles featuring the term “Common Core” across the fifty states. We used Newsbank, Inc.’s Access World News Database (<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/?p=AWNB>). The Access World News Database was selected due to its depth of subnational coverage of US newspapers across the fifty states. In a small number of cases (for New York, Oklahoma, Utah, and Washington, DC) the articles were sourced from the LexisNexis Academic database. Access to these databases was provided via an institutional subscription by the Brown University Library.

**SCOPE OF ARTICLES GATHERED.** The newspaper selection was achieved by identifying high-circulation newspapers for each state (plus the District of Columbia) by means of Google searches, and cross-referencing with the Newsbank database to determine availability. In a small number of cases, where the identified newspaper was not available in the Access World News database, the articles were retrieved from the LexisNexis Academic database.

The search terms used to retrieve articles were as follows:

- “Common Core” in text search box
- “01/08/2018—01/31/2018” entered as “from” and “to” dates (or as a date range)

- Either the newspaper title was entered (for LexisNexis), or the results were filtered to the state and newspaper desired (AccessWorldNews)

All articles were manually downloaded between March and June 2018 by a research assistant working under the supervision of a postdoctoral research associate. Articles were saved as PDF files in a Google Drive folder structure to which access was restricted to members of the research team. A total of 13,691 newspaper articles were downloaded: table B.6.1 below provides a list of the newspaper, number of articles downloaded, and source used, for each state.

Table B.6.1. Record of Newspaper Article Downloads

<i>State</i>	<i>Newspaper Selected</i>	<i>Number of Articles Retrieved</i>	<i>Source used (AWN: Access World News; LN: LexisNexis Academic)</i>
AL	Birmingham News	202	AWN
AK	Alaska Dispatch News	21	AWN
AZ	Arizona Daily Star	440	AWN
AR	Arkansas Democrat Gazette	456	AWN
CA	San Francisco Chronicle	139	AWN
CO	Denver Post	163	AWN
CT	Hartford Courant	302	AWN
DE	Wilmington News Journal	13	AWN
FL	Tampa Bay Times	557	AWN
GA	Atlanta Journal-Constitution	413	AWN
HI	Honolulu Star Advertiser	161	AWN
ID	Idaho Statesman	228	AWN
IL	Chicago Sun-Times	98	AWN
IN	Journal-Gazette (Fort Wayne)	237	AWN
IA	Quad City Times	122	AWN
KS	Wichita Eagle	208	AWN
KY	Lexington Herald-Leader	272	AWN
LA	Baton Rouge Advocate	1622	AWN
ME	Lewiston Sun-Journal	63	AWN
MD	Baltimore Sun	282	AWN
MA	Worcester Telegram & Gazette	247	AWN
MI	Grand Rapids Press	138	AWN
MN	St. Paul Pioneer-Press	129	AWN
MS	Sun-Herald	311	AWN
MO	Kansas City Star	158	AWN
MT	Billings Gazette	234	AWN
NE	Omaha World-Herald	117	AWN

(continued)

**Table B.6.1. (continued)**

<i>State</i>	<i>Newspaper Selected</i>	<i>Number of Articles Retrieved</i>	<i>Source used (AWN: Access World News; LN: LexisNexis Academic)</i>
NV	Las Vegas Review-Journal	140	AWN
NH	New Hampshire Union-Leader	355	AWN
NJ	Star-Ledger	221	AWN
NM	Albuquerque Journal	215	AWN
NY	New York Times	683	LN
NC	Charlotte Observer	346	AWN
ND	Bismarck Tribune	375	AWN
OH	Plain Dealer	298	AWN
OK	The Daily Oklahoman	360	LN
OR	Oregonian	288	AWN
PA	Philadelphia Inquirer	173	AWN
RI	Providence Journal	228	AWN
SC	Charleston Post and Courier	281	AWN
SD	Rapid City Journal	169	AWN
TN	Knoxville News Sentinel	373	AWN
TX	Dallas Morning News	57	AWN
UT	Salt Lake Tribune	294	LN
VT	Bennington Banner	162	AWN
VA	Virginian-Pilot	70	AWN
WA	Seattle Times	97	AWN
WV	Herald-Dispatch	138	AWN
WI	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	165	AWN
WY	Casper Star-Tribune	185	AWN
DC	The Washington Post	685	LN

Programmers then used three sentiment analysis tools to assess sentiment portrayed in the articles: Bing, NRC, and Afinn.

## **B.7 Government Document Collection**

The research team gathered states standards from 980 state documents across states and years: Alabama (4); Alaska (25); Arizona (58); Arkansas (74); California (17); Colorado (100); Connecticut (3); Delaware (10); Georgia (27); Hawaii (8); Idaho (15); Illinois (9); Indiana (41); Iowa (4); Kansas (3); Kentucky (1); Louisiana (19); Maine (8); Maryland (17); Michigan (4); Minnesota (6); Mississippi (10); Missouri (12); Montana (7); Nebraska (11); Nevada (3); New Hampshire (2); New Jersey (86); New Mexico (23); New York (12); North Carolina (44); North Dakota (12);

Ohio (16); Oklahoma (9); Oregon (34); Pennsylvania (24); Rhode Island (14); South Carolina (13); South Dakota (15); Tennessee (24); Texas (35); Utah (49); Vermont (5); Virginia (22); Washington (14); Wisconsin (14); Wyoming (17)

The research team gathered Local Control Accountability Plans for all California districts from 2019.

Our archival research in the Special Collections of Harvard University's Gutman Library focused on six states: Massachusetts (8 volumes), Minnesota (13 volumes), New York (11 volumes), North Carolina (7 volumes), Ohio (9 volumes), and Washington (15 volumes), gathering information on instructional support from 1880–1949.





# NOTES

## Preface

1. Mike W. Kirst, “The Common Core Meets State Policy: This Changes Almost Everything,” PACE Policy Brief, Center for Education Policy Analysis, Stanford University, 2013), 1.

2. Interview ID 798. We conducted over 250 semi-structured interviews over the course of the study. The interviews took place between December 2016 and July 2020. To protect the anonymity of the interviewees, each individual was given a unique, randomly generated, three-digit ID number between 100 and 900 for every semi-structured interview in which they participated. A full description of the interview process appears in Technical Appendix B.

3. Interview ID 267.

4. Interview ID 805.

## Chapter One

1. David K. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” *The Elementary School Journal* 98, no. 5 (1998): 427–66, <https://doi.org/10.1086/461907>.

2. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 US 483 (1954); *Abbott v. Burke* 100 (NJ) 269 (1985).

3. Crystal Sanders, *A Chance for Change: Head Start and Mississippi’s Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

4. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 is the prevailing statutory name for this policy. The original statute was named the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, established in 1975 (Public Law 94–142).

5. California Senate Bill 2100, chapter 654.

6. Scholars look to statutes to measure and assess reform. Notable examples include David Mayhew, *Divided We Govern: Party Control, Lawmaking, and Investigations, 1946–1990* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); and Paul C. Light, *Tides of Reform: Making Government Work, 1945–1995* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

7. Eric Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk: What Happens After Major Policy Reforms Are Enacted* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

8. Frederick M. Hess, *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998).

9. Jal D. Mehta and David K. Cohen, “Why Reform Sometimes Succeeds: Under-

standing the Conditions that Produce Reforms that Last,” *American Educational Research Journal* 54, no. 4 (2017): 644–90.

10. David K. Cohen, “Policy and Organization: The Impact of State and Federal Education Policy on School Governance,” *Harvard Educational Review* 52, no. 4 (1982): 474–99; David K. Cohen and James Spillane, “Policy and Practice: The Relations between Governance and Instruction,” in *Review of Research in Education*, ed. G. Grant (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 1992), 3–49.

11. Interview ID 185.

12. For discussion of complex terrains for policy making, see Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk*, chapter 5.

13. Interview ID 185.

14. Patashnik lays the groundwork upon which we build for considering the problems reforms create. For a helpful summary, see Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk*, chapter 9. This builds on Aaron Wildavsky, *Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1987).

15. Light, *Tides of Reform*.

16. Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

17. Hess, *Spinning Wheels*.

18. Anthony S. Bryk and Sharon G. Hollow, “The Chicago Experiment: Enhanced Democratic Participation as a Lever for School Improvement,” *Issues in Restructuring Schools* 3 (Fall 1992): 3–8.

19. David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

20. An electricity metaphor appears in political psychology. See Nicholas Winter, *Dangerous Frames: How Ideas about Race and Gender Shape Public Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

21. Interview ID 185. She noted the ways in which the district had been partnering with its county office and with consultants for additional support.

22. Interview ID 185.

23. Interview ID 185.

24. Interview ID 798.

25. See Cohen and Spillane, “Policy and Practice” for a prescient critique of systemic or standards-based reforms that identifies the chasm between policy ambitions embodied in systemic reform, instructional practice, and the capabilities of government to move practice toward policy ambitions. In addition to their predictions of layers of new requirements that would yield modest change and problematic results, they also invite us to think about standards-based reforms as an opportunity for policy leaders to learn. This is where we pick up the thread. We offer a framework for learning from the problems reform creates, rather than leaving those problems as clutter for future iterations of policy.

26. Light, *Tides of Reform*, 2.

27. On the collision of new policies with old terrains, see Paul Manna, *Collision Course: Federal Education Policy Meets State and Local Realities* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010).

28. Tyack and Cuban (*Tinkering Toward Utopia*, 4) offer a useful, education-

specific definition of reform as “planned efforts to change schools to correct perceived social and educational problems.”

29. The law also specifies that one (or more) of these conditions must also adversely impact a child’s educational performance for the child to qualify for IDEA services and processes.

30. In practice, this means districts need to maximize the participation of students with disabilities in regular education programs. For more discussion of this, see Thomas Hehir, Todd Grindal, and Hadas Eidelman, “Review of Special Education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts,” Massachusetts Department of Education, 2012, <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/249/Hehir%20SynthesisReport.pdf>.

31. US Department of Education, *Thirty-Five Years of Progress in Educating Children with Disabilities through IDEA* (Washington, DC: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2010). Though the federal government establishes the right for children with disabilities to receive “free and appropriate education,” the federal grants provided through IDEA cover only a small fraction of the bill: only about 12 percent of what it costs to provide special education services, though estimates vary. For a summary of IDEA financing, see Congressional Research Service, *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Funding: A Primer* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019). Estimates also vary as to how much it would cost if the federal government paid for the full 40 percent that is authorized, including an additional \$17.7 billion. See Clare McCann, *Federal Funding for Students with Disabilities: The Evolution of Federal Special Education Finance in the United States* (Washington, DC: New America Education, 2014).

32. Title I of ESEA allocated approximately \$1 billion originally and expanded to \$12 billion over time.

33. The ideas reflected in standards-based reform accumulated through the 1980s and 1990s. For a summary of the original formulation of coherence, centralization, school-level professional discretion, and state responsibilities see Marshall S. Smith and Jennifer O’Day, “Systemic School Reform,” in *Politics of Education Association Yearbook 1990*, ed. Susan H. Fuhrman and Betty Malen (London: Taylor and Francis, 1990), 233–67.

34. On the conceptual connections between systemic or standards-based reforms and equity, see Jennifer A. O’Day and Marshall S. Smith, “Systemic Reform and Educational Opportunity,” in *Designing Coherent Education Policy: Improving the System*, ed. Susan H. Fuhrman (New York: Jossey-Bass, 1993), 250–312. For a recent summary, see Jennifer O’Day and Marshall S. Smith, *Opportunity for All: A Framework for Quality and Equality in Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2019), 35, including ideas about equity at the center of standards-based reforms. For a thoughtful discussion of common elements across different interpretations of systemic reform, see Suzanne Wilson, *California Dreaming: Reforming Mathematics Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 30.

35. Cohen and Spillane, “Policy and Practice,” 3–49; Rip Correnti and Brian Rowan, “Opening Up the Black Box: Literacy Instruction in Schools Participating in Three Comprehensive School Reform Programs,” *American Educational Research Journal* 44, no. 2 (2007): 298–338. Specifically, instruction is a “multi-component

social technology.” For a discussion of coherence in the instructional core in a decentralized setting, see Anthony S. Bryk et al., *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 48–57, 205–6.

36. Kathleen Lynch et al., “Strengthening the Research Base that Informs STEM Instructional Improvement Efforts: A Meta-Analysis,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41, no. 3 (2019): 260–93.

37. Most teachers show evidence of being able to improve their instructional practice. Estimates suggest only 2 to 7 percent of teachers appear unable to improve their instructional practices. See Dana Goldstein, *Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014). Research also suggests teachers affect student achievement in math and reading, along with student outcomes later in life, more than other school-based variables. See Isaac M. Opper, *Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers’ Impact on Student Achievement* (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2019); Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, and Jonah E. Rockoff, “Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood,” *American Economic Review* 104, no. 9 (2014): 2633–79.

38. Paul Manna, *School’s In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006); Lorraine M. McDonnell, “No Child Left Behind and the Federal Role in Education: Evolution or Revolution?” *Peabody Journal of Education* 80, no. 2 (2005): 19–38.

39. For discussion on why standards-based reforms are extraordinarily ambitious, see Cohen and Spillane, “Policy and Practice.”

40. The SAT and many standardized tests used throughout the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, were not connected to standards, curriculum, and texts.

41. Another inducement has appeared through competitive grants, including the 2009 Race to the Top (RTTT) grants.

42. We are grateful to Andrea Campbell for helping us to clarify this point and to discern three components of the inherited terrain.

43. Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the American Ideal* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), xii, 41–45.

44. Massachusetts Department of Education, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of Education* (Boston: Boston and Wentworth State Printers, 1849, 59–60), <http://www.archive.org/details/annualreportofde18471848mass>.

45. On the development of American belief in the “self-made man” see Brian Balogh, *Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 283–84.

46. About 4.3 million children (or about 5.5 percent of all children) lack health insurance, though estimates suggest many more lack access to primary care services and have unmet needs for specialty care. The proportion of uninsured children was 12.1 percent in the year 2000. See US Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement* (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, 2018). On health demands on schools in the COVID era, see Julia Graham Lear, “Health at School: A Hidden Health Care System Emerges from the Shadows,” *Health Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2007): 409–19.

47. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities*, ed. E. O’Connell, T. Boat, and K. E. Warner (Washington, DC: The National Academic

Press, 2009); American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, “Best Principles for Integration of Child Psychiatry into the Pediatric Health Home, 2012,” developed by Richard Martini et al., [https://www.aacap.org/App\\_Themes/AACAP/docs/clinical\\_practice\\_center/systems\\_of\\_care/best\\_principles\\_for\\_integration\\_of\\_child\\_psychiatry\\_into\\_the\\_pediatric\\_health\\_home\\_2012.pdf](https://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/docs/clinical_practice_center/systems_of_care/best_principles_for_integration_of_child_psychiatry_into_the_pediatric_health_home_2012.pdf). Public schools currently provide 85 percent of all children’s mental health care in the US.

48. Estimates suggest 14 million children live in households that are food insecure. See Lauren Bauer, “About 14 Million Children Are Not Getting Enough to Eat,” Brookings Institution, June 20, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/07/09/about-14-million-children-in-the-us-are-not-getting-enough-to-eat/>.

49. Estimates suggest approximately 30 million children receive free or reduced-priced meals daily through the school lunch program. US Department of Agriculture, *The National School Lunch Program Fact Sheet* (Washington, DC: US Department of Agriculture, 2017). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/NSLPFactSheet.pdf>. SNAP, however, is the largest food support program in the US, reaching over 40 million people. Of those, approximately 44 percent are children (over 20 million children). Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “SNAP Helps Millions of Children,” press release, April 26, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/3-2-17fa2.pdf>.

50. On localism, see Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, paperback edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), part 1.

51. Power manifests through both decisions and non-decisions. See Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, “Two Faces of Power,” *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 4 (1967): 947–52.

52. Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 41–45. For discussion of how colonial leaders sought to use schooling to depart from Europe and how some US education reforms began looking to the Prussian model of schooling by the mid-eighteenth century, see Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 6–7, 73–74.

53. In *Roberts v. City of Boston*, 59 Mass. 198 (5 Cush.) (1849), Sarah Roberts sought to attend the school closest to her home, which was also better resourced than the school that the Boston School Committee required her to attend (she walked past five schools to attend the school the School Committee required). The Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled in favor of Boston School Committee and Roberts’s exclusion from the school closest to her home. Even though Massachusetts outlawed segregated schools in 1855, the logic of the Massachusetts Supreme Court case in *Roberts v. Boston* formed the foundation for *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 US 537 (1896). In *Tape v. Hurley*, 66 Cal. 473 (1885), the California Supreme Court ruled San Francisco could not exclude a child of Chinese ancestry from attending school. The California legislature (with support from San Francisco) then passed a law allowing “separate but equal” segregated schools for students of Chinese ancestry. San Francisco maintained segregation until 1936. The Compulsory Attendance Law (1891) allowed federal officers to forcibly remove Indigenous children from their homes. This persisted until 1978 when the Indian Child Welfare Act provided Indigenous parents with the right to refuse having their child placed in school. For discussion of discrimination in late nineteenth-century schooling, see William Reese, *America’s Public Schools: From the Common School to No Child Left Behind* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University

Press, 2005), 52–55, 126–27, and in the twentieth century, 210–12. On disparities by income, see Sean F. Reardon, “The Widening Income Achievement Gap,” *Educational Leadership* 70, no. 8 (2013): 10–16.

54. David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

55. Estimates of students’ access to technology vary, depending on whether teachers or parents were surveyed. For teacher surveys on student access, see David Saleh Rauf, “Coronavirus Pushes Schools Closer to a Computer for Every Student,” *Education Week*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/06/03/coronavirus-pushes-schools-closer-to-a-computer.html>. For parent surveys, see Emily A. Vogels et al., “53% of Americans Say the Internet Has Been Essential During the COVID-19 Outbreak,” Pew Research Center, April 30, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/04/30/53-of-americans-say-the-internet-has-been-essential-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/>.

56. Annie E. Casey Foundation, *2020 Kids Count Data Book: 2020 State Trends in Child Well-Being*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.aecf.org/resources/2020-kids-count-data-book>.

57. Christina A. Nguyen et al., “Comparison of Healthcare Delivery Systems in Low- and High-Income Communities,” *The American Journal of Accountable Care* 7, no. 4 (2019): 11–18.

58. Scott Allard, *Out of Reach: Place, Poverty, and the New American Welfare State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

59. Institute of Medicine, *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2003).

60. US Government Accountability Office, *Better Use of Information Could Help Agencies Identify Disparities and Address Racial Discrimination* (Washington, DC: GAO, 2016); National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, *Monitoring Educational Equity* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2019), 85.

61. National Academies, *Monitoring Educational Equity*, 87–88.

62. National Academies, 94.

63. Randall Reback, “Investments in Student Health and Mental Health in California’s Public Schools, Technical Report,” in *Getting Down to Facts II: Current Conditions and Paths Forward for California Schools* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018).

64. Wildavsky, *Speaking Truth to Power*; Suzanne Mettler, “The Polyscape and the Challenges of Contemporary Politics to Policy Maintenance,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 2 (2016): 369–90.

65. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1927), 22.

66. On multiple policies within a policy, see Paul Manna and Susan L. Moffitt, “Traceable Tasks and Complex Policies: When Politics Matter for Policy Implementation,” *Policy Studies Journal* 49, no. 1 (2021): 190–218. Different parts of policy design may contain elements that help reinforce or help dismantle the policy. On this point, see Andrew Karch and Shanna Rose, *Responsive States: Federalism and American Public Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

67. Goldstein, *Teacher Wars*.

68. National Center for Education Statistics, *Teacher Quality: A Report on the Prep-*

*aration and Qualification of Teachers* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education 1999), 48.

