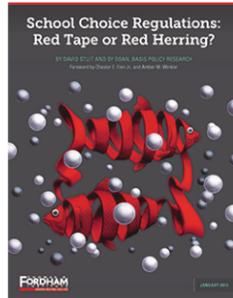


Hot off the Press



School Choice Regulations: Red Tape or Red Herring

As private-school-choice programs proliferate, the need to balance accountability with autonomy grows. Yet little is known about the factors that entice—and deter—private schools from participating in these programs. This report examines the relationship between regulations (state-level, mainly) and private-school participation in these programs—with a goal of informing the next round of school-voucher and tax-credit legislation.

Review of Draft II of the Next Generation Science Standards

Our experts once again weigh in on the latest draft of the Next Generation Science Standards—common-science standards being developed by Achieve, Inc. Reviewers address to what extent NGSS writers have moved closer to a set of K–12 science standards that even states with strong standards of their own would do well to adopt.

Needles in a Haystack: Lessons from Ohio's High-Performing Urban High Schools

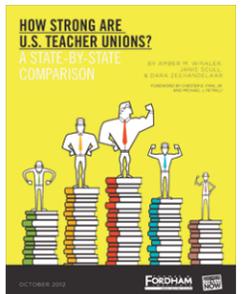
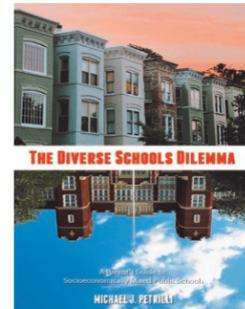
Nobody is satisfied with the educational performance of Ohio's poor, urban, and minority youngsters—or the schools that serve them. Yet there are high schools in the Buckeye State that buck the bleak trends facing too many of our urban students. This report examines six of them -- urban high schools that are making good on promises of academic excellence; specifically, schools that work for low-income and minority students.

Strategies for Smarter Budgets and Smarter Schools

This policy brief by Nathan Levenson, managing director at the District Management Council and former superintendent of the Arlington (MA) Public Schools, offers informed advice to school districts seeking to provide a well-rounded, quality education to all children in a time of strained budgets.

The Diverse Schools Dilemma

Lots of parents favor sending their sons and daughters to diverse schools with children from a variety of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. But can such schools successfully meet the educational needs of all those different kids? How do middle class children fare in these environments? And why is it so hard to find diverse public schools with a progressive, child-centered approach to education? These quandaries and more are addressed in this groundbreaking book by Michael J. Petrilli.



How Strong Are U.S. Teacher Unions? A State-by-State Comparison

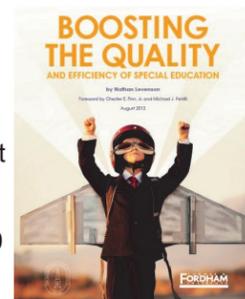
This timely study represents the most comprehensive analysis of American teacher unions' strength ever conducted, ranking all fifty states and the District of Columbia according to the power and influence of their state-level unions. The study analyzed factors ranging from union membership and revenue to state bargaining laws to campaign contributions, and included such measures such as the alignment between specific state policies and traditional union interests and a unique stakeholder survey.

Exam Schools: Inside America's Most Selective Public High Schools

What is the best education for exceptionally able and high-achieving youngsters? As Chester Finn and Jessica Hockett show, for more than 100,000 students each year, the solution is to enroll in an academically selective public high school. *Exam Schools* is the first-ever close-up look at this small, sometimes controversial, yet crucial segment of American public education. This groundbreaking book discusses how these schools work—and their critical role in nurturing the country's brightest students.

Boosting the Quality and Efficiency of Special Education

Special education consumes a growing share of increasingly tight district budgets but academic achievement among students with special needs continues to lag. How are districts spending their special education dollars? Does spending more translate to better results for their students with special needs? In this groundbreaking study, the District Management Council's Nate Levenson uses the largest database of information on special-education spending and staffing ever assembled to uncover significant variance in how districts staff for special education. Levenson concludes that if the highly staffed districts studied reduce their staffing in this area to the national median the public could save \$10 billion; he also offers clear recommendations for improving the quality and efficiency.



