EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION: THE CASES OF THE COMMON CORE AND TEACHER EVALUATION
WHICH ARE MYTHS? WHICH ARE TRUE?

Mark M (myth) or T (true).

1. Student learning would be improved if teachers were free to be more creative.
2. The main difference between U.S. education and schooling in high-performing nations is that teachers are respected more in other countries.
3. Teacher unions support fair evaluation procedures and firing ineffective teachers.
4. The Common Core is a Federal effort to take power away from local school boards and communities.
5. There are too many brand new teachers in U.S. schools.
REFORM—AGAIN AND AGAIN AND . . .

- The U.S. has a long history of trying to “fix” education
- And an almost equally long history of failing to do so
TYPICAL POLICY “FIXES”

- Spend more money
- Regulate more with higher standards and more accountability
- Reduce class size
- Pay teachers more to recruit “smarter” people or reward merit
- Evaluate teachers’ job performance based on results

These often do not affect students’ achievement — why not?
A FEW FACTS

- The U.S. spends more per pupil than any other OECD country
- U.S. students score below the median of the OECD countries
- U.S. ranks fourth from the bottom among OECD countries
- Growing income-based disparities
- Educational opportunity and quality are inequitably distributed and significantly associated with income and race
- U.S. K-12 education is a large scale and sprawling enterprise: 50,000,000 schoolchildren; 3.7 million teachers, 15,000 school districts
- Federal funding accounts for only about 9% of education spending in the U.S.; control for education largely local
A FIELD TRIP TO A CLASSROOM

- Grade 3 class
- Diverse racially and ethnically; over half are English language learners
- mid-January

Shea:
“I was just thinking about 6 . . . it can be an odd number, too.”
WHAT TO WATCH FOR

1. What might the students be learning?
2. What might the teacher be teaching?
What is your evidence?

What is determining what students are learning?
Shea: Um, I don't have anything about the meeting yesterday, but I was just thinking about six, that it's a...
WHAT DETERMINES WHAT STUDENTS LEARN IN SCHOOL?
THE ORIGIN AND AIMS OF “COMMON SCHOOLS”

- Prior to 1840, only some children went to school
- Horace Mann and others wanted to create a common system of schooling to help develop the new young nation-state, prepare citizens.
- Aim: to develop resources for democracy.
- Civic goals, individual skills and knowledge shared with others.
- Assumed a collective commitment to the common good.
WHAT HAD THE COMMON SCHOOL REFORMERS NOT ANTICIPATED?

1. Disagreement on core values: Waves of immigration brought diversity of language, culture, religion
2. Rapid industrialization: Economic and social change
3. Schools began to diversify who learned what in school, which created inequality that led schooling away from the “common” school and common curriculum that Mann had envisioned.
4. Unforeseen: the tension between acting for the public good and acting for individual benefit.
5. Children were not treated democratically in schools; and this undid the aspiration for developing resources for democracy.
WHAT DEVELOPED ABOUT U.S. SCHOOLS?

- Increasing press for local control (authority already vested in states): responsiveness to parents, community, cultural diversity
- Local funding to support local preferences (but huge income differentials)
- Inequality of opportunity by where children live and their demographic characteristics (race, ethnicity, language)
- Using schools for individual advancement, congruent with competitive individual aims

This is all very far from the vision of the common school reformers.
WHAT WAS THE IMPETUS FOR THE COMMON CORE?

- Every state has had its own set of academic standards
- Children who move frequently suffer from gaps in their learning because of differences in standards.
- Inefficiencies for developing materials, resources, and professional training
- Other countries have national standards, curriculum, and tests on those
WHAT ARE (AND ARE NOT) THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS?

WHAT IS THE COMMON CORE?
- Goals for students in mathematics and English language arts
- Aligned with college and work expectations
- Rigorous content and applications
- Internationally benchmarked

WHAT IS THE COMMON CORE NOT?
- A curriculum
- A Federal program
- A set of tests
BUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

- The Federal Race to the Top program was linked to Common Core
- The Federal government funded assessment development
- Many examples of curriculum materials springing up everywhere (see internet!), many of them questionable
COMMON CORE: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- Reading: Greater attention to reading complex texts and the developing reading comprehension
- Writing: More varied genres
- Speaking and listening: Flexible communication and communication with others, collaboration
- Language: Conventions, effective use, and vocabulary
COMMON CORE: MATHEMATICS

Standards for mathematical practice
- e.g., precision, mathematical justification, critique

Standards for mathematical topics and procedures
- Fewer topics per grade level and less over-repetition
- Some topics moved to earlier grades
COMMON CORE: THE CHALLENGES

- Little guidance for teachers on how to achieve the new standards
- How to teach and not just request more complex work
- Teachers’ own educational experiences
- Decades of “reform”
- The viral examples of what Common Core “is” (not)
“FRUSTRATED PARENT”

Dear Jack,

Don't feel bad. I have a Bachelor of Science Degree in Electronics Engineering which included extensive study in differential equations and other higher math applications. Even I cannot explain the Common Core Mathematics approach nor get the answer correct. In the real world, simplification is valued over complication. Therefore,

\[
\begin{align*}
427 \\
- 316 \\
\hline
111
\end{align*}
\]

The answer is solved in under 5 seconds—111. The process used is ridiculous and would result in termination if used.