69. Not only do teachers feel unprepared; many lack the materials they perceive as necessary for instruction, including internet access, computers, and instructional materials. On estimates of how much teachers draw on their own resources to purchase classroom materials, see Susan Moore Johnson, “Working in Schools,” in *The Public Schools*, ed. Susan Fuhrman and Marvin Lazerson (New York: Oxford University Press 2006), 165.

70. On the shortage of teachers prepared to teach English Learners, see US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, *Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listings 1990–1991 through 2015–2016* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2015). On variation in perceptions of quality materials to teach English Learners, with a majority of teachers perceiving their instructional material as “adequate” for teaching English Learners, see Andrea Prado Tuma, Sy Doan, and Rebecca Ann Lawrence, *Do Teachers Perceive that Their Main Instructional Materials Meet English Learner Needs?* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA134-5.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA134-5.html).

71. Goldstein, *Teacher Wars*. Significant percentages of public school teachers teach classes—like English, math, or science—that are not part of their major or minor course of study in college. While public school teachers have undergraduate degrees, large percentages have degrees in general education. For teachers at the middle and high school levels, undergraduate degrees do not match the subject matter they teach between 20 and 50 percent of the time, depending on the subject matter, according to estimates from 1996. National Center for Education Statistics, *Out-of-Field Teaching and Educational Equity* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 1996).

72. Arthur Levine, *Educating School Teachers* (Princeton, NJ: The Education Schools Project, 2006), 31.

73. Unlike some European countries, the US lacks a career ladder for educators along which excellent teachers can move up and into school leadership. On the development of school administrators in the US, see David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 116–21, 172–80. On teachers’ subordinate position relative to administrators, see Moore Johnson, “Working in Schools,” 166–67. See also Brian Rowan, “Instructional Management in Historical Perspective,” *Educational Administration Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1982): 43–59.

74. Paul Manna, *Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy* (New York: Wallace Foundation, 2015).

75. Matthew A. Kraft and Allison F. Gilmour, “Revisiting *The Widget Effect*: Teacher Evaluation Reforms and the Distribution of Teacher Effectiveness,” *Educational Researcher* 46, no. 5 (2017): 234–49; David Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern, and David Keeling, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Difference in Teacher Effectiveness* (Brooklyn, NY: New Teachers Project, 2009). Mezzo-level policy makers also offered perspective on principals’ weak understanding of instruction and their struggle to evaluate the content of what teachers teach: Interview ID 118.



76. National Academies, *Monitoring Educational Equity*, 94. On the historical roots of the lack of descriptive representation in the pool of American public school educators and leaders, see Leslie T. Fenwick, *Jim Crow's Pink Slip: The Untold Story of Black Principal and Teacher Leadership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2022); David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

77. National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2019), table 209.10; Desiree Carver-Thomas, *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color* (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2016); Hannah Putnam et al., *High Hopes and Harsh Realities: The Real Challenges to Building a Diverse Workforce* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2016).

78. Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The Dreamkeepers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing Co., 1994).

79. Albert Shanker Institute, *The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education* (Washington, DC: Albert Shanker Institute, 2015).

80. Seth Gershenson et al., “The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers,” Working Paper no. 25254, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2018, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w25254.pdf>; Jason Grissom, Jill Nicholson-Crotty, and Sean Nicholson-Crotty, “Race, Region, and Representative Bureaucracy,” *Public Administration Review* 69, no. 5 (2009): 911–19.

81. Leib Sutcher, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Desiree Carver-Thomas, “Understanding teacher shortages: An analysis of teacher supply and demand in the United States,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 27, no. 35 (2019), <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3696>. These teacher shortage numbers may indicate positions that go unfilled, but they may also include positions filled by people who are uncertified. These shortages are particularly acute in special education, mathematics, science, and bilingual education.

82. Susan L. Moffitt et al., “Frontlines Perspectives on Instructional Improvement in the Common Core Era, Technical Report,” in *Getting Down to Facts II: Current Conditions and Paths Forward for California Schools* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018).

83. US Census, Week 21 Pulse Survey, December 9–December 21, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp21.html>. The census data found “In the two weeks before the December holiday break . . . 6.3 million survey respondents said children in their households had no live contact with their teachers in the preceding week. The impact was greatest in households earning \$25,000 or less, the lowest income bracket, where nearly 1.4 million respondents said there was no contact; fewer than 300,000 respondents in the highest income bracket, households earning \$200,000 or more, said the same.” See also Natasha Singer, “Pandemic Teacher Shortage Imperil In-Person Schooling,” *New York Times*, January 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/pandemic-substitute-teacher-shortages.html>, updated September 16, 2021.

84. National estimates find that congressional legislation that represents the interests of poor communities is relatively rare. See Kristina Miler, *Poor Representation: Congress and the Politics of Poverty in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

85. Mettler, “The Policyscape.”



86. See Tyack and Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia*; Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607–1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience 1783–1876* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980); Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience 1876–1980* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988).

87. Jeffrey R. Henig, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education: The Changing Politics of School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press 2013).

88. Elisabeth Clemens, “Lineages of the Rube Goldberg State: Building and Blurring Public Programs, 1900–1940,” in *Rethinking Political Institutions: The Art of the State*, ed. Ian Shapiro, Stephen Skowronek, and Daniel Galvin (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 187–215.

89. We are grateful to our reviewers for pressing us to elucidate this distinction.

90. Eugene Bardach, *The Implementation Game* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977); Richard Elmore, “Backward Mapping: Implementation Research and Policy Decisions,” *Political Science Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (1979–1980): 601–16; Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Heather C. Hill, “Understanding Implementation: Street-Level Bureaucrats Resources for Reform,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13, no. 3 (2004): 265–82; Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock, *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

91. On implementing the letter and the spirit of the law, see Manna and Moffitt, “Traceable Tasks.” On interpreting policy and bringing professional values and judgments to decisions, see James P. Spillane, *Standards Deviation: How Schools Misunderstand Education Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); David K. Cohen and Heather C. Hill, *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

92. Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980). On the role of values in developing standards, see Lorraine M. McDonnell and M. Stephen Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2020), 37.

93. We are grateful to our reviewers for encouraging us to speak to these wars and providing us with examples.

94. Henig, *The End of Exceptionalism*.

95. Eric Patashnik, “Limiting Policy Backlash: Strategies for Taming Countercoalitions in an Era of Polarization,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 685, no. 1 (2019): 47–63; Eric Patashnik and Julian Zelizer, “The Struggle to Remake Politics: Liberal Reform and the Limits of Policy Feedback in the Contemporary American State,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 4 (2013): 1071–87; Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk*.

96. Andrea Louise Campbell, *How Policies Make Citizens: Senior Political Activism and the American Welfare State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

97. Mid-level policy making includes managing politics, not just administration or implementation. This idea arose in our interviews: Interview ID 830. On district leaders as policy makers and not just implementers, see Spillane, *Standards Deviation*; Cynthia E. Coburn and Joan E. Talbert, “Conceptions of Evidence Use in School Districts: Mapping the Terrain,” *American Journal of Education* 112, no. 4 (2006): 469–95.

98. Jamila Michener, *Fragmented Democracy: Medicaid, Federalism, and Unequal Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

99. Manna, *Collision Course*.

100. On the implications of federalism for American inequality, see Andrea Louise Campbell, *Trapped in America's Safety Net: One Family's Struggle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Donald F. Kettl, *The Divided States of America: Why Federalism Doesn't Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Michener, *Fragmented Democracy*; Joe Soss, Richard C. Fording, and Sanford F. Schram, "The Color of Devolution: Race, Federalism, and the Politics of Social Control," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 3 (2008): 536–53. On the implications of federalism in the COVID era, see Nicole Huberfeld, Sarah H. Gordon, and David K. Jones, "Federalism Complicates the Response to the COVID-19 Health and Economic Crisis: What Can Be Done?" *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 45, no. 6 (2020): 951–65. On the implications of increasing returns, see Paul Pierson, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 2 (2000): 251–67.

101. Our selection procedures and response rates appear in the Technical Appendix.

102. Our framework does not aim to make causal claims.

103. While Tennessee embodied more centralized education governance in the period we examined, Tennessee's Department of Education had a reputation for being "pre-bureaucratic" in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. See Jerome Murphy, *State Education Agencies and Discretionary Funds: Grease the Squeaky Wheel* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974), 217–18.

104. These surveys were conducted by the RAND Corporation's "America's Teacher Panel." More information appears in the Technical Appendix.

105. These surveys were conducted by YouGov through the Taubman Center for American Politics and Policy at Brown University. More information appears in the Technical Appendix.

106. As we conducted our interviews, we were attentive to interviewer/interviewee axes of identities. Members of our interview team reflected multiple identities.

107. For discussion on layers as a mechanism for institutional change, see Eric Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the US Congress* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Jacob Hacker, "Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State: The Hidden Politics of Social Policy Retrenchment in the United States," *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 2 (2004): 243–60.

## Chapter Two

1. Calif. Constitution art. IX, §1.

2. Ind. Constitution art. VIII, §1.

3. Idaho Constitution art. IX, §1.

4. N.Dak. Constitution art. VIII, §1.

5. Justifications for the civic purposes for schooling are often twofold. One purpose is about democratic engagement: education can prepare future citizens to make reasoned decisions about whom they elect. The second purpose is about democratic

enlightenment: education can prepare future citizens to deliberate with each other, anchored in respect for dissenting views.

6. Interview ID 667.

7. Interview ID 665.

8. Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the American Ideal* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 207–8.

9. Cohen and Hill described this as “a long history of misguided efforts to ‘improve’ schools.” See David K. Cohen and Heather C. Hill, *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), preface.

10. Stephen Skowronek, *Building A New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities 1877–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

11. David K. Cohen, recorded during interview on February 24, 2017.

12. For discussion on the tension between reformers who emphasized schools as engines of economic efficiency and reformers who emphasized schools as sites for social justice and democracy, see William Reese, *America’s Public Schools: From the Common School to No Child Left Behind* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 122. On the converging, diverging, and intertwined dimension of economic, political, and societal expectations of education, see Carl Kaestle, “Toward a Political Economy of Citizenship,” in *Rediscovering the Democratic Purposes of Education*, ed. Lorraine M. McDonnell, P. Michael Timpane, and Roger Benjamin (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 48–49, 51–57. On the utopian aspirations of American school reformers, see David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

13. On these points, see Kaestle, “Toward a Political Economy of Citizenship,” 48–49.

14. On the expansion of the franchise in the US and its links to arguments for expanded public education, see Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 72–73.

15. Massachusetts Department of Education, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of Education* (Boston: Boston and Wentworth State Printers, 1849), 79, <http://www.archive.org/details/annualreportofde18471848mass>, University of Pittsburgh Library System.

16. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 80–81.

17. Arguments for common schools as essential for citizenship education in the US, however, prevailed in an era when the majority of adults in the US were not allowed to vote.

18. David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Public Schools* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992), 33–36. Tyack and Hansot point specifically to Benjamin Rush’s arguments for educating girls so that they, as mothers, could teach “their sons in the principles of liberty and government” (p. 34). Horace Mann offered similar justifications for educating girls, rooted in his ideas about educating for civic virtue (p. 35). See also Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 27–28.

19. For a discussion of southern resistance to common schools, grounded in ideas of racial and social hierarchy, along with discriminatory policies in both the North and South, see Reese, *America’s Public Schools*, 43, 74–76, 102–4. For discussion of coeducation of boys and girls in segregated Black common schools and southern

schools, see Tyack and Hansot, *Learning Together*, 54–55, 96–97. Estimates from the US Census suggest that 2 percent of school-aged Black children were enrolled in school in 1860, 10 percent in 1870, 34 percent in 1880, and 45 percent in 1910. These estimates appear in David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America 1820–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 87.

20. For discussion on this tension in the early and mid-nineteenth century, see Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 80–81. This ongoing tension between schools for critical and uncritical thinking manifests across subject matters, not just through instruction in history or civics. On debates over mathematics instruction, including debates over “the preeminence of drill, coupled with a lack of emphasis on meaning” and on New Math, see Suzanne Wilson, *California Dreaming: Reforming Mathematics Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 9–16.

21. See Christopher J. Phillips, *The New Math: A Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 9–13.

22. National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, Committee on Developing Indicators of Educational Equity, *Monitoring Educational Equity* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2019).

23. Joseph M. Rice, *The Public School System of The United States* (New York: The Century Co., 1893). As David Cohen noted, Rice did not use the term “infrastructure,” but he carefully adumbrated many of its elements in his analysis of what school systems did and did not do. And Rice’s study showed that it was possible. He carefully and extensively observed instruction and discerned differences on several dimensions of quality in three dozen US school systems. One of Rice’s main findings was that very few system managers knew and cared enough about teaching and learning to spend time in classrooms, let alone to use what they learned to improve instruction.

24. As David Cohen observed, it would have been no mean feat to get beyond such proxy measures. These circumstances created two barriers to the development of knowledge about teaching and learning. One was technical and logistical: anyone trying to get valid estimates of average instructional quality in districts, given the variation among teachers that devolution of instructional decisions was likely to yield, would have had to spend a good deal of time in samples of classrooms. They would have had to cope with curricula that offered teachers little or no help in figuring out how to use them, which would have made it difficult to figure out if teachers were teaching well. They would have had to cope with tests that were not referenced to curricula, which would have made it difficult to learn what students were learning and teachers were teaching. Guidance for instruction had not been designed to promote inquiries into instruction. Such investigation would have cost a good deal even then, which probably would have displeased many taxpayers, school board members, or school managers. Common sense told Americans that the proxy measures were what counted to manage local schools.

25. Nicole Bateman, “Working Parents are Key to COVID-19 Recovery,” *Brookings*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/working-parents-are-key-to-covid-19-recovery/>; Catherine Brown, Ulrich Boser, and Perpetual Baffour, “Working 9 to 5: How School Schedules Make Life Harder for Working Parents,” Center for American Progress, October 11, 2016, <https://www.americanprogress.org/>

issues/education-k-12/reports/2016/10/11/145084/workin-9-to-5-2/; Kara Voght, “Why Does the School Day End Two Hours Before the Workday?” *The Atlantic*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/09/school-day-parents/569401/>.

26. Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), 113–18.

27. “Public Schools in the US—Employment Statistics 2003–2028,” IBISworld Industry Statistics, <https://www.ibisworld.com/industry-statistics/employment/public-schools-united-states/>, accessed April 4, 2021. Other estimates suggest 3,450,000 worked as K–12 teachers in 1999–2000, about 2.7 percent of the US labor force. Put differently, there are more teachers than physicians. See National Center for Education Statistics, *Mobility in the Teacher Workforce: Findings from the Condition of Education 2005* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2005), 2–3.

28. The COVID-19 disruptions to in-person education put this interdependence back in the spotlight, with reports of school closures impacting families’ ability to work. Women with children under the age of eighteen reported especially severe implications for their work, including quitting their jobs or taking unpaid leave from their jobs because their children’s schools were physically closed or had reduced in-school teaching. Estimates of COVID-19’s impact on leaving the workforce continue to evolve and suggest a mixed portrait. See Misty L. Heggeness, “Estimating the Immediate Impact of the COVID-19 Shock on Parental Attachment to the Labor Market and the Double Bind of Mothers,” *Review of Economics of the Household* 18, no. 4 (2020): 1053–78, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-020-09514-x>; Felipe Lozano-Rojas et al., “Is the Cure Worse than the Problem Itself? Immediate Labor Market Effects of COVID-19 Case Rates and School Closures in the U.S.,” National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 27127 (2020), <https://www.doi.org/10.3386/w27127>; Usha Ranji et al., *Women, Work and Family During COVID-19: Findings from the KFF Women’s Health Survey*, Women’s Health Policy, Kaiser Family Foundation, March 22, 2021, <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/women-work-and-family-during-covid-19-findings-from-the-kff-womens-health-survey/>.

29. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 15–16, 109–10, though the practice of sending young children to school subsided with the emergence of graded schools and classrooms. The development of schools relative to family work circumstances varied widely in the early days of the republic. Kaestle (chapters 2 and 3) documents how rural schools developed following a logic of schools as extensions of families, whereas urban education developed following a logic of “saving” children from their families and “indictment of the urban poor” (p. 32). During the early republic, children of enslaved people were expected to work alongside their parents or accompany their parents in their work. On the development of African free schools see Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 38–39. On the use of Dame Schools to support parent work in the colonial era, see Tyack and Hansot, *Learning Together*, 19.

30. For discussion of young children working in factories with their parents in the eighteenth century, see Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 107–9.

31. Jonathan Grossman, “The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938: Maximum Struggle for the Minimum Wage,” *Monthly Labor Review* 101, no. 6 (1978): 22–30. See for

instance the Supreme Court's decision in *Hammer v. Dagenhart* (1918) and *Schechter Corp. v. United States* (1935). Moreover, the Fair Labor Standards Act applied to only certain industries.

32. US Department of Labor, *Child Labor Provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act for Non-Agricultural Occupations* (Washington, DC: US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, December 2016); US Department of Labor, *Child Labor Requirements in Agricultural Occupations Under the Fair Labor Standards Act*, Child Labor Bulletin 102, WH-1295 (Washington, DC: US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, June 2007).

33. Massachusetts passed a statewide compulsory attendance law in 1852, though versions of compulsory school attendance began as early as 1642. On the development of state-level compulsory attendance laws, see Michael S. Katz, *A History of Compulsory Education Laws*, Fastback 75 (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1976).

34. Tracy Steffes, *School, Society and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

35. For instance, Montana specifies, in Mont. Constitution art. X, §1: “Equality of educational opportunity is guaranteed to each person of the state.” Nevada specifies, in Nev. Constitution art. XI, §2: “The legislature shall provide for a uniform system of common schools.” Michigan specifies, in Mich. Constitution art. VIII, §2: “Every school district shall provide for the education of its pupils without discrimination as to religion, creed, race, color or national origin.”

36. Katz, *History of Compulsory Attendance Laws*, 18–19.

37. Education Commission of the States, *50 State Comparison: Minimum Number of Days or Hours Per School Year* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2018), <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbquest2ci?rep=IT1801-2> accessed 3/27/21.

38. Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue*, 129, 152–60. On the political influence of scientific management and school administrators, see Susan Moore Johnson, “Working in Schools,” in *The Public Schools*, ed. Susan Fuhrman and Marvin Lazerson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 163, 166–67.

39. On the development of factory models of schooling, see David B. Tyack, *One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 39–59. On the emergence of teacher unionization, see Dana Goldstein, *Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014). See also Moore Johnson, “Working in Schools,” 169–72.

40. Margaret A. Haley, “Why Teachers Should Organize, 1904,” Appendix B in Margaret A. Haley, *Battleground: The Autobiography of Margaret A. Haley* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982). For general discussion on teaching as a pathway for female employment, see Tyack, *One Best System*, 59–65.

41. Haley, “Why Teachers Should Organize.” Haley connects teacher autonomy with public schools as potential engines of democracy.

42. For a summary of the development of teachers' unions, see Moore Johnson, “Working in Schools,” 169–72.

43. Linda Loewus, “Participation in Teachers Unions Is Down, and Likely to Tumble Further,” *Education Week*, October 12, 2017.

44. On measuring teacher union strength, see Katharine O. Strunk and Sean F. Reardon, “Measuring the Strength of Teachers' Unions: An Empirical Application



of the Partial Independence Item Response Approach,” *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics* 35, no. 6 (2010): 629–70. See also Terry M. Moe, *Special Interest: Teacher Unions and America’s Public Schools* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011).