What's cooking at Fordham

In Development

FEBRUARY 2013

Losing Leaders: How We Keep High-Quality Principals Out of Urban Schools

Precious little is known about how public-school systems go about identifying, recruiting, hiring, placing, and retaining high-quality principals. What does the process look like and upon which criteria are these decisions made? What are the constraints? How much boils down to politics and patronage? And who is the decider? This project will serve as an in-depth examination of hiring and placement decisions in a handful of school districts, intended to highlight the pros and cons of how districts select those who are given the daunting challenge of leading successful schools. What policies, agreements, restrictions, traditions and understandings—both official and unofficial—guide these decisions? And how can they be improved upon?

Budget: \$172,400; \$45,400 remaining need



A Market Research Study of the Nation's Parents

Analysts and advocates interested in the “demand” side of school choice have long been interested in parents' educational preferences. But too often parents are seen as monolithic, with researchers looking to determine what the “average” or “typical” parent (or low-income parent) wants in a school. This groundbreaking study takes a different approach: It will “segment” U.S. parents into distinguishable groups, each with its own values and preferences regarding education.

Budget: \$230,000 for national study, \$39,000 remaining need

Who is Accessing Digital Learning in Ohio?

Little is yet known as to which types of students are accessing online learning—and for what purposes? This pilot study will use path-breaking data now available in Ohio to profile digital course-taking in the Buckeye State. It will synthesize trends and offer policy recommendations for Ohio and other jurisdictions engaged in—and expanding—digital learning.

Budget: \$67,500; \$20,000 remaining need

School Leadership: Lessons from the UK

This series of projects—conducted in partnership with The Education Foundation (the U.K.'s newest, and only, independent education think tank)—will allow us to draw smart lessons from the UK's well-regarded approach to school leadership. By better understanding the workings of the UK's system of recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality principals, we will seek to shine light on ways the U.S. can improve its systems.

Budget: \$235,500

Credit Recovery: Saving Grace or Education Waste?

Credit recovery (CR) programs are one way to ensure that our K-12 system should offer alternative pathways to graduation, including opportunities to climb back onto the education turnip truck if one is so inclined. But are these courses the content equivalent of their brick-and-mortar brethren or imposters that simply make districts (and states) look good via increased graduation rates while giving their recipients the illusion that they really are academically prepared for the next stage? This study will focus on one state (Florida) with extensive CR options and a credible database by which to track students who use them—and determine how they are being used.

Budget: \$135,500

Underway

Fully funded projects underway and projected release dates for their findings:

Teacher Pensions and Teacher Quality: Examining the Effects of Florida Teacher Retirement Policies

Projected release February 2013

Fast-approaching funding cliffs have caused many states to rethink their approaches to teacher-pension plans, with some incorporating defined-contribution (DC) plans into their systems. This study addresses which types of teachers choose DC (as opposed to the traditional defined-benefit, or DB, plan) plans. Do high-quality teachers prefer this option? Teachers in hard-to-staff subject areas?



What can America's "Recovery Districts" teach us about rethinking education governance?

Projected release March 2013

The Recovery School District model has proven itself widely successful in fostering student progress in Louisiana. Similar experiments have begun in Tennessee and Michigan. But for what exactly is the state responsible and how are services administered over large geographic areas? To what extent do individual schools collaborate and how do they view their state-district administrators? This paper will examine the RSDs of Louisiana, Tennessee, and Michigan to see how this new governance arrangement has panned out and what other states and districts might learn from it.

Impact of Pensions on School-District Budgets

Projected release March 27, 2013

While it is well understood that most public-pension plans pose significant fiscal problems, we know virtually nothing about their potential impact on school budgets and current teachers in particular. This study addresses this void, answering a number of questions, such as: What is likely to happen to district expenditures and to teachers' take-home pay (and their required contributions to these plans) if the current trajectories continue? In the near future, what percentage of teachers' pay will support their elders' retirement, and what does that mean for their real wages? How much higher could teacher pay be if compensation could be shifted from pensions to wages?

