The Political And Policy Dynamics of K-12 Education Reform From 1965 T0 2010 : Implications for Changing Postsecondary Education

Michael W. Kirst, Stanford University

Introduction

Americans are largely unaware that local school boards as well as local superintendents and individual schools have been losing influence over education programs for some time to state and federal officials and other interests.. The reforms brought by the Progressive movement from 1900-1920 created control and trust of professional educators, and a politics preferred by pedagogues (Iannacone,1967). Certified School administrators once dominated education policy with little intrusion by federal or state authorities. Teachers were docile and not organized.

   This paper begins with chronicling the loss of confidence in professional educators, and the consequent k-12 policy and politics that have reached beyond the classroom door to alter what students are taught. A companion paper by Will Doyle then analyses why no such comparable change has occurred in post secondary education, and what forces may cause major future reform in postsecondary education. To address these and other questions, it is helpful to understand historic turning points in U.S. k-12 school policy and governance, and to see how the evolution of a local control system resulted in today's more centralized policies and reforms. However, k-12 policymaking is still fragmented among several levels of government, interest groups, and actors.

    The analysis stresses that negative public opinion has been a crucial underlying driver of k-12 policy change, and that policy and practice change is externally driven by actors who are not professional educators or employed by local school systems.. This low public esteem for k-12 education results from several social movements, and relentless criticism of the performance of our public schools. Evidence of public distrust can be found today, not only in low confidence in local k-12 education officials, but also in the assertion of authority over k-12 policy by governors, courts, presidents, mayors, and foundations. Initially low public opinion of state and national k-12 schooling became more evident ,and then more aggressive external intervention intensified in scope and depth (Kirst and Wirt, 2010, Fusarelli and Cooper, 2009)..

Historically, American k-12 education has been rooted in local policy, local management, and local financial control, that is deeply embedded in our historic national political culture. The local property tax was the largest source of funds until the 1980s. Until recently, in fact, the public thought officials beyond their districts had acquired too much power over their schools. Yet now No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has greatly expanded federal power instead. At the moment, there appears to be little to reverse the trend toward increased nonlocal power over schools and education professionals. Indeed, the likelihood is that traditional local governance structures, employee unions, and more traditional policies will be changed greatly by this trend, a prospect that stems from several factors, including:
.Social movements such as civil rights, desegregation, flightof the middle class from large city schools, unionization of k-12 employees, and the nationalization of an elite class of social reformers.

• The intense economic rivalry among states and nations, in which governors use k-12 education, reform and tax breaks and other lures, to help attract more businesses and jobs;

• Changes in school funding pattern to enhance equity, limit local property tax spending; and not adjust for high concentrations of children raised in poverty.

• The tendency of federal and state categorical grants (eg. special education), and standards-based reform to centralize and bureaucratize far more authority than it decentralizes.

All of these forces combined to galvanize a vast number of major K-12 reforms beginning in 1965. These reforms initially added new programs and services to the school organization, but later evolved into changes within classrooms and instructional processes- e.g. the core of k-12 schooling. This is not meant to imply that the fundamental structures and teaching methods of k-12 have been transformed, but the change is clearly non incremental.

Policy trends in k-12 have not been similar to those in postsecondary education. Nor has public approval been similar between the two sectors . A 2010 national poll asked "What grade would you give the k-12 public schools nationally ? The results were 1% A, 17% B, 53% C, 20%D, 6% Fail, and 3% do not know. A different 2010 national poll asked, "How good a job do your state's four year colleges do in providing a high quality education", and 72% said excellent or good. The answer was 67% for public 2 year colleges. These polls show the public blames public institutions for poor performance in k-12, but blames the students for low graduation rates in postsecondary education. (Phi Delta Kappan, 2010, AP 2010, Immerwahr, 2001,2009, 2010). When all the polling questions are reviewed the results suggest that k-12 is broken and someone needs to fix it. But postsecondary education is performing well, but needs to reduce its tuition increases.

Early History of School Governance

In early agricultural America, of course, schooling was a very different affair from the current one. The public school as we know it did not emerge until the 1840s with the advent of the common-school movement, a vast force that spread a basically similar institution across a sparsely settled continent. Southern states developed county school districts, while the Northeast organized around small towns. Southwestern and Western school districts grew by annexation.