45. On the contributions of schooling to reductions in inequality in the first half of the twentieth century, see Goldin and Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology*, 44–88. For a critique of the connection between education, skills needed in the US economy, and rising inequality, see Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 34–37.

46. See Goldin and Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology*, 13–30, 130–31. See also Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, x, 33–36 for discussion of how mass schooling generated less opposition in the US than in England, how capitalist interests in mass education emerged later than family demands for schooling, and how “education was a minor theme” for American capitalist expansion in the 1820s and 1830s (p. 26), but takes off after the 1840s (pp. 65–74). While mass schooling did not engender opposition comparable to that in England, state-sponsored common schools did evoke opposition in the mid- to late eighteenth century (pp. 136–37), not from the working class (p. 141), but from tax considerations (pp. 149–50), from ideological debates (p. 156), from religious concerns (pp. 168–69), and from proponents of racial segregation (pp. 172–73).

47. Claudia Goldin, “The Human Capital Century,” *Education Next* (Winter 2003), 77. US enrollments reflected less exclusivity than Europe, where high school access remained test-based. High schools were originally private, tuition-based institutions. Free, public high schools did not become more prevalent than private high schools until the late nineteenth century. On the development of US public high schools, see William J. Reese, *History, Education and the Schools* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 79–92.

48. US Department of Labor, *Child Labor Provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act for Non-Agricultural Occupations*.

49. Federal funding for vocational education has been modest, and employers rarely constitute the main source of funding for career and technical education in the US. See Reese, *America’s Public Schools*.

50. For discussion on this point, see Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue*, 111–12.

51. Along with working-class White men in the United States gaining the right to vote came working-class support for and interest in US public education, weaving together political and labor considerations. See Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 75–85.

52. On the issues that animated working-class advocacy for compulsory attendance, see Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 72–74.

53. On this point, see Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 214–15, 150–61, though exceptions include working-class advocacy for links between schools, workplaces, and vocational education.

54. In this sense, middle-class support for “modern” high school stood in contrast to Latin schools that focused on preparing boys for college. See Reese, *History, Education and the Schools*. Goldin and Katz also write on public support for schooling being connected with social mobility, and suggest that this support helps account

for increasing enrollments (i.e., not just compulsory attendance): Goldin and Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology*, 142–46, 180, 190–91, 195–99, 235–39, 244–46.

55. Reese, *History, Education and the Schools*, 80.

56. Reese, 80. Though, for a discussion of how shrinking labor market options for adolescents (rather than demand for knowledge) may have contributed to expanded high-school enrollments, see Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1985), 235–39.

57. Reese, *History, Education and the Schools*, 80–81, 89.

58. David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

59. National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

60. Mahasan Chaney, “Discipline for the ‘Educationally Deprived’: ESEA and the Punitive Function of Federal Education Policy, 1865–1998” (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 2019).

61. Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School*, 245–52, 256. Vast, uncurated terrains of options, moreover, put the burden on students and families to sort through options (pp. 41–45, 53), as do restrictions from different types of tracks (pp. 159–61).

62. In Gunnar Myrdal’s words, “Education has always been the great hope for both individual and society. In the American Creed it has been the main ground upon which ‘equality of opportunity for the individual’ and ‘free outlet for ability’ could be based. Education has also been considered as the best way—and the way most compatible with American individualistic ideals—to improve society.” Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944; New York: Pantheon, 1972), 2. Part of this quote also appears in Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue*, 224. Intertwined with social purposes are moral purposes. On these points, see Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 75–103; Phillips, *The New Math*.

63. These justifications emerged for charity schools, especially in developing urban areas. Proponents of kindergartens similarly justified their creation and expansion in the late nineteenth century in terms of “saving” children from their families. Rural schools followed a different trajectory. On the difference between the development of urban and rural schools in the early republic, see Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*. On the development of kindergartens, see Tyack and Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia*, 65–66.

64. On these points, see Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, chapter 4.

65. Massachusetts Department of Education, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of Education* (Boston: Boston and Wentworth State Printers, 1849), 59–60, <http://www.archive.org/details/annualreportofde18471848mass>, University of Pittsburgh Library System.

66. David K. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” *The Elementary School Journal* 98, no. 5 (1998): 427–66, esp. 429, 437.

67. However, important components of the American social safety net that benefit children also operate outside of schools, including Medicaid and the Children’s



Health Insurance Program (CHIP). For discussion of school links with services provided outside of school, see Anthony S. Bryk et al., *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 59. On the development of public schools as components of the social safety net, see Reese, *America's Public Schools*, 130–34, 152–53, though Reese also discusses the tension between reformers who emphasized schools as engines of economic efficiency and reformers who emphasized schools as sites for social justice and democracy (p. 122), and the intersection of morality and political economy in antebellum schools (pp. 32–42).

68. Diane Allensworth et al., *Schools and Health: Our Nation's Investment* (Washington, DC: Institute of Medicine National Academy Press, 1997), 33.

69. Courts played pivotal roles in this diffusion. The Supreme Court upheld the Massachusetts law as constitutional in 1905, *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*. In 1922, the Supreme Court ruled in *Zucht v. King* that a city (San Antonio, Texas) could impose mandatory vaccination policies for enrolling school students, even in the absence of imminent threat. See Erwin Chemerinsky and Michele Goodwin, “Compulsory Vaccinations Laws Are Constitutional,” *Northwestern Law Review* 110, no. 3 (2016): 589–615; James Colgove and Abigail Lowain, “A Tale of Two States: Mississippi, West Virginia, and Exemptions to Compulsory School Vaccination Laws,” *Health Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2016): 348–55; James G. Hodge Jr. and Lawrence O. Gostin, “School Vaccination Requirements: Historical, Social and Legal Perspectives,” *Kentucky Law Journal* 90, no. 4 (2002): 831–90.

70. Evidence suggests these laws have been effective at reducing the spread of disease. Alaska in the 1970s, for instance, combined compulsory vaccination laws with enforcement mechanisms that meant a child could be excluded or sent home from school if the child lacked documented evidence of vaccination. In Alaska in 1976, this meant that 7,418 Alaska school students (or about 8 percent) were excluded from school. Another example from this time period at the city level comes from Los Angeles, which also started excluding students from school if they lacked vaccination records; in 1977, 50,000 students (or about 4 percent of public school students in LA) were excluded from school. In both Alaska and Los Angeles, compliance quickly increased once enforcement went into place. All but 51 Alaska students returned to school in one month; in Los Angeles, the majority complied within days. For this history, see Chemerinsky and Goodwin, “Compulsory Vaccinations Laws Are Constitutional,” 596–97.

71. Forty-six states require vaccinations for private schools. The policy mechanisms at work here combine state-level and decentralized decision-making and use of authority tools, but those tools are backed up by the Supreme Court. Exemptions also vary by state (medical exemptions, religious exemptions, philosophical exemptions; Mississippi and West Virginia are two states that only allow medical exemptions). See Chemerinsky and Goodwin, “Compulsory Vaccinations Laws Are Constitutional.”

72. For more on how schools, notably California schools, could recoup more from Medicaid, see Randall Reback, “Investments in Student Health and Mental Health in California's Public Schools, Technical Report,” in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018).

73. Chemerinsky and Goodwin, “Compulsory Vaccinations Laws Are Constitutional.”

74. Allensworth et al., *Schools and Health*.

75. Reback, “Investments in Student Health.”

76. Michael Arenson et al., “The Evidence on School-Based Health Centers: A Review,” *Global Pediatric Health* 6 (2019): 1–10.

77. Arenson et al., “The Evidence on School-Based Health Centers.” Most (94 percent) of School Based Health Centers are located on school grounds; about 3 percent are mobile and travel between schools, and 1 percent just provide telehealth services (i.e., over the phone or computer—this is more common in rural areas).

78. 83 percent serve students from other schools; 65 percent serve students’ families; 61 percent serve out-of-school youth; 60 percent serve school personnel; and 35 percent serve other people in the community (this increases to about 68 percent in rural areas). See Arenson et al., “The Evidence on School-Based Health Centers.”

79. Arenson et al., “The Evidence on School-Based Health Centers.”

80. Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America’s Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 7.

81. Levine, *School Lunch Politics*, 7.

82. At the time of publication, free lunches are available to children in households with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty line. Reduced-price lunches are available to children in households with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty line. US Department of Agriculture, “Child Nutrition Programs Income Eligibility Guidelines (2022–2023),” Food and Nutrition Service, February 17, 2022, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-021622>.

83. Linley Sanders, “A Majority of Americans Say School Lunch Should be Free,” YouGov, August 23, 2019, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/education/articles-reports/2019/08/23/free-lunch-shaming-survey>.

84. Levine, *School Lunch Politics*.

85. Scott Allard, *Out of Reach: Place, Poverty, and the New American Welfare State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Scott Allard, *Places in Need: The Changing Geography of Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage, 2017); Andrea Louise Campbell, *Trapped in America’s Safety Net: One Family’s Struggle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Margaret Weir, “America’s Two Worlds of Welfare: Subnational Institutions and Social Assistance in Metropolitan Areas,” *Perspectives on Politics* 16, no. 2 (2018): 380–99.

86. Allard, *Out of Reach*.

87. Bruce D. Baker, *Educational Inequality and School Finance: Why Money Matters for America’s Students* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2019).

88. Cadence Willse, “Private Funding, Public Schools: Interest Group Mobilization, the Changing Advocacy Agenda, and Public Education” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2019).

89. For discussion on the central importance of residential segregation and the spatial organization of metropolitan areas on schooling, see Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 215–20.

90. Karen Benjamin, “Suburbanizing Jim Crow: The Impact of School Policy on Residential Segregation in Raleigh,” *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 2 (2012): 225–46.

91. Daniel Aaronson et al., “The Long-Run Effects of the 1930s HOLC ‘Redlining Maps’ on Place-Based Measures of Economic Opportunity and Socioeconomic Success,” *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 86 (January 2021): 103622; Richard

Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2018).

92. Formed in 1934, the Federal Housing Authority was charged with providing federal mortgage insurance for homeowners. In the course of this work, the FHA engaged in “restrictive covenants,” which prevented home sales or leases to Black buyers or renters. Estimates suggest that families of color had access to less than 2 percent of the housing stock that FHA built in the time between World War II and the 1960s. See Rothstein, *The Color of Law*.

93. See Rothstein, *The Color of Law*. Black Americans’ average income is 60 percent of White Americans’ income, and Black American’s average wealth is 10 percent of White American’s wealth.

94. Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 208.

95. Ann Owens, Sean F. Reardon, and Christopher Jencks, “Income Segregation between Schools and Districts,” *American Education Research Journal* 53, no. 4 (2016): 1159–97.

96. Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Jamila Michener, *Fragmented Democracy: Medicaid, Federalism, and Unequal Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

97. Joe Soss, “Lessons of Welfare: Policy Design, Political Learning and Political Action,” *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 2 (1999): 363–80.

98. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem.”

99. Suzanne Mettler, “The Polycscape and the Challenges of Contemporary Politics to Policy Maintenance,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 2 (2016): 369–90; Aaron Wildavsky, *Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1987).

100. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” 427–46.

101. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” 427–46.

### Chapter Three

1. David K. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” *The Elementary School Journal* 98, no. 5 (1998): 427–66, see esp. 444–45.

2. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” 445. These problems were hardly unique to Dewey or to nineteenth-century education reformers. Mid-twentieth-century reformers of math curriculum, similarly, offered a vision of how “new math” could transform the student’s “mind, the family, the society, and the state.” See Christopher J. Phillips, *The New Math: A Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 4. For a general discussion of US reliance on public schools to improve society, see William Reese, *America’s Public Schools: From the Common School to No Child Left Behind* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 215.

3. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” 445.

4. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” 444–45.

5. See Miguel Centeno, Atul Kohli, and Deborah J. Yashar, *States in the Developing World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), which includes a distinction between infrastructural capacity (as nation-state capacity) and learning.

6. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” 438.

7. On the centrality of factions to the governing structure and challenges to the

American republic, see James Madison, “Federalist No. 10,” in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: New American Library, 1961).

8. Susan Levine. *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America’s Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

9. On infrastructure and capacity as relative, see Susan L. Moffitt, *Making Policy Public: Participatory Bureaucracy in American Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Kathryn Sikkink, *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

10. David K. Cohen and Susan L. Moffitt, *Ordeal of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

11. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1927), 22.

12. For helpful answers to those questions, see Joseph P. McDonald, *American School Reform: What Works, What Fails, and Why* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

13. Approximately 40 percent of the world’s population lives in countries governed by federalist systems. Forum of Federations, “Federal Countries,” accessed July 15, 2019. Countries with federalist systems include: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Iraq, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, UAE, USA, and Venezuela.

14. Jacob Levy, “Federalism, Liberalism and the Separation of Loyalties,” *American Political Science Review* 101 no. 3 (2007): 459–77; Jenna Bednar, *The Robust Federation: Principles of Design* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

15. Charles R. Shipan and Craig Volden, “Bottom-Up Federalism: The Diffusion of Antismoking Policies from U.S. Cities to States,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 825–43. On the important role of ideas in policy making, see Lorraine M. McDonnell and M. Stephen Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2020), 45–46.

16. Craig Volden, “States as Policy Laboratories: Emulating Success in the Children’s Health Insurance Program,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 2 (2006): 294–312; Charles R. Shipan and Craig Volden, “Policy Diffusion: Seven Lessons for Scholars and Practitioners,” *Public Administration Review* 72, no. 4 (2012): 788–96; Craig Volden, “Failures: Diffusion, Learning, and Policy Abandonment,” *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2016): 44–77.

17. Pablo Beramendi, “Federalism,” in *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carlos Boix and Susan Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 752–82. On the elements of organizational capacity, see Centeno, Kohli, and Yahser, *States in the Developing World*. Some comparative federalism literature refers to this as “administrative” rather than “organizational” capacity.

18. Centeno, Kohli, and Yahser, *States in the Developing World*, 10.

19. Centeno, Kohli and Yahser, 10. This component has its roots in Mann’s concept of infrastructural power: “the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm”—Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results,” *European Journal of Sociology* 25, no. 2 (1984): 189.

20. Centeno, Kohli, and Yahser, *States in the Developing World*, 10.

21. Little about the operation of American public education reflects coherence in terms of systematic communication, oversight, and support for component parts of teaching and learning. See Susan Fuhrman, *Designing Coherent Education Policy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).

22. The challenges to coherence that manifest at the mezzo-level also emerge at the front lines of teaching and learning: in the classroom. One prevailing model of classroom organization continues to follow an egg-crate model in many schools, which it has done for over a century. In factory-like fashion, classrooms became organized in discrete, interchangeable components, each room separated from the others. On this point, see Susan Moore Johnson, “Working in Schools,” in *The Public Schools*, ed. Susan Fuhrman and Marvin Lazerson (New York: Oxford University Press 2006), 166–67; Susan Moore Johnson, *Where Teachers Thrive: Organizing Schools for Success* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2019), 4–7; Dan Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). It is an organizational strategy that can amplify the kind of isolation that makes it challenging or costly for teachers to share ideas, resources, and instructional support. This way of structuring schooling sharply reduced opportunities and incentives for teachers to work together to learn and improve their craft and eliminated significant opportunities to develop common knowledge. And that deprived teaching of the most significant source of authority it might have claimed—valid common knowledge of the work.

23. For a discussion of how this reflects “fragmented centralization” and the challenges it poses to superintendents, see David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 243–46. See also David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 78. For a general discussion of looking beyond the Weberian ideal type to understand American governance, see Elisabeth Clemens, “Lineages of the Rube Goldberg State: Building and Blurring Public Programs, 1900–1940,” in *Rethinking Political Institutions: The Art of the State*, ed. Ian Shapiro, Stephen Skowronek, and Daniel Galvin (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 187–215.

24. See Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 94–110 on the complexity of joint action and multiple veto points. The practice of principals evaluating teachers has emerged over the past twenty years, but is notorious for yielding invalid results. Oversight of principals and superintendents is even more inconsistent than teacher evaluations. If education had well-established standards for the profession, like medicine, professional licensure could offer meaningful oversight—but it does not.

25. National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2019), Fast Facts.

26. Interview ID 260.

27. The relationship between school finance and student outcomes is mixed. Jackson and colleagues find that a 10 percent increase in school funding throughout the student’s twelve-year education trajectory yields higher wages and a lower likelihood of poverty in later life. See C. Kirabo Jackson, Rucker C. Johnson, and Claudia Persico, “The Effects of School Spending on Educational and Economic Outcomes: Evidence from School Finance Reforms,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131, no. 1 (2016): 157–218. Other work finds that increasing school funding by \$1,000 per

pupil over ten years led to improved test scores. Julien Lafortune, Jesse Rothstein, and Diane Whitmore Schazzenbach, “School Finance Reform and the Distribution of Student Achievement,” *American Economic Journal* 10, no. 2 (2018): 1–26. And yet other work finds that higher per pupil spending is associated with higher student graduation rates. See Christopher A. Candelaria and Kenneth A. Shores, “Court-Ordered Finance Reform in the Adequacy Era: Heterogeneous Causal Effects and Sensitivity,” *Education Finance and Policy* 14, no. 1 (2019): 31–60.

28. On intrastate disparities due to variations in property taxes, see Bruce D. Baker, *America’s Most Financially Disadvantaged School Districts and How They Got That Way* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2014).

29. Jesse Levin et al., “What Does It Cost to Educate Students? A Professional Judgment Approach, Technical Report,” in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018), v.

30. Levin et al., “What Does It Cost to Educate Students?,” viii.

31. For discussion of how shifts in PTAs keep financial resources pegged to particular schools rather than distributed across the district, see Cadence Willse, “Private Funding, Public Schools: Interest Group Mobilization, the Changing Advocacy Agenda, and Public Education” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2019).

32. Eric Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk: What Happens After Major Policy Reforms Are Enacted* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

33. For discussion on public school governance, see Paul Manna and Patrick McGuinn, *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the Structural Barriers to School Reform* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013). For discussion on the separation of districts and school boards from cities and counties, see Jeffrey R. Henig, Rebecca Jacobsen, and Sarah Reckhow, *Outsized Money in School Board Elections: The Nationalization of Education Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2019), 2. Though school boards’ authorities vary, their responsibilities typically include selecting the district’s superintendent, who oversees district administration. School boards also typically determine the district’s budget and approve plans for school building repairs, construction, and closure. And school boards play key roles in core aspects of instructional practice, including whether and how to conduct teacher evaluations, establishing employee contracts, and approving instructional curriculum. Locally constructed forms of election-based governance loom large in the operation of American public schools, in stark contrast to other nations where appointed experts play a larger role in setting education policy. On policies in other countries that rely more heavily on experts and esteem for educators along with less public oversight, see Moore Johnson, “Working in Schools,” 168.

34. Sarah Anzia and Terry Moe, “Public Sector Unions and the Costs of Government,” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 1 (2015): 114–27. Also on collective bargaining, see Sarah Anzia and Terry Moe, “Collective Bargaining, Transfer Rights, and Disadvantaged Schools,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 36, no. 1 (2014): 83–111.

35. Paul Manna and Susan L. Moffitt, “Traceable Tasks and Complex Policies: When Politics Matter for Policy Implementation,” *Policy Studies Journal* 49, no. 1 (2021): 190–218.

36. Henig, Jacobsen and Reckhow, *Outsized Money*, 21.

37. For a helpful summary of critiques of localism in general and school elections in particular, see Henig, Jacobsen and Reckhow, 30–36.