Are Teachers Assigning Texts Rigorous Enough for the Common Core?

Projected release April 2013

The Common Core State Standards in English language arts require students to read a variety of complex and rigorous texts at each grade level. How long of a leap will these texts be for our students? This survey will ascertain what students are currently assigned and how well these texts align with the Common Core.

Spendthrifts or Misers? Spending Strategies of District Versus Charter Schools in Denver

Projected release April 2013

We know that the "average" charter school receives about 20 percent less in funding than its district counterparts. But what about the charter sector's high flyers? And do high-performing charter schools spend money smarter than typical public schools? Where do they find cost savings? And could these spending patterns be replicated in the American education system writ large?

Governance in the Charter Sector

Projected release April 2013

The growth of the charter school network, the ubiquity of for-profit management companies, and the emergence of the "virtual" charter school have all upended the notion, circa 1992, that charters would mostly be freestanding "community-based" schools of the "one-off" sort. Yet the public policies and practices that characterize charter school governance haven't kept pace with this transformation of the real world. It's time to think anew about governance and consider a policy reboot. This policy brief does just that.

Solving the Funding Quandary for the Nation's Severely Disabled Students

Projected release May 2013

Funding for special education is complex and politically volatile. This is even more true about funding for severely disabled students—who might cost a district up to \$250,000 per year. This brief will unbundle the funding mechanisms for severely disabled students and offer recommendations on how to well serve these youngsters without creating undue financial stress on individual districts.

The Big Disconnect: Do School Boards Know Their Districts?

Projected release June 2013

This project explores whether those charged with leading local schools—community school-board members—fare better than parents, legislators, and American voters when it comes to understanding the actual challenges and on-the-ground conditions that districts face and which characteristics lead to more accurate perceptions of their districts and better academic returns on investment.

A Market Research Study of the Nation's School Parents

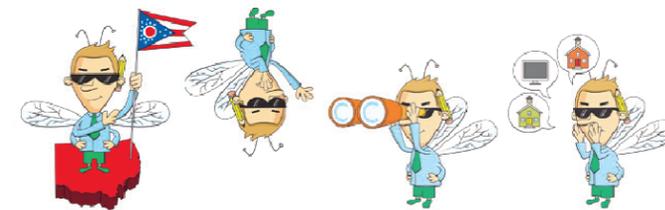
Projected release July 2013

Analysts and advocates interested in the "demand" side of school choice have long been interested in parents' educational preferences. But too often parents are seen as monolithic, with researchers looking to determine what the "average" or "typical" parent (or low-income parent) wants in a school. This groundbreaking study takes a different approach: It will "segment" U.S. parents into distinguishable groups, each with its own values and preferences regarding education.

The Explosive Growth of Non-Teaching Personnel

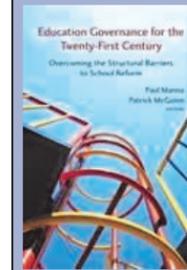
Projected release September 2013

The rapid growth in non-teaching personnel and other school-support staff (instructional and non-instructional) is likely a key challenge to the financial sustainability of public-school budgets in America—yet is little studied. Most other OECD countries educate children without as many aides, specialists, paraprofessionals, and administrators. This study will examine the historical growth of such staff over time using information from the NCES Common Core of Data and other sources, look at state-by-state and district-by-district variation, dig deep into staffing arrangements in a handful of districts, and then take a look abroad for lessons from OECD nations with very different staffing patterns.



Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the Structural Barriers to Reform

Paul Manna and Patrick McGuinn, eds.
Available now



School reforms abound today, yet even the boldest and most imaginative of them have produced—at best—marginal gains in student achievement. Instead of shoveling yet more policies, programs, and practices into our current system, we must tackle head-on the obstacles to reform posed by existing structures, governance arrangements, and power relationships. To that end, Fordham and the Center for American Progress have teamed up to produce this far-reaching volume. Its seventeen chapters probe the structural impediments to school reform, detail emerging alternatives, and offer provocative pathways forward.