While the common-school movement established a fairly uniform education system, another nationalizing force—professionalism—was of greater consequence in this regard and over a longer period. The growth of professional standards for administration, teaching, curriculum, testing, and other elements essential to the system began drawing it together in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Experience drawn from the testing of a jumble of ideas—transmitted through new professional journals and new training for the emergent profession—did more than the common school to instill uniformity in U.S. education. Common-school reformers also created education agencies at the state level, but these generally were bare-bones units with scant power. As late as 1890, the median size of state departments of education was two persons, including the state superintendent.

At the turn of the century (1890–1910), schools were placed under stronger control of local education governments, the result of reforms that followed disclosures of widespread municipal corruption in schools as well as in city offices. Reformers contended that, among other things, board

members elected by wards advanced their own parochial and special interests at the expense of the school district as a whole. What was needed to counter this, they believed, was election at large or citywide, without any subdistrict electoral boundaries. A good school system was good for all, not for just one part of the community. The basic prerequisite for better management was thought to be centralization of power in a chief executive to whom the selection board would delegate considerable authority. The school superintendent would be controlled, but only on board policies, by a board respectful of his professional expertise. Only under such a system would a superintendent make large-scale improvements and be held accountable.

Essentially, they aimed to "take education out of politics"—often meaning away from de-centralized control by certain lay people—to turn "political" issues into matters for administrative discretion by professional educators. The watchwords of reform were efficiency, expertise, professionalism, centralization, and nonpolitical control. Taken together, reformers thought these ideals would inspire the "one best system." The most attractive models for this new governance structure were the industrial bureaucracies rapidly emerging during this era. Whatever the problems, the federal government and the states were content to let most decisions rest with local education authorities.

<u>The Decline of Professional Control</u>

However, the turn-of-the-century triumph of the doctrine of efficiency achieved through professionalism and centralization had attenuated the ties between school leaders and their constituents. Parent participation had little effect on the school policymaking. Until the 1950s, for example, Baltimore held its school board meeting in a room that could seat only 25 people. As the leading citizens' "interest group," the PTA considered its prime function to be providing support for professional administrators. But school politics and governance were about to change and in more than one direction. The efficiency of the centralized local administration was starting to lose its aura, and new waves of both egalitarianism and elitism were to trigger new turning points for education governance.

It was during the 1950s that confidence in local school boards and administrators began to weaken. In 1957, after Moscow launched Sputnik, an angry chorus complained that the Soviet education system was surpassing our own. The decline of confidence in schools accelerated during the 1960s and1970s, when the driving force was the quest to reduce unequal educational opportunities tolerated by state and local policymakers, a force set in motion by desegregation. Opponents had long argued successfully that because the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution left control of schools to the states. The ESEA Act of 1965 was a signal event because it established the modern federal role in education.

Amid growing racial and class strains, including big-city riots, the base of the federal ESEA steadily expanded, and programs for other neglected groups—children with disabilities, minority-language students, and others—were added, often following supportive court rulings. The mid-1970s also was the peak expansion period for new state court regulations on local schools, indicating that local schools could not be trusted to guarantee student rights or due process.

If this era brought dramatic increases in federal activity, the basic mode of delivering federal services remained the same. This differential funding route sought bigger and bolder categorical and

demonstration programs. In the 1970s teachers found themselves cut off from the school board and the public. Increasingly, business managers, administrative assistants, subject-matter coordinators, and department heads were telling them how to conduct their classrooms. It was during the 1970s that the teachers' perception of their "proper professional role" began to change, and unions began to emerge as a preferred alternative.

<div align="center">Teacher Unions Emerge</div>

By 1980, the teacher drive for collective bargaining had spread to most U.S. regions, except the Southeast and Mountain states, resulting in a significant reduction in administrative dominance of local school governance. The outcome of collective bargaining is a written, time-bound, central-office contract covering wages, hours, and employment conditions. While the effects of central-office contracts vary widely by district and school, they nonetheless generally restrain the power of school boards and superintendents and force principals to react to centralized personnel policies. Union work rules on teacher tenure, seniority, and evaluation all began in the 1970's.