38. On these points, the implications of the nationalization of school board elections in some cities, and media coverage of school board elections, see Henig, Jacobsen and Reckhow, 146–54, 177–94. School board elections are low-information in the sense that they are typically nonpartisan (so voters cannot rely on party cues for information about potential school board members' policy preferences), they typically receive little media coverage, and they often occur in off-cycle electoral schedules (i.e., elections don't coincide with statewide or national-level elections). See Michael W. Kirst and Frederick M. Wirt, *The Political Dynamics of American Education* (San Pablo, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 2009), 101–20. On the implications of off-cycle elections, see Jonathan Collins, Eddie Lucero, and Jessica Trounstein, "Will Concurrent Elections Shape the Electorate?" *California Journal of Public Policy* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.5070/P2cjpp1150416>.

39. Vladamir Kogan, Stéphane Lavertu, and Zachary Peskowitz, "The Democratic Deficit in U.S. Education Governance," EdWorkingPaper 20–196, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University, January 2021.

40. On how "outside assistance" can operate at the local level, see McDonnell's discussion of national group influence in generating local opposition to the California Learning Assessment System in the 1990s—Lorraine M. McDonnell, *Politics, Persuasion, and Education Testing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 113–14. See also McDonnell and Weatherford, "Seeking a New Politics of Education," 183 for helpful discussion of how education politics can operate in ways that are responsive to specific geographic constituencies without centralization.

41. Kathy Cramer, *Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

42. Frederick M. Hess, *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 52–58, 103; Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock, *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

43. In some states, the top state-level education official (such as the state superintendent of schools or the chief state school officer) is elected. In other states, the top official is appointed by the governor. In yet other states, the top official is appointed by the state Board of Education. And in yet other states, the state Board of Regents appoints the top official. Governors and state legislatures are key education policy makers, as are district-level superintendents.

44. Jeffrey Henig, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education: The Changing Politics of School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013); Nathan J. Kelly, *America's Inequality Trap* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

45. Kogan et al., "The Democratic Deficit."

46. John Festerweld, "How Does California Rank in Per-Pupil Spending? It All Depends," *EdSource*, February 28, 2017.

47. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about the importance of foundation funding in policy making: Interview ID 584.

48. Organization data for figure 3.2 was geocoded by zip code in ArcGIS and the map was produced using ArcGIS. There are 778 grants included in the sample, and 458 foundations. The foundation data were merged with aggregated county estimates of English Learners from the California Department of Education for the 2015 school year. Poverty estimates are based on the percentage of the population aged 5–17 in

poverty, from the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) in 2015. The table excludes counties that do not have foundations or grant recipient service organizations according to our analysis—i.e., any county that did not have organizations geocoded within the county boundary (there are 41 counties with organizations, out of a total of 58 counties). Please see the Appendix for additional source information. We are grateful to Cadence Willse for conducting this analysis.

49. The specific offices changed names over the course of our study. Office names included: The Performance, Planning and Technology Branch; the Teaching and Learning Support Branch; and the Systems Support Branch. Names and responsibilities shifted to Instruction, Measurement, Administration; and Opportunities for All.

50. Legislative Analyst's Office, *Overview of State Governance: K–12 Education* (February 14, 2018), 5.

51. The governor appoints most of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) members. The CTC was established in 1970 by the Ryan Act. See Commission on Teacher Credentialing, "A History of Policies and Forces Shaping California Teacher Credentialing," February 2011, [https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/commission/files/ctc-history.pdf?sfvrsn=96050f5\\_0](https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/commission/files/ctc-history.pdf?sfvrsn=96050f5_0); see also Commission on Teacher Credentialing, "About the Commission," <https://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/default>, accessed December 13, 2017.

52. California Collaborative for Educational Excellence Website, <https://ccee-ca.org/mission-work-history/>, accessed August 21, 2022; California Collaborative for Educational Excellence Governing Board Bylaws, Article III, Section 1, <https://ccee-ca.org/governing-board/bylaws/>, accessed on August 21, 2022.

53. On county offices of education, see David Plank, Jennifer O'Day, and Benjamin Cottingham, "Building an Effective System of Support Under LCFF: The Key Role of County Offices of Education," in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018).

54. Organization data for figure 3.2 was geocoded by zip code in ArcGIS, and the map was produced using ArcGIS. There are 778 grants included in the sample, and 458 foundations. The foundation data were merged with aggregated county estimates of English Learners from the California Department of Education for the 2015 school year. Poverty estimates are based on the percentage of the population aged 5–17 in poverty, from the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) in 2015. The table excludes counties that do not have foundations or grant recipient service organizations according to our analysis—i.e., any county that did not have organizations geocoded within the county boundary (there are 41 counties with organizations, out of a total of 58 counties). Please see the Appendix for source information. We are grateful to Cadence Willse for conducting this analysis.

55. Amber M. Winkeler, Janie Scull, and Dara Zeehandelaar, *How Strong Are U.S. Teacher Unions: A State-by-State Comparison* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2012), 10.

56. On the collision of new policies with old terrains, see Paul Manna, *Collision Course: Federal Education Policy Meets State and Local Realities* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010), esp. 43–52.

57. Andrew Karch and Shanna Rose, *Responsive States: Federalism and American Public Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk*.



58. Kenneth J. Meier and Lawrence O'Toole, *Bureaucracy in a Democratic State: A Governance Perspective* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

59. Michael Berkman and Eric Plutzer, *Evolution, Creationism, and the Battle to Control America's Classrooms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

60. Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).

61. See Giandomenico Majone and Aaron Wildavsky, "Implementation as Evolution," in Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

62. Our use of the term "organizational capacity" is akin to the use of the term "administrative capacity" in scholarship on state-building and state capacity. See Susan L. Moffitt et al., "Centralization and Subnational Capacity: The Struggle to Make Federalism Work Equitably in Public Education," *Perspectives on Politics* (2021), <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721002012>; Centeno, Kohli, and Yashar, *States in the Developing World*.

63. On isolation, see Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy*; James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

64. Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock, *Building State Capability*; Hess, *Spinning Wheels*; David K. Cohen, "Teaching Practice: Plus Ça Change . . .," Issue Paper 88–3 (East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Education, 1988); Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught* (New York: Longman, 1984); Larry Cuban, *Inside the Black Box of Classroom Practice: Change without Reform in American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

65. Hess, *Spinning Wheels*, chapter 5; Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock, *Building State Capability*.

66. Though McDonnell and Weatherford note that the fiercest opposition appeared in only a handful of states, and most standards continued to espouse their core ideas in 2020. See McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 7.

67. Nicholas Tampio, *Common Core: National Education Standards and the Threat to Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

68. For calls to standardize curricula and greater state-level centralization, see Morgan Polikoff, *Beyond Standards: The Fragmentation of Education Governance and the Promise of Curriculum Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2021), 136–40.

## Chapter Four

1. On the expansion of reform ideas that work, see Craig Volden, "States as Policy Laboratories: Emulating Success in the Children's Health Insurance Program," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 2 (2006): 294–312; Charles R. Shipan and Craig Volden, "Policy Diffusion: Seven Lessons for Scholars and Practitioners," *Public Administration Review* 72, no. 4 (2012): 788–96; Craig Volden, "Failures: Diffusion, Learning, and Policy Abandonment," *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2016): 44–77. Bad ideas can spread too. US cities have copied each other's economic development strategies, sometimes to their detriment, as in the case of some forms of financing arrangements for sports teams and stadiums. On the spread

of bad ideas, see Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

2. Charles R. Shipan and Craig Volden, “Bottom-Up Federalism: The Diffusion of Antismoking Policies from U.S. Cities to States,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 825–43; Volden, “States as Policy Laboratories,” 294–312.

3. See Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin, “Learning from Experience: Lessons from Policy Implementation,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 9, no. 2 (1987): 171–78, for a discussion of the will and skill required in implementation.

4. On information and oversight, see: Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862–1928* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5–6; Tracy Steffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

5. Quoted in Harry Kursh, *The United States Office of Education* (Philadelphia, PA: Chilton Company, 1965), 10–11. See also National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 1993).

6. The agency underwent a series of name changes, from Department, to Bureau, to Office.

7. The origins and fate of the original Bureau of Education are discussed in more detail in Susan Moffitt, *Making Policy Public: Participatory Bureaucracy in American Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 82–87.

8. David B. Tyack, *One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 47–48. On the expansion of testing in the early twentieth century and the role of testing in tracking children, see William Reese, *America’s Public Schools* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press), 158–71.

9. Francis Keppel, *The Necessary Revolution in Education* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), 108–9.

10. For discussion of the policy learning that manifested through the 1982 evaluation of NAEP, see Archie Lapointe, “A New Design for a New Era,” in *The Nation’s Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives*, ed. Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004), 186–91. For the text of the 1982 evaluation of NAEP, see Willard Wirtz and Archie A. Lapointe, *Measuring the Quality of Education: A Report on Assessing Educational Progress* (Washington, DC: Wirtz and Lapointe, 1982).

11. The governance structure for NAEP was reconstituted in 1988 through PL 100-297, known as the Hawkins-Stafford Act. This reconstitution created the National Assessment Governing Board. On the history of the National Assessment Governing Board, see Mary Lyn Bourque, “A History of the National Assessment Governing Board,” in *The Nation’s Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives*, ed. Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004), 201–31.

12. National- and state-level politics that followed the release of the Nation at Risk report helped propel the changes in NAEP to allow state-by-state comparisons. Secretary Bell, following a Nation at Risk recommendation, used SAT comparisons across states, which helped generate state demand for a different vehicle for comparison. Secretary Bennett followed with the Alexander-James panel, which paved

the way for state NAEP, which began as a pilot and then became institutionalized. For discussion of NAEP's transition to allow state comparisons, see Maris A. Vinovkis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind: National Education Goals and the Creation of Federal Education Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 18–19. See also Ramsay Selden, "Making NAEP State-by-State," in *The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives*, ed. Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004), 195–99.

13. Frederic A. Mosher, "What NAEP Really Could Do," in *The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives*, ed. Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004), 329.

14. This included matrix sampling of items, meaning that samples of students took portions of the assessment, which were then combined to form a regional and then a state portrait of student achievement. Put differently, individual students did not take the entire exam. When ETS became the contractor for NAEP in 1983, the assessment's psychometric design changed to allow for BIB-spiraling.

15. On the history of NAEP, see William Greenbaum, Michael Garet, and Ellen R. Solomon, *Measuring Educational Progress: A Study of the National Assessment* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1977), esp. 16–19, 47–49, 68–71; Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin, *The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives* (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004).

16. On the roles and responsibilities of the National Assessment Governing Board, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the NAEP contractor after PL 100-297, see Bourque, "A History of the National Assessment Governing Board," 204–5; and Emerson Elliott and Gary Phillips, "A View from NCES," in *The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives*, ed. Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004), 240–42.

17. On early opposition to and then support for NAEP, see Irvin J. Lehman, "The Genesis of NAEP," in *The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives*, ed. Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004), 46–49.

18. These buffers, moreover, appeared across presidential administrations.

19. NAEP's design, overseen by a separate board and administered by a statistical agency and contractors, means that it relies relatively less on state and local districts. It nonetheless depends on frontline staff to administer the assessment, and on students to answer questions, including demographic questions. Some kinds of questions, for instance regarding socioeconomic status, can be difficult for children to understand and report. This issue arose in the way the assessment gathered and reported demographic data on child poverty. See Bourque, "A History of the National Assessment Governing Board," 205–11.

20. Over the course of its early history, NAEP reported group means, then switched to Item Response Theory with anchor points, before moving to achievement levels to report scores. See Mosher, "What NAEP Really Could Do," 330–31.

21. As Mosher observed, "the history of NAEP could be written as the story of the struggle to find a way to report the assessment's results so that people could understand them and form some judgment about their significance"—Mosher, "What NAEP Really Could Do," 330. See also Greenbaum, Garet, and Solomon, *Measuring Educational Progress*, 10–11.

22. This standards-based approach was authorized in PL 100-297, which both reconstituted NAEP's governing board and authorized state-level NAEPs, though NAGB initiated the process of reporting results by achievement levels in 1990. Authorization for NAGB to develop performance levels for NAEP was further specified in PL 103-328, the Improving America's Schools Act. For a brief discussion of the implications of the Hawkins-Stafford amendments for NAEP to develop subject-specific achievement goals, see Vinovkis, *From a Nation at Risk*, 19. For a discussion on the ways that standard setting for these levels was a "learning experience," see Bourque, "A History of the National Assessment Governing Board," 211–18. A series of reports sharply criticized the method used to establish achievement levels for NAEP in the 1990s—see James W. Pellegrino, Lee R. Jones, and Karen J. Mitchell, *Grading the Nation's Report Card: Evaluating NAEP and Transforming the Assessment of Educational Progress* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999), 7–8, 162–84.

23. Moving in this direction opened up NAEP to a new line of criticism that this form of reporting was misleading. US General Accounting Office, *Educational Achievement Standards: NAGB's Approach Yields Misleading Interpretations*, Report No. GAO/PEMD-93-12 (Washington, DC: General Accounting Office, 1993); National Academy of Education, *Setting Performance Standards for Student Achievement* (Palo Alto, CA: National Academy of Education, 1993). Others reported that changing the reporting process had spillover effects on the design of the assessment, leading the assessment to include fewer easy questions and more difficult questions. See Lyle V. Jones, "The History of the National Assessment of Educational Progress and Some Questions about Its Future," *Educational Researcher* 25, no. 7 (1996): 15–22.

24. Considerable scholarship demonstrates that data alone do not help teachers improve instructional practice. See Kathleen Lynch et al., "Strengthening the Research Base that Informs STEM Instructional Improvement Efforts: A Meta-Analysis," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41, no. 3 (2019): 260–93.

25. For discussion on how early NAEP helped stimulate state and local assessment efforts, see Greenbaum, Garet, and Solomon, *Measuring Educational Progress*, 166.

26. For discussion of different assumptions and logics of policy design, see Anne L. Schneider and Helen Ingram, *Policy Design for Democracy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

27. McDonnell and Weatherford quote an Indiana legislator and member of the Education Roundtable in charge of setting standards as saying, "For a long time, I've been very frustrated with why all fifty states have standards but there's no consistency in them. And the fact that NAEP is the only thing we really have to tell how we are doing compared to our neighboring states, and even that's not perfectly reflective"—in Lorraine M. McDonnell and M. Stephen Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2020), 123.

28. Policies, of course, emerge that reflect no learning from experience, only partial learning from experience, or a backlash to learning. On these points, see David K. Cohen and Heather C. Hill, *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 30; Suzanne M. Wilson, *California Dreaming: Reforming Mathematics Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 2–3. For a general discussion of thermostat politics, see Christopher Wlezien, "The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending," *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 4 (1995): 981–1000. On fits and starts

in welfare state development, see Theda Skocpol, “Against Evolution: Social Policies and American Political Development,” *Studies in American Political Development* 8, no. 2 (1994): 140–49.

29. For discussion of how key players in the development the California math curriculum guides believed “that learning is not linear, but spiraling and layered,” see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 56. For discussion of how policy learning can lead policy makers in different directions, sometimes adopting something new, sometimes going back to something tried and true, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 159.

30. If we focus only on linear trends, we risk missing much of the learning, along with the problems that reform produces.

31. For helpful discussion on the history of California’s mathematics frameworks, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy* and Wilson, *California Dreaming*.

32. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of district-level standards that preceded state-level standards; state standards started to emerge in the 1980s, and came to fruition in the 1990s. Interview ID 875.

33. The California Education Code specifies the functions and objectives of the frameworks, including their role in guiding textbooks, instructional materials, curricula, and assessments. For a discussion of these purposes in the 1990s, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 32–33.

34. However, some ambitious components from the 1990s were immolated in subsequent political warfare. On the math wars in California, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 13, 20–21.

35. This is a form of social learning, in Peter May’s terms. See Peter May, “Policy Learning and Failure,” *Journal of Public Policy* 12, no. 4 (1992): 331–54.

36. Yet, nationally, “new math” was not a singular curriculum; rather, as Phillips argues, it was a term attached to an array of “curriculum projects” and textbooks in the 1950s and 1960s that differed from each other “both mathematically and pedagogically.” See Christopher J. Phillips, *The New Math: A Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.

37. On the New Math elements of early California frameworks, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 13, 15.

38. For more on California’s seesaw from new math to “basics,” see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 14–15. For discussion of different assumptions about children’s learning, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 20.

39. On the leading role that California played in pursuing ambitious academic content and instruction for all children, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, preface, 1–2, and Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 20, 24, 30–31, 35.

40. Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 14. Other parts of this stream included the Coalition of Essential Schools, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards, and G. W. Bush’s education goals.

41. Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 16; See also Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 26. Mezzo-level policy makers discussed the controversies that erupted with these changes, and the political divergence that ensued between teachers, parents, and different cadres of policy makers. Interview ID 655.

42. Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 17.

43. Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 16–18.

44. For background on the California State Board of Education (SBE) and its responsibilities, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 31.

45. For background on the IQC, formerly known as the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission or the Curriculum Commission, and how it operates, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 32–33, 35–36. Our interviews also discussed the role of the IQC in translating standards into frameworks: Interview ID 284.

46. For discussion on the CDE and its operations, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 31, 37. For discussion of the limited capacity of the CDE in this era, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 7–8.

47. Our mezzo-level policy makers reflected on the era that preceded state-level standards in California, when some districts tried to develop their own standards and assessment systems, and how mezzo-level leaders learned from that process. Interview ID 877.

48. While some of the most visible battles appeared between the governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, conflicts also arose between some parent groups that pressed for back-to-basics, and groups of educators, including the California Mathematics Council, that pressed for more experiential and applied math. Interview ID 655.

49. On political conflict, budget cuts, pedagogical aspirations, and processes of policy development that did not systematically examine implementation, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 2, 11, 19, 67, 69–70.

50. For a discussion of the relationship between California’s framework (approved by the IQC) and the curriculum guides as a way to help districts choose instructional materials, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 56.

51. For more discussion on how the development of Common Core standards took California’s and other states’ experiences with standards into account, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 25, 43.

52. One area of tension in California’s adoption of the Common Core, though, was whether and how they would be aligned with English Learners’ needs. Interview ID 581.

53. For more discussion on the impact of the Race to the Top grant competition on California’s process for adopting the Common Core State Standards, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 110, 239n2.

54. As California developed the frameworks and curriculum guides to support the standards, mezzo-level policy makers spoke of how they represented a shift from “test and punish to a build and support approach”—Interview ID 284.

55. For more discussion on the process and politics involved in California’s adoption of the Common Core State Standards, including the unanimous vote of support from the State Board of Education along with support from the CTA and state PTA, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 111–15.

56. For discussion on the political learning from Governor Jerry Brown and State Board of Education President Mike Kirst that abetted local discretion, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 116. For discussion of standards implementation, see Neal Finkelstein et al., “Insights on Standards Implementation in California’s Schools, Technical Report,” in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018); Reino Makkonen and R. Sheffield, “California Standards



Implementation: What Educators Are Saying,” *WestEd Knowledge Brief*, October 2017, <https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/resource-california-standards-implementation-what-educators-are-saying-1.pdf>; for a national view, see Julia Kaufman et al., *What Supports Do Teachers Need to Help Students Meet Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy?* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016).

57. At the time, the Instructional Quality Commission oversaw the development of frameworks and set policy for curriculum and instructional guidance. The California Department of Education was in charge of “rolling out” the frameworks and guidance, in collaboration with the IQC. In the Common Core era, however, there were few departmental resources to support the rollouts. For instance, there was only one for all of Los Angeles County. Interview ID 226.

58. The former name of the Instructional Quality Commission was the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission. It was originally established in 1927 (Instructional Quality Commission, California State Board of Education website, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/cc/cd/>, accessed on December 7, 2017). Interview ID 284.

59. There is still flexibility for districts within this arrangement. For discussion on the terms specified in the California Code, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 28.

