

Research-Based Options for Education Policymaking¹ Toolkit

To help you communicate with policymakers and others, this toolkit is designed to concisely summarize each section of a multi-part brief and make the research relevant, user-friendly, and understandable as you deliver it to a broad audience.

Find the brief on the Great Lakes Center website:

<http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

School Accountability, Multiple Measures and Inspectorates in a Post-NCLB World (William Mathis)

PART 1: Since the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), policymakers have focused on test-based measurements for school evaluation. Although many states use this approach, it is deeply flawed and problematic because student test scores often overlook internal and external factors that can influence a school's success.

Key Takeaways of School Accountability:

- States should use multiple comprehensive measures that capture a broader set of learning goals
- School self-evaluations, in combination with an external review, can provide insight into subjective factors that cannot be easily measured by test scores
- Data from standardized test scores should be used in combination with other data to avoid creating incentives for narrowed teaching and learning

Reversing the Deprofessionalization of Teaching (William Mathis and Kevin Welner)

PART 2: Policymakers are damaging the teaching profession as a whole by using test-based methods to evaluate teacher success. Today, a number of education reform policies focusing on test-based teacher evaluations continue to fuel the deprofessionalization and demoralization of teachers.

Key takeaways regarding the Deprofessionalization of Teaching:

- Teacher education programs must be strengthened and provide future teachers with the training needed to be successful
- Instead of only using student test scores alone to evaluate teachers, job evaluations should be based on a combination of internal and external factors
- Curriculum must be broadened so both new teachers and expert teachers can follow the same curriculum regardless of their experience

Do Choice Policies Segregate Schools? (William Mathis and Kevin Welner)

PART 3: Despite claims that school choice enrollments help advance school integration, research shows school choice is fueling segregation by race, ethnicity, poverty and special needs – particularly in charter schools. This should alarm policymakers and encourage them to create equitable school choice policies for all schools to follow.

Key Takeaways on Choice Policies and Segregation:

- All charter schools should adhere to laws and policies that result in equal opportunities for all students
- School enrollment choice policies must value communities that have diverse socioeconomic levels, ethnicities and languages
- Choice plans must be accessible for all families, including disadvantaged families

The “Portfolio” Approach to School District Governance (William Mathis and Kevin Welner)

PART 4: School districts are often tasked with turning around underperforming schools. However, most states don’t provide schools with adequate resources to successfully do so. An approach seeking to solve this challenge is “Portfolio” school districts. “Portfolio” districts aim to replace the traditional school structures with a hybrid, de-centralized school structure.

Key Takeaways on “Portfolio” School District Governance:

- Policymakers should not be distracted by quick fixes, such as “Portfolio” schools, that promise cheap, easy shortcut solutions
- Children living in unstable environments need stable school environments with highly-qualified teachers, personalized instruction and wrap-around services
- If a “Portfolio” system is adopted, policies must be in place to ensure transparency, fiscal responsibility and checks and balances are in place

5 Simple Steps to Reading Policy Research (Infographic by Holly Yettick)

PART 5a: When reading education policy research, it’s essential to know how to identify what constitutes “high-quality” research. This infographic highlights key factors to keep in mind when reviewing quantitative policy research.

Key Takeaways on Reading Policy Research:

- Always look for research that has been peer-reviewed by other industry experts
- Pay close attention to the parties who conducted or funded the research
- Always investigate the *who*, *what*, *when* and *where* when understanding research applicability.

Reading Qualitative Educational Policy Research (William Mathis)

PART 5b: Policymakers often use qualitative research to fill in the gaps that quantitative research cannot provide. Qualitative research provides a deeper understanding of a population, program, policy or intervention through a broad collection of research methods, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, developmental studies and documentary analysis.

Key Takeaways on Qualitative Research:

- Regardless of the research method used, ensure the study was conducted with rigor and that the research methods are clearly explained
- Research should be independently peer-reviewed, display source integrity and be free from obvious bias
- Researchers should be housed at a reputable academic institutions

Housing Policy (William Mathis and Kevin Welner)

PART 6: There are five types of policies that help create equal educational opportunities: School improvement, school choice, school desegregation, wealth-focused and housing-focused policies. For these policies to work, multiple policies must be used as a unified set of mutually supportive initiatives.

Key Takeaways on Housing Policy:

- Housing policies that address housing supply and affordability help decrease segregation in schools
- Closing housing-associated opportunity gaps will require a broad coalition of governmental agencies, zoning administrators and realtors
- Zoning and planning ordinances should require residential developers to provide a balanced, mixed and equitable complement of affordable housing in all plans

The Purpose of Education: Truing the Balance Wheel (William Mathis)

PART 7: Horace Mann, a politician and educational reformer, claimed universal education is the bedrock of society and that it has the potential to serve as a “balance wheel of social machinery.” Today, the education opportunity gap is growing. This gap is caused by a broad scope of inequities in public schools and society, including disparities in housing and a lack of equal job opportunities.

Key Takeaways on Truing the Balance Wheel:

- Policymakers must support policies that provide equal opportunities for all students
- All schools must have basic educational resources, effective teachers, appropriate class sizes and a safe learning environment to promote student success
- Policymakers must expand wrap-around services and eliminate policies that promote school re-segregation in low-income communities

Does Money Matter? (William Mathis)

PART 8: Policymakers often debate whether school funding influences student outcomes. While research shows great public support for increases in school funding, some policymakers believe that more financial support would not improve the quality of public schools. Contrary to this belief, when funding is provided adequately and equitably to schools, it leads to improved student outcomes and higher test scores.

Key Takeaways on Money Matters:

- Adequate funding is essential to improving student outcomes, especially for economically-deprived children
- Increased funding results in higher test scores, graduation rates and earnings after graduation
- Productive financial investments in education include high-quality preschools, smaller class sizes, teacher pay and additional learning time for students

The Effectiveness of Class Size Reduction (William Mathis)

PART 9: Smaller class sizes are costly for most local school districts because of the costs associated with hiring more teachers. Many studies have found, however, that smaller class sizes produce measurable gains in test scores, grades and even fewer disciplinary referrals, and the value of these benefits are well worth the additional costs. This is why policymakers and educators need to find a solution that supports funding for smaller class sizes.

Key Takeaways on Class Size Reduction:

- Low-income and minority students benefit from smaller class sizes
- If class sizes continue to increase and students don't receive a high-quality education, this will likely result in future social and economic costs
- Class sizes between 15 and 18 students are recommended, with exceptions. For example, band and physical education may require large classes while special education and some laboratory classes may require less

Regulating Charter Schools (William Mathis)

PART 10: Forty-three states and the District of Columbia have adopted some form of charter schools, enrolling 2.5 million students in the 2013-14 school year. Even as the number of charter schools grows rapidly, they continue to be plagued by charges of corruption, fiscal exploitation, weak academic performance and intentional segregation.

Key Takeaways on Regulating Charter Schools:

- Student test-score results from charter schools are not meaningfully better or worse than public schools
- Charter schools are often segregated by race, economic class, academic achievement, special education and English-language learner status
- There are a number of financial irregularities in charter schools, including exorbitant salaries, excessive rent and conflicts of interest

¹ Mathis, W. J. (2016). *Research-Based Options for Education Policymaking*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.