Sincerely,
Frustrated Parent
STATUS OF THE COMMON CORE

- Adopted by 43 states
- Controversy still swirls around aligned standardized tests: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium
COMMON CORE: CONTROVERSIES

From the left
  ▪ Too much standardized testing and pressure ("bubble fatigue")
  ▪ Reduced autonomy of teachers

From the right
  ▪ Loss of local control
  ▪ Collection and use of "big data"
  ▪ Questions about the content (texts, what’s valued)

From both sides
  ▪ Lack of transparency in the development of the standards
  ▪ Companies who stand to profit from the development of aligned tests too involved
WHAT DETERMINES WHAT STUDENTS LEARN IN SCHOOL?
Case #2

TEACHER EVALUATION
MICHIGAN’S POLICY CONTEXT

HB 4627: Amendment to public education act (2011)

- “Tenure reform” — goal to make it possible to fire bad teachers
- Mandate: recommend a system to evaluate teachers
- Formation of the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness (MCEE) (http://mcede.org/)
EVALUATION IN MICHIGAN: MCEE CHARGE

The MCEE was charged with submitting to the State Board of Education, the Governor, and the state legislature a report that identified and recommended all of the following:

1. A student growth and assessment tool.
3. A state evaluation tool for school administrators.
4. Changes to the requirements for a professional teaching certificate.
5. A process for evaluating and approving local evaluation tools for teachers and administrators that are consistent with the state evaluation tool for teachers and administrators and the act.
IS THIS TEACHING EFFECTIVE?

Shea: Um, I don't have anything about the meeting yesterday, but I was just thinking about six, that it's a...
WHY EVALUATION MATTERS…

- The evidence that skillful teaching has significant impact on students’ learning
- The need for a more systematic way to support improvement of teaching and learning

WHAT THE CHALLENGES ARE…

- Risk of emphasizing compliance over usefulness
- Lack of shared professional language and practice sets up big risks of subjectivity and capriciousness
THE CHALLENGES

1. Choosing tools that are valid, fair, and feasible
   - Measure the things we actually care about
   - Measure things that are appropriate to try to account for
   - Measure these things validly and reliably
   - Affordable and doable

2. Building a system that focuses on improvement
   - Provides useful feedback
   - Is linked to effective learning opportunities
FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Released on July 24, 2013
- Sought to recommend an educator evaluation system that had the greatest probability of improving teaching and learning
- Balanced local capacity building with high-quality common standards
- Maximized on the cost-benefit ratio and used resources for improvement more than regulation
CONTROVERSIES

- Divided political landscape (Republican governor and Republican-controlled House and Senate; teacher unions are typically aligned with Democrats)
- Lack of faith in the Michigan Department of Education
- Distrust/misunderstanding of ways to measure student growth
- Worry about high-stakes testing
- Concern about loss of local control
THE MICHIGAN LEGISLATURE AND THE POLICY

HB5223 and HB5224

- Made a good faith effort to align with MCEE recommendations (improvement focus, research-based tools, training, funding)
- Developed after extensive consensus-building effort
- Supported by broad range of stakeholders (e.g., teachers, unions, administrators, advocates)
- Passed the House with strong bipartisan support (95 yeas, 14 nays)
- Died in the Senate

SB103

- Focuses on local control; does not align with key MCEE recommendations (research-based tools, training, funding)
- Passed the Senate largely along party lines (22 yeas, 15 nays, 1 excused)
- House Education Committee: went to summer recess without resolving

... TO BE CONTINUED THIS FALL
WHAT DETERMINES WHAT STUDENTS LEARN IN SCHOOL?
WHICH ARE MYTHS? WHICH ARE TRUE?

Mark M (myth) or T (true).

1. Student learning would be improved if teachers were free to be more creative.
2. The main difference between U.S. education and schooling in high-performing nations is that teachers are respected more in other countries.
3. Teacher unions support fair evaluation procedures and firing ineffective teachers.
4. The Common Core is a Federal effort to take power away from local school boards and communities.
5. There are too many brand new teachers in U.S. schools.
WHICH ARE MYTHS? WHICH ARE TRUE?

Mark M (myth) or T (true).

M  Student learning would be improved if teachers were free to be more creative.

M  The main difference between U.S. education and schooling in high-performing nations is that teachers are respected more in other countries.

T  Teacher unions support fair evaluation procedures and firing ineffective teachers.

M  The Common Core is a Federal effort to take power away from local school boards and communities.

T  There are too many brand new teachers in U.S. schools.
THANK YOU!

dball@umich.edu

Slides will be available on my website
(“Google” Deborah Ball)