60. Interview ID 507.

61. Despite the prevalence of teachers’ exposure to or awareness of standards and frameworks, standards alone are ill equipped to transform teachers’ instructional practices. Instead, greater teacher use of frameworks has been associated with a greater likelihood of teachers deploying conventional instructional practices, rather than practices more closely aligned with the ambitions and expectations of the frameworks. On these points, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 39–40, 114. Our mezzo-level policy makers also spoke of policies, like frameworks, not translating automatically into transformed instructional practices: interview ID 655.

62. For more on teachers’ exposure to the 1985 California frameworks, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 50.

63. For a discussion of the policy learning, including the political learning, that helped develop and sustain the Common Core in California, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 121.

64. For discussion of teachers’ perceptions that they “worked in schools or districts that promoted the math framework,” see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 51.

65. National studies of teachers suggest their general support and use of Common Core standards, or their close derivatives. See Thomas J. Kane et al., *Teaching Higher: Educators’ Perspectives on Common Core Implementation* (Center for Education Policy Research, Harvard University 2016). For analysis of public opinion in California for the Common Core, see Morgan Polikoff et al., *Californians and Public Education: Results from the Fourth PACE/USC Rossier Poll* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2014).

66. Interview ID 263. Sentiments about the usefulness of standards emerged in our discussions with superintendents.

67. California stands in stark contrast to states like New York in its approach to developing system alignment. Unlike New York, California waited several years to shift its assessment, and California has remained stable with its standards and assessment in recent years. California also waited to roll out teacher evaluation. Unlike

New York, where Common Core quickly became embroiled in political conflict, California standards managed, for a while, to remain above the political fray. For further discussion on this, see Susan L. Moffitt et al., “State Structures for Instructional Support in California, Technical Report,” in *Getting Down to Facts II: Current Conditions and Paths Forward for California Schools* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018).

68. For discussion of state-level collaboration, political stability from 2008 to 2018, and the development of political learning in California to abet this stability and political convergence, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 120.

69. Interview ID 515.

70. On the political convergence in California in the Common Core era, see Bill Honig, “The California Context: California Policymakers and Educators Shift from Test-and-Punish to Build-and-Support,” Building Better Schools (blog), 2016, <http://www.buildingbetterschools.com/ca-policy-makers-and-educators-shift-from-test-punish-to-build-support/>. For more discussion on political conflict and partisanship in the 1980s and 1990s, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 19, 28–29. Our mezzo-level policy makers also discussed the tension between the CDE and SBE in the 1990s, noting that the Boards are appointed by the governor and how the governors in the 1980s and 1990s did not get along with the department, leading to power shifting away from the CDE but the CDE being left with administrative responsibilities and burden: Interview ID 226.

71. Interview IDs 664, 321. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of Governor Brown’s unique and commanding leverage. While one interviewee noted Governor Brown’s reliance on the SBE and Kirst for advice, they continued, “Brown is also the unchallenged master of Sacramento; nobody does anything in Sacramento that Jerry Brown doesn’t like very much. I don’t know that there are any other governors in the United States, particularly in a big state, that have that level of control. . . . Despite the fact that his . . . successor is likely to be a Democrat, that governor will not have the same level of control” (Interview ID 830).

72. Interview ID 282.

73. Interview ID 830.

74. Some respondents spoke with us about the political alignment that emerged in this period but did not want to be quoted.

75. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke of state-level policy between 1998 and 2004 as approaching standards as a ceiling or a way of “ending the debate” and focusing on fidelity to the standards, and they spoke of how leaders in the Common Core era pivoted to seeing the standards as a “floor” or an opening to a bigger, more extensive conversation about instructional support, moving away from a “textbook-driven” approach. Interview IDs 655, 877.

76. Interview ID 630. The mezzo-level policy maker continued, “except maybe for the Race to the Top states.”

77. On standards as a linchpin of other components or as “meta-policy,” see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 28, 122. On coherence, see Marshall S. Smith and Jennifer O’Day, “Systemic School Reform,” in *Politics of Education Association Yearbook 1990*, ed. Susan H. Fuhrman and Betty Malen (London: Taylor and Francis, 1991), 254.

78. Interview ID 875.



79. For discussion of how policy developments did not provide the infrastructure for changing instructional practice, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 18.

80. We discuss the California Subject Matter Project further in chapter 6.

81. Interview ID 641.

82. Interview ID 641.

83. For further discussion on the trajectory of assessments in California, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 57–58, 60–61.

84. For further discussion on the development of the California Learning Assessment System, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 115.

85. For helpful discussion on the politics of CLAS, see Lorraine McDonnell, *Politics, Persuasion, and Education Testing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 12–13, 56–58, 62–86. For additional discussion of CLAS, see Joel Knudson, Stephanie Hannan, Jennifer O'Day, and Marina Castro, "Still Learning from the Past: Drawing on California's CLAS Experience to Inform Assessment of the Common Core," California Collaborative on District Reform Policy Brief, 2015, [https://cacollaborative.org/sites/default/files/CA\\_Collaborative\\_CLAS\\_2015.pdf](https://cacollaborative.org/sites/default/files/CA_Collaborative_CLAS_2015.pdf).

86. Susan L. Moffitt and David K. Cohen, "The Politics of Bad News: The Effects of Practice on Policy and Politics," paper presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, 2010.

87. Susan L. Moffitt et al., "Frontlines Perspectives on Instructional Improvement in the Common Core Era, Technical Report," in *Getting Down to Facts II: Current Conditions and Paths Forward for California Schools* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018), 27.

88. Interview ID 877.

89. Some mezzo-level policy makers spoke of multiple interpretations and components of LCFF, including equity, "multiple measures" rather than a single metric for accountability/intervention, and local control: Interview ID 797. On the Local Control Funding Formula, see California Department of Education, "Local Control Funding Formula," Sacramento, CA, 2013, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/>, last reviewed December 17, 2021; Daniel Humphrey et al., "How Stakeholder Engagement Fuels Improvement Efforts in Three California School Districts," Local Control Funding Formula Research Collaborative, February 2018, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED591104.pdf>; Rucker C. Johnson and Sean Tanner, "Money and Freedom: The Impact of California's School Finance Reform on Academic Achievement and the Composition of District Spending," in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018); Julia E. Koppich and Daniel C. Humphrey, "The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF): What Have We Learned After Four Years of Implementation?" in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018).

90. On the links between LCFF and CCSS, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 117.

91. Interview ID 877.

92. Interview ID 797.

93. Interview ID 480.

94. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of the ripple effects of the Common Core on materials, on attention to equity (including the integration with standards and ELD), and on the implications for eighth-grade math and Algebra I (interview ID 655). On the English Language Development standards in California, see Califor-

nia Department of Education, *The California English Language Development Standards: Kindergarten Through Grade 12*, ed. Faye Ong and John McLean (Sacramento, CA: Department of Education, 2014), <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/eldstndpublication14.pdf>.

95. Mike W. Kirst, “The Common Core Meets State Policy: This Changes Almost Everything,” PACE Policy Brief, Center for Education Policy Analysis, Stanford University, 2013, 1.

96. Some of our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of the need for principals to have good observation protocols, for grade-level common planning, and for opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s work. Interview ID 877.

97. Moffitt et al., “State Structures for Instructional Support,” 5–6.

98. On the interconnectedness between standards and the other components of instruction, the unreasonableness of expecting standards alone to improve instruction, and the political strategy at work in Common Core promotion, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 39–41.

99. Interview ID 493.

100. Interview ID 198.

101. Interview ID 260.

102. In California, this is abetted by the regular review cycle for standards. On the reviews of standards in the 1980s and 1990s, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 34, 177–95.

103. Interview ID 198.

104. California standards were not alone in this effort. For a discussion of NCTM, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 25–26; see also McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 7.

105. During California’s regularly scheduled review of its math standards in 2021, the IQC wrestled with whether or not the revisions to standards and frameworks should incorporate different ideas about equity.

106. For a discussion of the challenge of state education policy to yield meaningful improvements for multiple components of instruction, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 150.

107. On the ways in which California’s frameworks were blamed for declining NAEP scores, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 137–44.

108. Interview ID 741.

109. On this point, see Aaron Wildavsky, *Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1987); Suzanne Mettler, “The Polycscape and the Challenges of Contemporary Politics to Policy Maintenance,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 2 (2016): 369–90; John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1927).

110. On multiple policies within a policy, see Paul Manna and Susan Moffitt, “Traceable Tasks and Complex Policies: When Politics Matter for Policy Implementation,” *Policy Studies Journal* 49, no. 1 (2021): 190–218. Different parts of policy design may contain elements that help reinforce or help dismantle the policy. On this point, see Andrew Karch and Shanna Rose, *Responsive States: Federalism and American Public Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

111. On multiple, colliding policies, see Mettler, “The Polycscape.”

112. 34 CFR 300.307(a)(2). “The law also allowed all local education agencies

(LEAs) to allocate a portion of their federal special education dollars to support early intervening services for students requiring academic and behavioral assistance (34 CFR 300.226[a]), and required those LEAs determined by their states to be struggling with significant issues of racial and ethnic disproportionality in their special education programs to use the maximum portion of those federal dollars for early intervening services” (p. 94). Michaela Krug O’Neill, “The Predicaments of Addressing Equity without Attending to Race and Racism,” *The Educational Forum* 86, no. 1 (2022): 93–106.

113. US Department of Education, *Thirty-Five Years of Progress in Educating Children with Disabilities through IDEA* (Washington, DC: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2010).

114. O’Neill, “The Predicaments of Addressing Equity without Attending to Race and Racism,” 94.

115. Sheri Berkeley et al., “Implementation of Response to Intervention: A Snapshot of Progress,” *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 42, no. 1 (2009): 85–95; Perry Zirkel and Lisa Thomas, “State Laws for RTI: An Updated Snapshot,” *Teaching Exceptional Children* 42, no. 3 (2010): 56–63.

116. Berkeley et al., “Implementation of Response to Intervention.”

117. Renee Bradley, Louis Danielson, and Jennifer Doolittle, “Response to Intervention,” *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 38, no. 6 (2005): 485–86.

118. Coordinated Early Intervening Services are required: “if an LEA is identified by the state as having a disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in: the identification of children with disabilities; the identification of children with disabilities in a particular impairment category; the placement of children in particular educational settings; and/or the incidence, duration and type of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions.” When significant disproportionality is identified, “coordinated early intervening services must serve particularly, but not exclusively, students in racial and ethnic groups that are significantly overidentified.” M. C. Bradley et al., “IDEA National Assessment Implementation Study” (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education, 2011), xxx.

119. At the February 1, 2013 State Board of Education meeting, the deputy commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Education reported that, to date, the state had approved twenty-two models of RTI for the identification of students with specific learning disabilities, but estimated that more than half of the state’s districts were using a version of RTI in at least some of their schools in order to provide interventions prior to the referral process. This meant that prior to RTI<sup>2</sup> there were at least twenty-two separately approved RTI policies in Tennessee.

120. O’Neill, “The Predicaments of Addressing Equity without Attending to Race and Racism,” 95; Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle, “Response to Intervention,” 485–86; Rollanda E. O’Connor and Victoria Sanchez, “Responsiveness to Intervention Models for Reducing Reading Difficulties and Identifying Learning Disability,” in *Handbook of Special Education*, ed. J. M. Kauffman and D. P. Hallahan (New York: Routledge, 2011), 123–33.

121. Tennessee Department of Education, RTI<sup>2</sup> Framework: Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Education, revised 2015), 9.

122. Tennessee State Government, “Tennessee Announces Common Core Leadership Council,” Tennessee State Government Newsroom, February 15, 2012, <https://www.tn.gov/news/2012/2/15/tennessee-announces-common-core-leadership-council.html>.

123. Tennessee Department of Education, *RTI<sup>2</sup> Framework: Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework*, 9.

124. Although not simply a special education policy, RTI<sup>2</sup> used a special education mandate to ensure widespread policy adoption by changing how schools were able to identify students with specific learning disabilities.

125. Tennessee State Board of Education, “Special Education Guidelines and Standards” (Nashville: Tennessee State Board of Education, 2013).

126. Tennessee Department of Education, *RTI<sup>2</sup> Framework: Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework*, 9.

127. Our mezzo-level policy makers also discussed the prevalence of alignment around procedural issues with respect to standards implementation (not RTI): Interview ID 118.

128. Tennessee Department of Education, *RTI<sup>2</sup> Framework: Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework*, 11.

129. Interview originally appears in Michaela Krug O’Neill, “Efforts to Improve Instruction for One and All: Policy Reforms in Special Education,” PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2017.

130. By the spring of 2015 the state was considering an RFP process for interventions programs similar to the one they had done for universal screeners, but even when weighing the pros and cons of that decision, they were trying to balance the benefits of providing a list of supported programs to schools looking for support with the political backlash from schools that might find their programs did not make the cut.

131. Manna and Moffitt, “Traceable Tasks”; Patricia Strach, Katie Zuber, and Elizabeth Pérez-Chiqués, “Why Policies Fail: The Illusion of Services in the Opioid Epidemic,” *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 25, no. 2 (2020): 341–64.

## Chapter Five

1. Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Dana Goldstein, *Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014); William Reese, *Testing Wars in the Public Schools: A Forgotten History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

2. John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

3. On the possibility that reforms disappear altogether, see Eric Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk: What Happens After Major Policy Reforms Are Enacted* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

4. For a discussion of how when new stakeholder coalitions form, prior policies and practices are more likely to be dismantled and new ones are likely to be built, see Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk*; for a discussion of how piles of policies can create contradictory expectations, see Jacob Hacker, “Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State: The Hidden Politics of Social Policy Retrenchment in the United

States,” *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 2 (2004): 243–60. For a discussion of how the ideas of policy “losers” become baked into operations, see Terry Moe, “Power and Political Institutions,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 2 (2003): 215–33.

5. Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980); Aditya Dasgupta and Devesh Kapur “The Political Economy of Bureaucratic Overload: Evidence from Rural Development Officials in India,” *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 4 (2020): 1316–34.

6. Race to the Top grant recipients included: Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Washington DC.

7. For early evidence on the impact of No Child Left Behind, see Thomas S. Dee and Brian Jacob, “The Impact of No Child Left Behind on Student Achievement,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 30, no. 3 (2011): 418–46.

8. See Ashley Jochim and Patrick McGuinn, “The Politics of Common Core Assessment,” *Education Next* 16, no. 4 (2016), <http://educationnext.org/the-politics-of-common-core-assessments-parcc-smarter-balanced/>; Patrick McGuinn, “The National Schoolmarm: No Child Left Behind and the New Educational Federalism,” *Publius* 35, no. 1 (2005): 41–68; Patrick McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Education Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Bryan Shelly, “Rebels and Their Causes: State Resistance to No Child Left Behind,” *Publius* 38, no. 3 (2008): 444–68.

9. For more on NCLB and Race to the Top, see Lorraine M. McDonnell and M. Stephen Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2020); William G. Howell and Asya Magazinnik, “Financial Incentives in Vertical Diffusion: The Variable Effects of Obama’s Race to the Top Initiative on State Policy Making,” *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (2020): 185–212.

10. For discussion of the importance of common standards and assessments to the RTTT award criteria, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 85.

11. On the weak capacity of state departments of education, see Jerome T. Murphy, *State Education Agencies and Discretionary Funds: Grease the Squeaky Wheel* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974), 4–5; Ashley Jochim and Patrick Murphy, “The Capacity Challenge: What It Takes for State Education Agencies to Support School Improvement,” Center for Reinventing Public Education, December 2013, [https://crpe.org/wp-content/uploads/pub\\_capacity-challenge\\_dec13\\_0.pdf](https://crpe.org/wp-content/uploads/pub_capacity-challenge_dec13_0.pdf); Thomas B. Timar, “The Institutional Role of State Education Departments: A Historical Perspective,” *American Journal of Education* 105 (1997): 231–60.

12. National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve, Inc., *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 2008).

13. For further discussion on how Race to the Top helped mobilize states to sign on to the Common Core, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 125.

14. Interview IDs 630, 493.

15. For discussion of the unraveling of support for the Common Core in Indiana, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 130–31.

16. On the ways in which policy design drew on research and evidence, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 105.

17. Interview ID 630.

18. On the quick spread of and pushback to Common Core, see Ashley Jochim and Lesley Lavery, “The Evolving Politics of the Common Core,” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 45, no. 3 (2015): 380–404.

19. Interview ID 630.

20. New York stands as a notable example where teacher opposition mobilized, along with links between student assessments and teacher evaluations.

21. Parental pressure by opting students out of the assessment also appeared in New York.

22. Interview ID 493.

23. Interview ID 830.

24. These surveys came from the Harvard PPEG/EdNext group and from USC. Michael B. Henderson, Paul E. Peterson, and Martin West, “No Common Opinion on the Common Core,” *Education Next* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 10–11.

25. The data come from a survey of 1,000 respondents conducted by Taubman Center for American Politics and Policy in the fall of 2018 via the firm YouGov, using a seven-point scale for responses. YouGov uses matched sampling with post-stratification weights to obtain a nationally representative sample from its online panel. For more on the matched sampling, see Douglas Rivers, “Sample Matching: Representative Sampling from Internet Panels,” Polimetrix White Paper Series 11 (2006), [http://jwolf-ra.wdfiles.com/local--files/web-panels/Rivers\\_SampleMatching.pdf](http://jwolf-ra.wdfiles.com/local--files/web-panels/Rivers_SampleMatching.pdf). The “median” respondent in our sample was forty-seven years old, White, female, with some college education, who identifies as ideologically moderate and politically independent.

26. We deployed standard measures of racial animus used in the American National Election Survey.

27. For further discussion on the ways in which President Obama became a “toxic brand,” with implications for the Common Core, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 100.

28. Supovitz and his colleagues conducted analysis of Twitter between September 2013 and March 2014, documenting the high volume and frequency of tweets opposed to Common Core appearing on #commoncore. Jonathan Supovitz, Alan Daly, and Miguel Del Fresno, *#commoncore Project: How Social Media Is Changing the Politics of Education* (Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, February 23, 2015), cited in McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 238n46. Our mezzo-level policy makers also spoke with us about the importance of Twitter for teachers: interview IDs 188, 601.

29. Interview ID 198.

30. Interview ID 869.

31. For more information, please see the Technical Appendix.

32. For discussion of the College and Career Ready Standards, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 22.

33. The distribution of the histogram skews negative, although the #commoncore sample also has a high density of tweets categorized as “zero.” The distribution of sentiment for “college and career readiness” and #commoncore are different: senti-

ment varies depending on the narrative. However, a significant portion of the tweets related to #commoncore are positive, suggesting that proponents of education standards may be engaging with opponents of education standards.

34. For more information, please see the Technical Appendix.

35. David K. Cohen, personal communication, February 24, 2017.

36. Jochim and Lavery, “The Evolving Politics of the Common Core”; Milbrey McLaughlin, Laura Glaab, and Isabel Hilliger Carrasco, *Implementing Common Core State Standards in California: A Report from the Field* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2014); Paul Warren and Patrick Murphy, *California’s Transition to the Common Core State Standards: The State’s Role in Local Capacity Building* (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2014).

37. Howell and Magazinnik, “Financial Incentives in Vertical Diffusion.”

38. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about looking at New York and doing the opposite. Interview ID 584.

39. Interview ID 830.

40. For discussion of the California textbook adoption process in the 1990s, see Suzanne M. Wilson, *California Dreaming: Reforming Mathematics Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 50–55. The process changed in the Common Core era, yielding more approved materials options and thus both more flexibility and more complicated choices for districts, and driving the ensuing debate over whether the IQC let too many options through the gate or displayed more trust of districts. Interview IDs 226, 493.

41. For discussion on textbook adoption related to the 1985 mathematics frameworks, see David K. Cohen and Heather C. Hill, *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 21.

42. For a discussion of the development of replacement units, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 21; Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 118–20.

43. For further discussion on the vision for grassroots involvement in and support for replacement units, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 22–23.

44. On the process of state contracting for replacement units, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 24, 112.

45. On limited state authority for oversight, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 24.

46. Susan L. Moffitt et al., “State Structures for Instructional Support in California. Technical Report,” in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018). Instructional Quality Commission, California State Board of Education website, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/cc/cd/>, accessed December 7, 2017.

47. Interview ID 284.

48. Interview ID 153.

49. For a discussion of how this is “partially centralized” see Cory Koedel et al., “Mathematics Curriculum Effects on Student Achievement in California,” *AERA Open* 3, no. 1 (January–March 2017): 1–22. For a history of the politics of textbook adoption in the 1970s in California, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 15. Changes in California textbook adoption to allow more options in the Common Core era was, in some ways, undertaken to depart from the top-down approaches of the 1990s: interview ID 226.

50. EC Section 60200; CCR, Title 5, sections 9510–9525, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/imfrfaq1.asp>, accessed May 7, 2021. In contrast, the Tennessee ma-



terials review process has been described this way: “There’s basically an educator panel that reviews textbook submissions. They work directly with the Department of Ed. There’s a legislatively appointed textbook commission that can make some final recommendations and propose a list. Then it comes to the board for adoption . . . the textbook commission process, again, is housed largely at the department legislatively”: interview ID 741.

51. A mezzo-level policy maker described California materials adoption in the 1990s this way: “We went with very few limited adoptions that were very scripted in terms of delivery and the instruction to say, ‘okay, it’s Common Core now. . . . You have to use a lot more discretion and professional judgment as to where it fits with the standards and when it needs to be taught.’ The books weren’t bad. The script was maybe off, but we should have never gone down that path of the scripted curriculum because what we did is we overreacted and made teaching teacher-proof. Then we stopped learning”: interview ID 521.

52. EC Section 60210: “(a) Notwithstanding any other law, a local educational agency may use instructional materials that are aligned with the academic content standards adopted pursuant to Section 60605 or 60605.8, including instructional materials that have not been adopted by the state board pursuant to Section 60200. (b) Instructional materials for mathematics that are aligned to common core academic content standards developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative consortium pursuant to Section 60605.7 shall be deemed to be aligned to the content standards adopted pursuant to Section 60605 or 60605.8 for purposes of Section 60119. (c) If a local educational agency chooses to use instructional materials that have not been adopted by the state board, the local educational agency shall ensure that a majority of the participants of any review process conducted by the local educational agency are classroom teachers who are assigned to the subject area or grade level of the materials.” <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/imfrpfaq1.asp>, accessed May 7, 2021. For further discussion on how the materials adoption process differed from previous eras, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 117. Mezzo-level policy makers also discussed the departure and how granting more text options changed the strength of the policy lever: interview ID 667.

53. For discussion on frustrations with the quality and availability of Common Core materials and insufficient availability of professional learning opportunities, see McLaughlin et al., *Implementing Common Core State Standards in California*.

54. These results also appear in Susan L. Moffitt et al., “Frontlines Perspectives on Instructional Improvement in the Common Core Era. Technical Report,” in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018). We discuss elsewhere how “a little improvement” signifies an important accomplishment relative to the enormity of the Common Core–related expectations and ambitions for instructional improvement. The source of this data is the January 2018 RAND ATP.

55. This combines the categories of “worsened a little” and “worsened a lot.”

56. See Moffitt et al., “Frontlines Perspectives on Instructional Improvement.”

57. Interview ID 260.

58. These differences are distinguishable at conventional levels of statistical significance. Moffitt et al., “Frontlines Perspectives on Instructional Improvement.”

59. Interview ID 282.



60. This is consistent with earlier studies of Common Core in California that underscored teachers' perceived challenges receiving quality instructional materials and professional learning opportunities to meet the needs of all student populations. Rebecca Perry et al., *Taking Stock of Common Core Math Implementation: Insights from Math in Common Baseline Survey of Teachers and Administrators* (San Francisco: WestEd, 2015).

61. Interview ID 260.

62. For further discussion on the misalignment between the Common Core standards and textbooks, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 97.

63. For a discussion of materials curation in Louisiana, see Julia H. Kaufman, Lindsey E. Thompson, and V. Darleen Opfer, *Creating a Coherent System to Support Instruction Aligned with State Standards: Promising Practices of the Louisiana State Department of Education* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016).

64. See Moffitt et al., "State Structures for Instructional Support": a stratified random sample of 205 California school district superintendents were asked to participate in a structured interview to systematically retrieve their views on policies and conditions affecting their districts. A total of ninety-one district superintendents agreed to participate in the first round. Interview topics included: the implementation of educational standards, the implementation of the Local Control Accountability Plans, school finance, staffing needs, and data use. Please see Appendix A for selection information and interview protocol.

65. Interview ID 756.

66. Interview ID 873.

67. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke of coordinated efforts in some counties. Interview ID 877.

68. For further discussion on frustrations curating materials, see McLaughlin et al., *Implementing Common Core*; Niu Gao et al., *Implementing the Next Generation Science Standards: Early Evidence from California* (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2018), 12, <http://www.ppic.org/publication/implementing-the-next-generation-science-standards-early-evidence-from-california/>, accessed April 16, 2018. Interviews with mezzo-level policy makers raised concerns about quality control for materials and how districts and teachers could discern their quality. Interview ID 422.

69. Interview ID 730.

70. Interview ID 232.

71. Interview ID 553.

72. Interview ID 284.

73. Interview ID 873.

74. Interview ID 667.

75. Darleen Opfer, Julia H. Kaufman, and Lindsey E. Thompson, *Implementation of K–12 State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy: Findings from the American Teachers Panel* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), xv.

76. We discuss these results in Moffitt et al., "Frontlines Perspectives on Instructional Improvement."

77. McLaughlin et al., *Implementing Common Core*.

78. Interview ID 198.

79. For discussion on characteristics of professional development that increased innovative teaching, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 97.

80. Kathleen Lynch et al., “Strengthening the Research Base that Informs STEM Instructional Improvement Efforts: A Meta-Analysis,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41, no. 3 (2019): 260–93; Geoffrey B. Saxe, Maryl Gearhart, and Na’ilah Suad Nasir, “Enhancing Students’ Understanding of Mathematics: A Study of Three Contrasting Approaches to Professional Support,” *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education* 4, no. 1 (2001): 55–79; Jeremy Roschelle et al., “Integration of Technology, Curriculum, and Professional Development for Advancing Middle School Mathematics: Three Large-Scale Studies,” *American Educational Research Journal* 47, no. 4 (2010): 833–78; Fuhui Tong et al., “A Randomized Study of a Literacy-Integrated Science Intervention for Low-Socio-economic Status Middle School Students: Findings from First-Year Implementation,” *International Journal of Science Education* 36, no. 12 (2014): 2083–2109; Rafeal Lara-Alecio et al., “The Effect of an Instructional Intervention on Middle School English Learners’ Science and English Reading Achievement,” *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 49, no. 8 (2012): 987–1011.

81. Interview ID 553.

82. Interview ID 553.

83. Interview ID 693.

84. Interview ID 693.

85. Interview ID 560.

86. Interview ID 322.

87. Interview ID 619.

88. Yet the passage of Proposition 30 generated additional revenue for education. See McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 116.

89. Interview respondents spoke with us on this issue but did not want to be quoted.

90. For discussion of a version of this problem with respect to professional development in the 1990s, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 10.

91. Daniel Carpenter, Jeremy Greene, and Susan Moffitt, “The Drug Efficacy Study and Its Manifold Legacies,” in *FDA in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Challenges of Regulating Drugs and New Technologies*, eds. Holly Fernandez Lynch and I. Glenn Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

92. Mezzo-level policy makers discussed open-source tools developed to support instructional materials alignment and choice: interview ID 630.

93. The National Assessment of Educational Progress has been assessing student knowledge in mathematics, reading, science, and other subjects since 1969. It began offering state-by-state comparisons of student achievement in 1990 on a trial basis, and the practice became permanent in 1996.

94. The Chamber of Commerce report also gave Tennessee an F in “Truth in Advertising about Student Proficiency.” See US Chamber of Commerce, *Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness* (Washington, DC: US Chamber of Commerce, 2007), <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/publication/leaders-and-laggards-state-state-report-card-educational-effectiveness>. McDonnell and Weatherford write, “For Tennessee, adoption of the Common Core was a natural progression of an education reform that had begun in 2007”—McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 145.

95. Tennessee Higher Education Commission, “P-16 Report: Tennessee Diploma Project 2007,” [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/cm/2007/CM\\_Summer2007\\_I.B.%20P-16%20Tennessee%20Diploma%20Project.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/cm/2007/CM_Summer2007_I.B.%20P-16%20Tennessee%20Diploma%20Project.pdf), last accessed 5/31/22. For more discussion on the Diploma Project, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 25–26

96. Tennessee Higher Education Commission, “P-16 Report.”

97. For further discussion of Tennessee’s First to the Top Act and its connections to Tennessee’s Race to the Top application, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 148.

98. See State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), *The State of Education in Tennessee 2010* (Nashville, TN: SCORE, 2011), <https://tnscore.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2010–11-State-of-Education-in-TN.pdf>. On the importance of how the Common Core was framed politically for different audiences, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 38. For a summary of how the Common Core came to be adopted in Tennessee, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 149–50. In stark contrast to the acrimony that later ensued, the Tennessee State Board of Education approved the adoption of the Common Core unanimously. Then Governor Phil Bresden was also deeply involved in securing commitment from gubernatorial candidates, and public opinion polls reveal significant majority approval in the state for the Common Core standards.

99. Lynn Olson, *Scaling Reform: Inside Tennessee’s Statewide Teacher Transformation*, FutureEd, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University, 2018, <https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/FutureEdTennesseeReport.pdf>.

100. The “Expect More, Achieve More Coalition” formed as an alliance between business and community members to support standards-based reforms.

101. For more details on the development of Tennessee’s teacher training efforts, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 150.

102. Organizational capacity includes the authorities, responsibilities, and relationships between constituent and collaborative units to put ideas into practice. Coordination and collaboration can yield consistent messaging about safe practices to prevent disease transmission, for instance, or coherent instruction for children across classrooms. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke of perceiving multiple Tennessees: east (to the end of the Cumberland Plateau), middle (along the Tennessee River), and west (Jackson/Memphis): interview ID 526.

103. For discussion of how even states agencies that had organizational capacity for evidence use struggled to learn about standards implementation at the classroom level, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 157.

104. Interview ID 608. Interview ID 526 also discussed state funding to support in-house research starting with the RTTT grant and continuing afterward. For further discussion of Tennessee’s use of SCORE, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 148. Division staff included teams equipped with the content knowledge and technical knowledge to help answer the state agencies’ policy questions. To ensure that its work was relevant to policy, the Division would carefully select research questions and produce research to “answer useful and interesting questions for people, that give them real information” they can use in their policy making. A review of Tennessee’s Division of Research and Strategy appears in Moffitt

et al., “State Structures for Instructional Support in California.” As we note in that report, Tennessee avoided “hollowing out” state capacity by using in-house experts who were equipped to oversee contractors.

105. The leadership council formed in 2012.

106. For a discussion of the range of academic and nongovernmental sources of expertise Tennessee tapped for support with professional development, value-added assessments, and other components of the RTTT grant and standards-based reforms, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 150–53. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about how, while the state did much of the work, they didn’t try to develop all of the content for professional development trainings, using outside providers for much of that content. Interview ID 526.

107. Tennessee Department of Education, *Teacher Evaluation in Tennessee: A Report on Year 1 Implementation* (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Education, 2012), <https://team-tn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Year-1-Report.pdf>; see State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), *Supporting Effective Teaching in Tennessee: Listening and Gathering Feedback on Tennessee’s Teacher Evaluation*, [https://tnscore.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Supporting-Effective-Teaching\\_Teacher-Eval-Report-2011.pdf](https://tnscore.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Supporting-Effective-Teaching_Teacher-Eval-Report-2011.pdf), last accessed 7/11/21.

108. Michael Winerip, “In Tennessee, Following the Rules for Evaluation Off a Cliff,” *New York Times*, November 6, 2011, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/07/education/tennessees-rules-on-teacher-evaluations-bring-frustration.html>; Liana Loewus, “Teacher Evaluation Rush May Jinx Other States’ Efforts,” *Education Week*, October 18, 2011, <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/teacher-evaluation-rush-may-jinx-other-states-efforts/2011/10>. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about tension between former Commissioner Kevin Huffman and Tennessee superintendents, and state reluctance to become involved with materials and curriculum during that period, to honor the idea of local control. When Tennessee pulled out of the Common Core testing consortium and standards, some perceived more room for state-level engagement on materials and curriculum and connecting coaching to curriculum. Interview ID 510.

109. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of the listening tour as one part of a broader effort to engage in continuous improvement of policy over time. They suggested that engaging in such efforts allowed the agency to work better. Interview ID 608. See also Olson, *Scaling Reform*.

110. For discussion of how the Common Core remained the baseline for state standards revisions, even when those states withdrew from the Common Core Initiative, which has the effect of “minimizing the clutter of past state standards,” see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 158–59. The piles we are referring to in this chapter, however, focus on multiple professional development initiatives, not piles or layers of standards.

111. Olson, “Scaling Reform.”

112. Olson, “Scaling Reform.” The summer professional development occurred regionally to facilitate teacher participation.

113. Olson, 11 notes “Freitag estimates that the total number of educators participating in the state training was over 60,000, at a total cost of about \$20 million.”

114. Chiefs for Change, “Teacher Leadership Is Transforming Tennessee from the Ground Up,” Medium.com, February 13, 2018, <https://medium.com/@chiefs>

forchange/teacher-leadership-is-transforming-tennessee-from-the-ground-up-7b371dabe647.

115. Olson, “Scaling Reform,” 16n: “Based on a department analysis, about half of the teacher leaders in the Teacher Leader Network began as Core Coaches, although the two were never intentionally linked.”

116. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about educator support for rigorous standards in ELA and mathematics and how the subsequent standard-setting process in Tennessee helped diffuse political tensions: interview IDs 145, 735.

117. Olson, “Scaling Reform.”

118. Interview ID 573.

119. But stakeholder convergence is difficult to form. For discussion on growing teacher opposition to the CCSS in Tennessee, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 154–55. Some mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about distrust between districts and the state, and the challenge of sustaining state-level investment and commitment to instructional support: interview ID 723.

120. Interview ID 573.

121. Interview ID 573.

122. Interview ID 741.

123. Interview ID 148.

124. Interview ID 741.

125. Interview ID 148.

126. Interview ID 148.

127. Interview ID 741.

128. Interview ID 741.

129. The three governors were: Phil Bredesen (D), Bill Haslam (I), and Bill Lee (R). The Commissioners include: Lana Seivers (2003–2008), Tim Webb (2008–2010), Kevin Huffman (2011–2014), Candice McQueen (2015–2018), and Penny Schwinn (2019 forward). Lyle Ailshie also served as an interim commissioner.

130. Mezzo-level policy makers noted that districts and teachers liked the trainings and the trainings had high satisfaction ratings, but that they were unmanageable financially. Then assessment problems ensued, followed by a shift in professional development toward growing coaching networks and a focus on elementary reading. Interview ID 510.

131. This was funded, in part, with foundation support, and it reached thirteen districts.

132. Cohen and Hill (*Learning Policy*, 166, 169–70) refer to similar layers in California for instructional guidance, and the contradictory guidance layers can impart.

133. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke of problems with sustained state-level investment and support for instructional improvement across states. Interview ID 723.

134. Interview ID 148.

135. State-level leaders, however, recognized the need. Interview ID 107.

136. Interview ID 630.

137. Suzanne Mettler, “The Polyscape and the Challenges of Contemporary Politics to Policy Maintenance,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 2 (2016): 369–90. This also builds on Jones and Baumgartner’s discussion of friction from inherited institutions and inherited policies in subsequent policy decisions. See Bryan D. Jones and

Frank R. Baumgartner, *The Politics of Attention: How Government Prioritizes Problems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 47–50, 145–48.

138. Interview ID 148.

139. Interview ID 723.

140. For discussion of standardization of curricula and centralizing from the local to the state level, see Morgan Polikoff, *Beyond Standards: The Fragmentation of Education Governance and the Promise of Curriculum Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2021), 136–40. For critique that centers on the disconnect between standards-based reform and the technical core of teaching and connection with practitioners and parents, see Loveless, *Between the State and the Schoolhouse*, 160–69.

## Chapter Six

1. Interview ID 877.

2. Interview ID 805.

3. Interview ID 821.

4. Interview ID 821.

5. One of our mezzo-level policy makers discussed this relative to an example of good instruction. “I found myself in this one 11th grade English class, a fabulous group of students and teacher talking about South American literature. I kept thinking, ‘How can I tell if students are engaged in these activities as they went around giving conversation?’ You could listen for academic language. You could hear clearly quite robust comments that the students were making. Then again, because it was spring and obviously, they’d set up these the way they interact and talk about literature and the context of their face-to-face classroom, they were able to just carry that through in a virtual way. You could tell there’d been good learning about how to build on one another’s comments and how to ask probing questions. You could really see quite a bit through the context of the virtual Zoom classroom visits in an unexpected way, I thought.” Interview ID 877.

6. Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1985), 281–92. For a discussion of the political controversy that surrounded MACOS, including discussion of the importance of educators in curriculum development and educators’ support for the curriculum, to form a “close and continuing relationship between” curriculum developers and users, see Peter Dow, *Schoolhouse Politics: Lessons from the Sputnik Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 256–57, 263.

7. The “child benefit theory” was also an important element in the compromise that allowed federal funds to be directed to Catholic schools to fund services for children in those schools, but not to fund the religious schools directly. See David K. Cohen and Susan L. Moffitt, *Ordeal of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), chapter 3.

8. Jackie Kimbrough and Paul Hill, *The Aggregate Effects of Federal Education Programs* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1981); Cohen and Moffitt, *Ordeal of Equality*, 55–64. On the foundations of the fiscal accountability approach, see Ruby Martin and Phyllis McClure, *Title I: Is It Helping Poor Children?* (Washington, DC: Washington Research Project of the Southern Center for the Studies of Public Policy and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, 1969). See also Paul E. Peterson,

Barry G. Rabe, and Kenneth K. Wong, *When Federalism Works* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 1986).

9. Stewart C. Purkey and Marshall S. Smith, “Effective Schools: A Review,” *Elementary School Journal* 83, no. 4 (1983): 427–52.

10. For discussion of the development of the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC), see Maris A. Vinovkis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind: National Education Goals and the Creation of Federal Education Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 50–51. For a critique of the NASDC, see David B. Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 110–14.

11. David K. Cohen et al., *Improvement by Design: The Promise of Better Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Vinovkis, *From a Nation at Risk*, 123.

12. Technical know-how is, of course, always relative and develops over time.

13. US Government Accountability Office, *Reading First: States Report Improvements in Reading Instruction, but Additional Procedures Would Clarify Education’s Role in Ensuring Proper Implementation by States*, GAO report no. 07-161 (Washington, DC: GAO, 2007).

14. See Damon Centola and Michael Macy, “Complex Contagions and the Weakness of Long Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 3 (2007): 702–34; Damon Centola, “The Spread of Behavior in an Online Social Network Experiment,” *Science* 329, no. 5996 (2010): 1194–97; Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1360–80.

15. Janet C. Quint et al., *The Success for All Model of School Reform: Interim Findings from the Investigating in Innovation (i3) Scale-Up* (New York: MDRC, 2014); Geoffrey D. Borman et al., “Final Reading Outcomes of the National Randomized Field Trial of Success for All,” *American Educational Research Journal* 44, no. 3 (2007): 701–31; Brian Rowan and Robert J. Miller, “Organizing Strategies for Promoting Instructional Change: Implementation Dynamics in Schools Working with Comprehensive School Reform Providers,” *American Educational Research Journal* 44 (2007): 252–97; Brian Rowan et al., “School Improvement by Design: Lessons from a Study of Comprehensive School Reform Programs,” Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 2009.

16. Borman et al., “Final Reading Outcomes.”

17. Cohen and his colleagues call this the sustainment problem. Cohen et al., *Improvement by Design*.

18. On the development of state capacity, see Nate Schwartz, “Making Research Matter for the SEA,” in *Building Agency Capacity for Evidence-Based Policymaking*, ed. B. Gross and A. Jochim, *The SEA of the Future 5* (San Antonio, TX: Building State Capacity & Productivity Center at Edvance Research, Inc. 2015).

19. Interview ID 573.

20. Interview ID 636.

21. TEAM stands for the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model, which is Tennessee’s model for teacher evaluation.

22. Interview ID 636.

23. Interview ID 636.

24. Interview ID 212.

25. Interview ID 150.



26. Interview ID 150.
27. Interview ID 636.
28. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of ways in which the CORE offices strove to help LEAs coordinate their work despite silos that pulled them in lots of different directions. Interview ID 510.
29. Interview ID 577.
30. Interview ID 636.
31. Lynn Olson, *Scaling Reform: Inside Tennessee's Statewide Teacher Transformation*, FutureEd, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University, 2018, <https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/FutureEdTennesseeReport.pdf>.
32. Interview ID 636.
33. Interview ID 103.
34. Interview ID 636.
35. Interview ID 212.
36. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of variation across districts (especially in terms of superintendent activism), and also the LIFT districts (<http://lifteducationtn.com>). Along with lots of energized districts, there are others that are not energized. Other policy makers spoke of coordination challenges in large districts, and insufficient staff/capacity in small districts. Interview IDs 510, 723.
37. Interview ID 150.
38. Interview ID 591.
39. Interview ID 212.
40. Interview ID 212.
41. Interview ID 150.
42. Interview ID 591.
43. Interview ID 118.
44. Interview ID 103.
45. Interview ID 577.
46. Interview ID 577.
47. Interview ID 150.
48. Interview ID 551.
49. Interview ID 805.
50. Interview ID 805.
51. Rather than centralization, California deploys multiple networks for spreading ideas and know-how. See Danielle Hagood, “California K–12 Collaborative Network Inventory,” Center for Applied Policy in Education, University of California Davis, 2014, [https://education.ucdavis.edu/sites/main/files/file-attachments/california\\_k12\\_collaborative\\_network\\_inventory.pdf?1440457165](https://education.ucdavis.edu/sites/main/files/file-attachments/california_k12_collaborative_network_inventory.pdf?1440457165). For networks on data sharing, see Heather Hough, Erika Byun, and Laura Mulfinger, “Using Data for Improvement: Learning from the CORE Data Collaborative,” in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018); Michelle Nayfack et al., *Building Systems Knowledge for Continuous Improvement: Early Lessons from the CORE Districts* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2017). On organizational impediments to data sharing, see Meredith Phillips, Sarah Reber, and Jesse Rothstein, “Making California Data More Useful for Educational Improvement,” in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018).
52. For a discussion of California policies aimed at encouraging teachers’ access to the California Mathematics Project, and the relatively small percentages of teach-



ers that had access to these intensive forms of professional development, see David K. Cohen and Heather C. Hill, *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 42, 45, 47, 153.

53. For discussion of how the inherited terrain of organizations impeded teachers' access to professional development aimed at changing instruction, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 155.

54. For discussion of how California began "placing professional development at the center of reform," see Suzanne M. Wilson, *California Dreaming: Reforming Mathematics Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 66–70, 70–75, 77, 120.

55. Judith Warren Little et al., *Staff Development in California: Public and Personal Investment, Program Patterns, and Policy Choices*, Report to the California Postsecondary Education Commission (San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development and PACE, Policy Analysis for California Education, 1987).

56. For a discussion of the development of the California Mathematics Project, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 47; Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 79.

57. Little et al., *Staff Development in California*, 9. For a discussion of the policy study commissioned by the California legislature in 1987 to understand professional development, and additional discussion on the California Subject Matter Project, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 80–84, 95.

58. SB 1882, 1988.

59. The nine subject matter projects were: the California Arts Project, California History-Social Science Project, California International Studies Project, California Mathematics Project, California Physical Education-Health Project, California Reading and Literature Project, California Science Project, California World Language Project (formerly the California Foreign Language Project), and California Writing Project. Our mezzo-level policy makers also raised the subject matter projects as important vehicles to support what good instruction looks like, though the size and scope of California render professional development daunting: interview ID 104.

60. For discussion of the professional development opportunities that emerged in California, along with the limited access to or uptake of models perceived as professional for instructional change, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 24, 48–49.

61. Senate Bill 612 reauthorized the CSMP in 2011. For discussion of how the projects limited time for delving into mathematical ideas, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 159–60. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke of the implications of resource constraints and legislative priority shifts on the CSMP's scope and sustainability: interview ID 877.

62. For discussion of CSMP funding declines and evaluations, see Nancy Kamprath Bier and Alix Gallagher, *Evaluation of the California Subject Matter Project: Cross Case Summary* (Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, 2012), 6–7. For a summary of the implications of California's 1990s reforms for professional learning and the limits of those reforms, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 9, 54–55.

63. Bier and Gallagher, *Evaluation of the California Subject Matter Project*, 7. But for a critique of the evidence base available to California policy makers at all levels on which professional development programs would improve teaching and learning, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 160.

64. For discussion on the shifting politics in California, see Cohen and Hill, *Learn-*

ing Policy, 19. And some mezzo-level policy makers mentioned perceiving the subject matter projects as a “bit out of the loop of what other groups are doing”: interview ID 260.

65. Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 49, 117. Cohen and Hill also note that teachers who participated in the CMP did report spending less time on conventional teaching, but this did not result in more time teaching in ways consistent with the reforms.

66. Bier and Gallagher, *Evaluation of the California Subject Matter Project*.

67. David K. Cohen, “A Revolution in One Classroom: The Case of Mrs. Oublier,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 12, no. 3 (1990): 311–29; Wilson, *California Dreaming*. Cohen and Hill (*Learning Policy*, 27, 58, 63, 121–22) discuss how teachers’ knowledge of the reforms is not a proxy for what teachers did in the classroom; they also discuss the weakness of teachers’ mathematical knowledge.

68. For discussion of how even significant state investment in professional development in the 1990s was incommensurate with need, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 2, 4–5, 52–54.

69. Interview ID 877.

70. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about significant variation in the quality of professional development, along with a funding system that depended on foundations, third parties, or what textbook publishers offered. Interview ID 226.

71. Interview ID 480.

72. Interview respondents spoke with us about policy making and politics at the mezzo level. Interview IDs 581, 584.

73. Interview ID 877.

74. Interview ID 877. Other mezzo-level policy makers spoke of the central importance of engaging teachers in assessment development. Interview ID 875.

75. For discussion of the brevity and superficiality of professional development in the period that preceded the Common Core, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 25.

76. On the expansion of the professional development terrain in California and the lack of governmental influence over the quality of that terrain, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 26–27.

77. For a discussion of the ways in which CORE districts like Long Beach, Fresno, and Garden Grove partnered in this era to provide each other with instructional support, see Lorraine M. McDonnell, and M. Stephen Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2020), 118–19.

78. Interview ID 491.

79. Interview ID 491.

80. Interview ID 877. Our mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about policy fits and starts and the impediments this poses to learning.

81. Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*; Kathleen Lynch et al., “Strengthening the Research Base that Informs STEM Instructional Improvement Efforts: A Meta-Analysis,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41, no. 3 (2019): 260–93.

82. Vast “marketplace” of options comes from interview IDs 664, 321. Recognition of the curation problem comes from interview ID 740. On materials, see Morgan Polikoff, “How Well Aligned Are Textbooks to the Common Core Standards in Mathematics?” *American Educational Research Journal* 52, no. 6 (2015): 1185–1211.

83. Interview ID 667.

84. Some of our superintendents who looked to other superintendents did so as

part of formal networks, such as the CA CORE Districts. This handful of districts formed a partnership in 2010, as part of the state’s unsuccessful Race to the Top application, and then continued to support each other’s instructional improvement work. The network has transformed and expanded to include data sharing across a wider array of districts. Interview IDs 200, 284, 581, 830, 875.

85. Mezzo-level policy makers did raise CTA’s emerging involvement, and the support it received from foundations and Stanford to do so: interview ID 104.

86. Interview ID 830.

87. Interview ID 875.

88. Interview ID 875.

89. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about six or seven states-within-the-state, each facing different situations, each needing different approaches: interview ID 584.

90. Data were obtained from NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) School District Universe Survey, <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pubagency.asp>, accessed July 1, 2017. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke with us about problems with access to high-quality support, especially for small districts: interview ID 706.

91. Interview ID 198. The mezzo-level policy maker continued with discussion of the challenges of coordinating and making sure the “support” doesn’t work at cross purposes.

92. Interviews raised examples of counties not sharing with other counties, in other states: interview ID 428.

93. Interview ID 824. The superintendent continued, “I belong to some great superintendent groups, so that’s where I get the vast majority of my ideas or from ACSA.”

94. Interview ID 491.

95. Interview ID 797.

96. Interviews brought up a range of partnerships and collaborations with non-governmental organizations: interview IDs 422, 428, 797.

97. Interview ID 260.

98. Interview ID 667.

99. Interview ID 260.

100. Interviews brought up the mixed capacity of county organizations: interview IDs 422, 706.

101. Interview ID 260.

102. Interview ID 877.

103. Interview ID 875.

104. Interview ID 877.

105. For discussion of disparities in professional development and materials use by income level in the 1990s, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 173.

106. Interview ID 877.

107. For discussion of the important roles played by nonstate actors rather than government agencies in the 1990s, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 124.

108. Interview ID 875.

109. Interview ID 875.

110. On these points, see Donald F. Kettl, *The Divided States of America: Why Federalism Doesn’t Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); Suzanne

Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

## Chapter Seven

1. David K. Cohen, “Teaching Practice: Plus Ça Change,” Issue Paper 88–3 (East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Education, 1988). Cohen and Hill write “One researcher has likened policy to storms that stir the surface of oceans but fail to change much below that surface”—David K. Cohen and Heather C. Hill, *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 8.

2. Having lots of veto points and opportunities for obstruction in American politics constitutes a chief source of perpetuating the status quo. Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

3. For discussion of how instructional practice was like a carnival that makes it difficult to discern clear signal through the noise, see David K. Cohen and James Spillane, “Policy and Practice: The Relations between Governance and Instruction,” in *Review of Research in Education* ed. G. Grant (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 1992), 19–20. Wilson also notes “As one CDE staffer put it: ‘What keeps us from absolute sea-sickness is that locals don’t jump as quickly’ on some new reform bandwagon”—Suzanne M. Wilson, *California Dreaming: Reforming Mathematics Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 205.

4. But see William J. Reese, *Testing Wars in the Public Schools: A Forgotten History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

5. For discussion of the history of California’s assessment systems, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 15, 17, 27–28, 102, 105, 110, 128–34.

6. For discussion of assessment systems in other states, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 101–2.

7. PL 100-297, Hawkins-Stafford amendments, sec. 1021 (b) (A) (i) (ii).

8. David K. Cohen and Susan L. Moffitt, *Ordeal of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 115–16.

9. Interview ID 341.

10. Even before the passage of Goals 2000, efforts to promote national testing emerged from The New Standards Project, followed by recommendations from the National Council on Education Standards and Testing. On both, see Maris A. Vinovkis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind: National Education Goals and the Creation of Federal Education Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 51–54.

11. See Vinovkis, *From a Nation at Risk*, 97–110.

12. See Mary Lyn Bourque, “A History of the National Assessment Governing Board,” in *The Nation’s Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives*, ed. Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004), 227–30.

13. Michael Guerra, “National Assessment Governing Board and Voluntary National Tests: A Tale of Tribulations without Trials.” Paper commissioned for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Assessment Governing Board, 2009, 3.

14. Checker Finn, quoted in Guerra, “National Assessment Governing Board and Voluntary National Tests,” 5. Guerra also discusses bipartisan support for the VNT.

15. For further detail, see Guerra, “National Assessment Governing Board and Voluntary National Tests,” 8–9.

16. The federal government also provided funding, approximately \$350 million, to support the development of Smarter Balanced Assessment and PARCC. See Lorraine M. McDonnell and M. Stephen Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2020), 100.

17. Interviews also brought up the contributions that district-level, not state-level, testing made to parental backlash. Interview ID 630.

18. Interview ID 630.

19. Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia were included in these analyses. US Chamber of Commerce, *Leaders and Laggards: A State by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness* (Washington, DC: US Chamber of Commerce, 2007), <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/publication/leaders-and-laggards-state-state-report-card-educational-effectiveness>. Original data source: Paul E. Peterson and Frederick M. Hess, “Keeping an Eye on State Standards: A Race to the Bottom,” *Education Next* 6, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 28–29. The authors updated data on September 22, 2006.

20. Tennessee Office of Research and Education Accountability, “On the Horizon: More Rigorous Standards and New Graduation Requirements. Legislative Brief” (Nashville: Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, 2009), [https://comptroller.tn.gov/content/dam/cot/orea/advanced-search/orea-reports-2009/2009\\_OREA\\_StandardsandAssess.pdf](https://comptroller.tn.gov/content/dam/cot/orea/advanced-search/orea-reports-2009/2009_OREA_StandardsandAssess.pdf).

21. TCAP was the product of legislation passed by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1984. In 1988 the state started to test second through eighth graders as well as tenth graders annually. State Collaboration on Reforming Education (SCORE), *Teaching, Testing, and Time: Educator Voices on Improving Assessment in Tennessee*, September 2015, [https://tnscore.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Teaching-Testing-and-Time\\_PolicyReport-2015.pdf](https://tnscore.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Teaching-Testing-and-Time_PolicyReport-2015.pdf).

22. For discussion of how national organizations mobilized assessment opposition in Tennessee, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 154–55.

23. For discussion of Common Core adoption generally and in Tennessee, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 145.

24. Interview ID 630.

25. Joey Harrison, “TN’s Common Core Test Delay Disappoints, Concerns Kevin Huffman,” *Tennessean*, April 17, 2014, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/education/2014/04/17/tns-common-core-test-delay-disappoints-concerns-kevin-huffman/7847505/>.

26. Interview ID 551.

27. Grace Tatter, “Testmaker: What Went Wrong with TNReady?” *Chalkbeat*, April 27, 2016, <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2016/4/27/21106778/testmaker-what-went-wrong-with-tnready>; Grace Tatter, “Measurement Inc. Inks \$108 Million Testing Contract,” *Chalkbeat*, November 12, 2014, <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2014/11/12/21100499/measurement-inc-inks-108-million-testing-contract#.VyDmQWOBB6E>.

28. Interview ID 551.

29. Grace Tatter, “Online Testing Fiasco Sends Tennessee Ed Officials Back to the Drawing Board,” *Chalkbeat*, February 8, 2016, <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2016/2/8/21096135/online-testing-fiasco-sends-tennessee-ed-officials-back-to-the-drawing-board>.

30. Grace Tatter, “Tennessee Braces for TNReady Delays—Again—as State Blames Testing Vendor—Again,” *Chalkbeat*, April 21, 2016, <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2016/4/21/21098972/tennessee-braces-for-tnready-testing-delays-again-as-state-blames-testing-vendor-again#.VyDnmOBB6E>; Tatter, “Testmaker: What Went Wrong with TNReady?”

31. Grace Tatter, “Tennessee Fires TNReady Testmaker, Suspends Tests for Grades 3–8,” *Chalkbeat*, April 27, 2016, <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2016/4/27/21098160/tennessee-fires-tnready-testmaker-suspends-tests-for-grades-3-8>.

32. Interview ID 551.

33. Grace Tatter, “McQueen Declares TNReady a Success: Here’s What Comes Next for Tennessee,” *Chalkbeat*, May 5, 2017, <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2017/5/8/21100496/mcqueen-declares-tnready-a-success-here-s-what-comes-next-for-tennessee>; Marta W. Aldrich, “Tennessee’s Ill-Timed Score Delivery Undercuts Work to Rebuild Trust in Tests,” *Chalkbeat*, May 25, 2017, <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2017/5/25/21099900/tennessee-s-ill-timed-score-delivery-undercuts-work-to-rebuild-trust-in-tests>.

34. Jason Gonzales, “TNReady Issues Were Vendor’s Fault, Not Cyberattack,” *The Tennessean*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/education/2018/06/20/tennessee-student-testing-tnready-issues-were-vendor-questar-fault-not-cyber-attack/717911002/>; Marta Aldrich, “Here’s a List of Everything That’s Gone Wrong with Tennessee’s 2018 Testing,” *Chalkbeat*, May 1, 2018, <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2018/5/1/21104898/here-s-a-list-of-everything-that-s-gone-wrong-with-tennessee-s-2018-testing>.

35. Aldrich, “Here’s a List of Everything That’s Gone Wrong.”

36. In contrast, problems with state development assessment emerged in Indiana too: Interview ID 493.

37. For discussion of California’s move toward alignment between assessment and frameworks, along with discussion of teachers’ involvement, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 27, 49–50.

38. For discussion of the technical and political problems facing CLAS, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 29; Carol A. Barnes, “Understanding Curriculum Reform in One School” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1997); William Honig and Francie Alexander, in collaboration with Dennie Palmer Wolf, “Rewriting the Tests: Lessons from the California Learning Assessment System,” in *Performance-Based Student Assessment: Challenges and Possibilities*, ed. Joan Boykoff Baron and Dennie Palmer Wolf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 143–65; Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 133–35.

39. For discussion of CLAS, see Joel Knudson et al., “Still Learning from the Past: Drawing on California’s CLAS Experience to Inform Assessment of the Common Core,” California Collaborative on District Reform Policy Brief, 2015.

40. Interview IDs 200, 716. This includes community college support/use. However, mezzo-level policy makers raised frustrations with Smarter Balanced, including the lack of links between the assessment and materials.

41. Interview respondents spoke of this distinction between standards and accountability as being useful while noting that the Stull Act (on teacher evaluation) was official policy but was not being enforced. Interview IDs 226, 428.

42. For a discussion of how California’s decision not to move quickly on linking assessments with teacher evaluations has roots in California’s response to NCLB, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 120.

43. Interview ID 740. California contracted with ETS for implementation, though ETS was not the lowest bidder. Some estimates suggest that only 930 students had to take paper and pencil tests instead of online tests, and only three districts—all affluent suburbs—opted out of the assessment.

44. Interview ID 584, though some pushback from higher ed emerged around incorporating standards and frameworks into teacher education: interview ID 655.

45. Marta Aldrich, “Tennessee Lawmakers Take Matters Into Their Own Hands on TNReady Testing Problems,” *Chalkbeat*, April 19, 2018, <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2018/4/19/21106765/tennessee-lawmakers-take-matters-into-their-own-hands-on-tnready-testing-problems>.

46. Interview ID 428.

47. For discussion on legislation to replace the Common Core and the process that ensued, see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 156–57.

48. Interview ID 608.

49. Interview ID 118.

50. Interview ID 551.

51. Before PARCC, relying on a consortium to build technical and organizational capacity was part of the underlying idea in NECAP, the New England consortium that preceded the Common Core. McDonnell and Weatherford (*Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 26) also discuss the ways in which the NECAP testing consortium provided “political cover.”

52. Interview ID 547.

53. Interview ID 148.

54. See Pressman and Wildavsky, *Implementation*.

55. Adequate Yearly Progress was based on an average of three years.

56. On takeovers, see Domingo Morel, *Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also Paul Manna and Susan Moffitt, “Traceable Tasks and Complex Policies: When Politics Matter for Policy Implementation,” *Policy Studies Journal* 49, no. 1 (2021): 190–218.

57. The disconnect between superintendents’ or other policy makers’ incentives to make bold promises and the capacities available to bring those promises to fruition provide foundational elements for churn. Frederick M. Hess, *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), chapters 2 and 5; Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock, *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

58. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke about prior “hardnose” approaches to intervention in struggling schools that were both rigid, fleeting, and adversarial: “parachute in and parachute out: good thing this is a rental car.” Interview ID 655.

59. California Department of Education, “Dashboard Indicators FAQs,” <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/sicadashboardfaq.asp>, accessed 6/29/21.



60. Interview ID 716.

61. Interview ID 716.

62. Interview ID 716.

63. Ideas animating a System of Support approach include “what are we gonna do with the school district to build capacity, so they, in turn, can build capacity within that school, and all of their schools.” Interview ID 716.

64. Along with building capacity, the System of Support also aimed to work with identified districts on how to use LCAP for accountability. The initial budget for the CCEE and System of Support was \$20 million (interview ID 581). The work also included county offices and the California Department of Education.

65. California Collaborative for Educational Excellence Governing Board Bylaws, Article III, Section 1, retrieved from <http://ccee-ca.org/documents/Collaborative%20Bylaws%20Adopted%202–25–15.pdf>, accessed on December 13, 2017. The Superintendent of Public Instruction and the President of the School Board can appoint a designee to serve in their place. The Senate Committee on Rules is responsible for appointing the county superintendent. The Speaker of the Assembly is responsible for appointing the teacher. The Governor is responsible for appointing the district superintendent.

66. Interview ID 508.

67. Natasha Collins et al., *Re-Envisioning County Offices of Education: A Study of Their Mission and Funding* (Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst’s Office, 2017).

68. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke about how the System of Support aimed to depart markedly from NCLB: “the intent here is to not duplicate what was done under NCLB, which was a very top-down approach of, here are your four different ways to turn around a school. . . . This will be more, okay. You’ve been identified. Let’s look at what the data show. Let’s do a root cause analysis. Let’s see what it shows, and then see what we wanna do about it, with the district being more in partnership with their county office, and with any other state agency, or any outside agency, to determine what kind of action they’re going to take about it, rather than the State giving them a list of choices to choose from.” Interview ID 716.

69. “About CCSESA,” California County Superintendents Educational Services Association website, <http://ccsesa.org/about/about-ccsesa/>, accessed December 13, 2017. The work of CCESA’s Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee (CISC) is foundational to providing instructional support to districts. The committee “identifies statewide curriculum and staff development needs, provides a communication and implementation network for curriculum and professional development activities, and assists the CDE in adopting and implementing instructional materials and developing publications such as curriculum frameworks.” “Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee (CISC),” California County Superintendents Educational Services Association website, <http://ccsesa.org/committees/cisc/>, accessed December 13, 2017.

70. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke about variation in district needs across the state, including variation in need for resources. Others spoke of investments in support, along with coordination challenges to prevent working at cross purposes, and mentioned a handful—perhaps six or seven—people at the CDE tasked to help with this work. Interview IDs 200, 716.

71. Interview ID 830.

72. California Collaborative for Educational Excellence Website, <http://ccee-ca>



.org/index.asp, accessed December 13, 2017. Their work included some partnerships with counties, some training, and some materials provision. Mezzo-level policy makers observed that they thought aspects of the CCEE approach were “good” but that the CCEE was not “ever gonna be able to scale up to the size of . . . what they might need.” Interview ID 508.

73. Interview ID 877.

74. Interview ID 877.

75. Eric Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk: What Happens After Major Policy Reforms Are Enacted* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

76. Interview ID 226. Some mezzo-level policy makers brought up perceptions of “turf issues” between the CCEE and county offices.

77. The Governor’s 2018–2019 budget includes \$55.2 million in Proposition 98 General Fund for county offices. See also Collins et al., *Re-Envisioning County Offices of Education*.

78. Mezzo-level policy makers discussed the range and variation in county office capacity, noting in particular that some county offices have small staffs and workloads that exceed capacity. Interview ID 877.

79. The budget allotted \$4 million “for a competitive grant process to identify eight LEA county offices of education, which will provide training, resources, and support for other county offices of education” (Governor’s Budget Summary 2018–2019 K–12 Education, 26).

80. Interview ID 797.

81. Interview ID 208.

82. Interview respondents spoke of the lack of a long-term strategy: interview ID 422.

83. Interview ID 667.

84. For more on this point, see Manna and Moffitt, “Traceable Tasks.”

85. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke of the CDE staying in its lane: interview ID 716.

86. Interview ID 667.

87. For discussion of political and ideological conflict in California, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 19.

88. For discussion of CDE budget cuts in the 1980s, see Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 113. McDonnell and Weatherford (in *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 117–18) discuss weak capacity in the CDE, in terms of both resources and staff expertise.

89. See Jerome T. Murphy, *State Education Agencies and Discretionary Funds: Grease the Squeaky Wheel* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974), 4–5 for discussion of how state agency staffing patterns mirrored domains of federal investment.

90. Interview ID 830.

91. Mezzo-level policy makers discussed challenges of moving the department mindset from compliance to partnership, or moving away from a “top-down system”: interview IDs 655, 716.

92. Interview ID 521. The mezzo-level policy maker observed that “Two-thirds of the money to support operations in the state is federal.”

93. Mac Taylor, *Review of the California Department of Education* (Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst’s Office, 2014), 3.

94. For further discussion of state departments’ “compliance mindset” see Ash-

ley Jochim and Patrick Murphy, “The Capacity Challenge: What It Takes for State Education Agencies to Support School Improvement,” Center for Reinventing Public Education, December 2013, [https://crpe.org/wp-content/uploads/pub\\_capacity-challenge\\_dec13\\_0.pdf](https://crpe.org/wp-content/uploads/pub_capacity-challenge_dec13_0.pdf). We discuss elsewhere how the CDE has low levels of staffing relative to per-pupil enrollments and relatively high rates of federal funding: Susan L. Moffitt et al., “State Structures for Instructional Support in California. Technical Report,” in *Getting Down to Facts II* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2018).

95. Interview ID 507.

96. Interview ID 608. Mezzo-level leaders discussed continuation of operations in a compliance kind of way. Interview ID 740. For discussion on the difference between compliance and improvement in accountability systems, see Richard Elmore, “Agency, Reciprocity, and Accountability in Democratic Education,” in *The Public Schools*, ed. Susan Fuhrman and Marvin Lazerson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 293–95.

97. Interview ID 282.

98. Interview ID 875.

99. Interview ID 830.

100. On limited CDE resources, staff, and political support in the 1980s and 1990s, see Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 20. These limitations persisted to the point that the biggest division in the department is now nutrition. Interview ID 226.

101. Interview ID 667. Respondents also discussed how moving the Subject Matter Project to UC, in addition to the move away from categoricals, may have contributed to the CDE expertise drain: interview ID 521.

102. Wilson, *California Dreaming*, 61–62.

103. Mezzo-level policy makers spoke of the ways in which the CDE was a “shrinking agency”: interview ID 655.

104. The LAO report found that, of the 119 positions eliminated, 25 were in Professional Learning Support, 11 came from Assessment Development, and 10 came from Improvement and Accountability. See Taylor, *Review of the California Department of Education*, 14.

105. Interview ID 655.

106. Interview respondents spoke with us about the ways in which the state agencies had less capacity in the Common Core era compared with the 1980s and 1990s.

107. Interview ID 877.

108. Thomas B. Timar and Allison Carter, *Surprising Strengths and Substantial Needs: Rural District Implementation of Common Core State Standards* (Palo Alto, CA: PACE, 2017), 11.

109. Interview IDs 284, 655.

110. For discussion of Common Core adoption and review in California, and the CDE role (and limited involvement), see McDonnell and Weatherford, *Evidence, Politics, and Education Policy*, 113–14, 240–41.

111. Interview IDs 226, 260, 521, 716.

112. Mac Taylor, *A Historical Review of Proposition 98* (Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analysts Office, 2017), <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2017/3526/review-prop-98-011817.pdf>.

113. Interview ID 830.

114. Interview ID 521.

115. Moffitt et al., “State Structures for Instructional Support.” The perception that the CDE faces salary problems (Interview ID 508) was confirmed in data.

116. Taylor, *Review of the California Department of Education*, 3.

117. Legislative Analyst’s Office, *Overview of State Governance: K–12 Education* (February 14, 2018), 5. For discussion on California’s reliance on counties instead of the CDE for direct assistance, see Taylor, *Review of the California Department of Education*.

118. Interview ID 797.

119. Interview ID 491.

120. Interview ID 260.

121. Interview respondents spoke with us on distrust toward the state agency, but did not want to be quoted.

122. Interview ID 797.

123. Interview ID 491.

124. Interview ID 508.

125. For discussion of the relatively positive tone of legislation in California, see Ashley Jochim and Lesley Lavery, “The Evolving Politics of the Common Core,” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 45, no. 3 (2015): 380–404.

126. Interview ID 282.

127. Interview ID 260.

128. Interview ID 877.

129. During our fieldwork, the CDE was in the midst of another organizational redesign. See Tom Torlakson and Glen Price, “Towards a Learning State: California’s Journey Toward Continuous Improvement,” EducationWeek (blog), [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on\\_california/2016/11/towards\\_a\\_learning\\_state\\_californias\\_journey\\_toward\\_continuous\\_improvement.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on_california/2016/11/towards_a_learning_state_californias_journey_toward_continuous_improvement.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB); Superintendent’s Accountability and Continuous Improvement Task Force, California Department of Education, “Preparing All Students for College, Career, Life, and Leadership in the 21st Century, presented to Tom Torlakson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, California Department of Education,” May 2016, <http://www.edsynergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Preparing-All-Students-for-College-Career-Life-and-Leadership-in-the-21st-Century.pdf>; California Department of Education, Blueprint 2.0 Planning Team, *A Blueprint for Great Schools, Version 2.0*, ed. Faye Ong and John McLean (Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2015), <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/bp/documents/yr15bp0720.pdf>; Tom Torlakson and Glen Price, “Calif. Ed Department Reorganizes Into Teams,” EducationWeek (blog), April 10, 2017, [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on\\_california/2017/04/calif\\_ed\\_department\\_reorganizes\\_into\\_teams.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on_california/2017/04/calif_ed_department_reorganizes_into_teams.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB); Tom Torlakson and Glen Price, “Creating a Learning Community at California’s Education Department,” EducationWeek (blog), February 22, 2017, [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on\\_california/2017/02/creating\\_a\\_learning\\_community\\_at\\_californias\\_education\\_department.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on_california/2017/02/creating_a_learning_community_at_californias_education_department.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB).

130. Interview ID 797.

131. Interview ID 208.

## Chapter Eight

1. See David K. Cohen and Heather C. Hill, *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), preface.

2. David K. Cohen, “Dewey’s Problem,” *The Elementary School Journal* 98, no. 5 (1998): 427–66.

3. David K. Cohen, personal communication, February 24, 2017.

4. Interview ID 208.

5. On teachers’ use of research, see William R. Penuel et al., “How School and District Leaders Access, Perceive, and Use Research,” *AERA Open* 3, no. 2 (2017): 1–17.

6. Kathleen Lynch et al., “Strengthening the Research Base that Informs STEM Instructional Improvement Efforts: A Meta-Analysis,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41, no. 3 (2019): 260–93; Heather C. Hill et al., “Professional Development that Improves STEM Outcomes,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 101, no. 5 (2020): 50–56.

7. Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862–1928* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

8. Eric Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk: What Happens After Major Policy Reforms Are Enacted* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

9. David Axelson, “Meeting the Demand for Pediatric Mental Health Care,” *Pediatrics* 144, no. 6 (2019): e20192646.

10. On Telehealth, see Rose C. Chu et al., “State Medicaid Telehealth Policies Before and During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency,” Issue Brief, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, US Department of Health and Human Services, July 2021.

11. Craig Volden, “States as Policy Laboratories: Emulating Success in the Children’s Health Insurance Program,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 2 (2006): 294–312.

12. North Carolina Medicaid, “Healthy Opportunities Pilots Fact Sheet,” Division of Health Benefits, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, November 2018.

13. On Gender Affirming Medicaid Care, see Christy Mallory and William Tentindo, “Medicaid Coverage for Gender-Affirming Care,” Williams Institute, University of California Los Angeles, 2019.

14. For discussion on the limits of “means” like centralization to achieve progressive “ends,” see Brian Balogh, *Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 397.

15. Isaac M. Opper, *Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers’ Impact on Student Achievement* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019).

16. Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, and Jonah E. Rockoff, “Measuring the Impact of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood,” *American Economic Review* 104, no. 9 (2014): 2633–79; Jonah E. Rockoff et al., “Can You Recognize an Effective Teacher When You Recruit One?” *Education Finance and Policy* 6, no. 1 (2011): 43–74.

17. Jin Liu and Susanna Loeb, “Engaging Teachers: Measuring the Impact of Teachers on Student Attendance in Secondary School,” EdWorkingPaper No. 19–01, Annenberg Institute, Brown University, <http://annenberg.brown.edu/ai19-01>.

18. Cohen and Hill, *Learning Policy*, 127–28, 142, 144, 150. Though, importantly, not all efforts to support instruction or improve “human capital” in schools work. On this point, see Brian M. Stecher et al., *Improving Teaching Effectiveness, Final Re-*

port: *The Intensive Partnerships for Effective Teaching Through 2015–2016* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2242.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2242.html).

19. Dana Goldstein, *Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014), 6.

20. Beth E. Schueler, Joshua S. Goodman, and David J. Deming, “Can States Take Over and Turn Around School Districts? Evidence from Lawrence Massachusetts,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 39, no. 2 (2017): 311–32.

21. Lynch et al., “Strengthening the Research Base that Informs STEM Instructional Improvement Efforts.”

22. Matthew Kraft and Heather C. Hill, “Cultivating Ambitious Mathematics Instruction Through Online Coaching: A Randomized Trial,” *American Educational Research Journal* 57, no. 6 (2020): 2378–2414, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831220916840>.

23. Though one mezzo-level policy maker argued that the focus has been on standards rather than curriculum. Interview ID 284.

24. Susan Moore Johnson, *Where Teachers Thrive: Organizing Schools for Success* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2019), 1–12; Anthony S. Bryk et al., *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Susan Moore Johnson, Matthew A. Kraft, and John P. Papay, “How Context Matters in High-Needs Schools: The Effects of Teachers’ Working Conditions on Their Professional Satisfaction and Their Students’ Achievement,” *Teachers College Record* 114, no. 10 (2012): 1–39.

25. As David K. Cohen wrote, “To teach is always to teach something”—Cohen, *Teaching and Its Predicaments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 24.

26. On values embedded in assessments, see Lorraine M. McDonnell, *Politics, Persuasion, and Education Testing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), esp. 108–36; Lorraine M. McDonnell, “Educational Accountability and Policy Feedback,” *Educational Policy* 27, no. 2 (2012): 170–89; Lorraine M. McDonnell, “Stability and Change in Title I Testing Policy,” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2015): 170–86.

27. David K. Cohen interview, March 13, 2017.

28. Interview ID 723.

29. Interview ID 674.

30. Interview ID 830.

31. Interview ID 284.

32. Mezzo-level policy makers discussed reticence around standards and assessments, due to heated politics. Interview ID 723.

33. For discussion of the structure and use of educator and lay panels for the original 1969 NAEP, see Irvin J. Lehman, “The Genesis of NAEP,” in *The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives*, ed. Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004), 60–72. For discussion of teacher and local buy-in for NAEP, see “An Interview with Lloyd Morrisett” in Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin, eds., *The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives* (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004), 129. For additional discussion on teachers as the foundation of future reforms, see David B. Tyack and Larry

Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 10.

34. New York regents have a long history of involving educators in assessment development.

35. Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Raj Chetty et al., “Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility,” NBER Working Paper 23618, December 2017.

36. As Powell, Farrar, and Cohen argued decades ago, “it is easier to press requirements on public institutions than it is to repair labor market problems”: Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1985), 304. Tyack and Cuban make similar points in *Tinkering Toward Utopia*, 3–4.

37. Interview ID 667.

38. On big bangs, see Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). On punctuation, see Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner, *The Politics of Attention: How Government Prioritizes Problems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). For discussion of how American federalism operates as “a brake on positive-feedback processes,” see Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 227.

39. Jennifer Wallner, *Learning to School: Federalism and Public Schools in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 43. Notably, Canadian provinces (with the exception of Manitoba and Saskatchewan) moved away from local financing of schools to full province-level funding. Along with province-level funding has come comparability across the provinces in terms of per-pupil funding and student-teacher ratios. Moreover, Canada has accomplished this without a centralized department of education but with a much more robust social safety net than the US.

40. R. Kent Weaver, “The Politics of Blame Avoidance,” *Journal of Public Policy* 6, no. 4 (1986): 371–98.

41. Interview ID 521.

42. As Pressman and Wildavsky aptly noted, “Learning . . . is never finally achieved because it is always concerned with improving our conception of what we ought to prefer in the light of our failures in achievement”: Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xviii, 238–40. On how double-loop learning may operate with teaching (in terms of learning both how to teach and “how to learn about teaching”), see Richard Elmore, “Agency, Reciprocity, and Accountability in Democratic Education,” in *The Public Schools*, ed. Susan Fuhrman and Marvin Lazerson (New York: Oxford University Press 2006), 283.

43. Interview ID 657.

## Appendix B

1. Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1994).

2. J. Corbin and A. Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 2007).

3. Douglas Rivers, “Sample Matching: Representative Sampling from Internet Panels,” Polimetrix White Paper Series 11, 2006.

4. More information about the ATP is available at <https://www.rand.org/education/projects/atp-aslp.html>, last accessed April 23, 2018.

5. Demographic data were obtained from NCES at <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pubschuniv.asp>, last accessed April 23, 2018. Location information was obtained from NCES at <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/CCDLocaleCode.asp>, last accessed April 23, 2018.

6. Data from the CDE are available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/fselsch.asp>, last accessed April 23, 2018.

7. R. Socher et al., “Recursive Deep Models for Semantic Compositionality Over a Sentiment Treebank,” in *Proceedings of the Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing*, ed. David Yarowsky, Timothy Baldwin, Anna Korhonen, Karen Livescu, and Steven Bethard, 1631–42 (Seattle, WA: Association for Computational Linguistics, 2013).

8. Rachel Fyall, M. Kathleen Moore, and Mary Kay Gugerty, “Beyond NTEE Codes: Opportunities to Understand Nonprofit Activity through Mission Statement Content Coding,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2018): 677–701.

9. We exclude private foundations focused on vocational/technical education, community colleges, universities, graduate, professional education, adult and continuing education, scholarships and financial aid, sororities and fraternities, alumni associations working in education, and professional societies working in philanthropy, voluntarism, and grantmaking.

10. <https://data.ca.gov/dataset/ca-geographic-boundaries>.





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