Teachers organized not only to gain strong local contracts but also to obtain preferred policies through state and national political processes. This led the NEA to give its first endorsement, in 1976, to a presidential candidate—the Democrats' Jimmy Carter—and to spend $3 million in support of federal candidates that year. What Carter did achieve, in 1979, was to create a Cabinet-Level Department of Education, which the NEA had greatly desired and which had been justified partly on the ground that it would consolidate scattered education programs in one accountable department.

<div align="center">The Rise of State Influence and Role</div>

After the Carter years, Reagan tried but failed to reorient federal education policy to return power and policymaking to states and local schools..The Reagan administration also attempted to scale back federal education activity in general—it initially wanted to dismantle the Department of Education, a notion that went nowhere. Equity concerns, however, remained Washington's principal education thrust—though the emphasis already had begun to change elsewhere in the nation to accountability for results.

Among the important effects of greater federal involvement in education was the dramatic expansion of state education agencies (SEAs) and thus of SEA and state board of education capacity to intervene in local school affairs. In 1995, the General Accounting Office found that Washington had become the largest funder of a good number of state agencies, in some cases footing 70 percent of their budgets. Many states, moreover, mirrored the federal thrust by creating their own categorical aids for groups neglected or underrepresented in local politics. Atop the expansion of state agencies came other developments that moved school power to state capitals. The main one was a rapidly spreading state school finance movement, based on state court rulings that local property tax bases were inherently unequal.

During the nineteenth century, states concentrated on establishing minimum standards for rural schools, and let the urban areas go their own way. Indeed, despite Washington's greatly enlarged role, perhaps the most striking change in U.S. education governance in recent decades has been the growth of centralized state control and the ascendance of governors over school policy in most states.

The rise of governors often has put them into conflict with chief state school officers, As governors grew more active in education, however, they wanted more direct control, whether by repealing the election of chiefs or overseeing the state boards that appointed them. The growth of gubernatorial influence had its origins in state economic development strategies, in which improved schools are used to help attract businesses and jobs.

The growth of state and gubernatorial influence accelerated in the 1980s as a result of the 1980–82 recession and fear of increasing global competition, especially from Japan. That worry triggered a series of highly critical private and public studies, most notably *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, which assailed schools as producing a "rising tide of mediocrity" that threatened nothing less than "our very future as a nation and a people." Education suddenly became a leading electoral issue.Then, as now, states differed in how strenuously they asserted control of education, ranging from highly aggressive states such as California and Florida to more decentralized ones such as Vermont and Iowa.

Until the 1980s, most states left curriculum largely to local discretion, satisfied to specify a few required courses and issue advisory curricular frameworks for local consideration. For example, states required many high school students to take only one year of science or math but four years of physical education. That sort of anomaly was swiftly put to an ending starting in 1983–84. In just those two years, thirty-four states established much higher high school graduation requirements in standard academic subjects.

In sum, some of the major policy areas that demonstrate the dramatic increase of state influence in the last two decades are found in administration of federal categorical grants, education finance, educational accountability, specifications and programs for children with special needs, and efforts to increase academic standards and test scores. Substantive changes have become possible in large part due to an increase in the institutional capacity of states to intervene in local affairs. Thus most state legislatures have added staff and research capacity, and they also now meet annually, or for more extended sessions than in earlier years. Over the decades, the states also diversified their tax sources and expanded their fiscal capacities.

Another factor enhancing state policy growth is the increased fragmentation and competition among the traditional supporters of local control. Thus, local-control advocates—such as teachers' unions, school boards, and school administrator associations—feud among themselves and thereby provide a vacuum that state control activists can exploit. Often these local education groups cannot agree on common policies with their old allies such as parent organizations or local charter school operators. The loss of public confidence in professional educators and the decline of achievement scores also cause many legislators to feel that local school employees should no longer be given much discretion.

A particular state culture will contribute a distinctive cast to policies rooted in its own history. Moreover, these culturally shaped answers are imposed on new actors entering the state's educational policy world, a classic form of political socialization. The variety of state policies means that the total school system will adjust differently to impinging nationwide events or a state law. No

such thing as state education policy exists; what does exist are differential state and local responses to common external and internal events, all of which work on the local political system.

Unfortunately, despite these and many other state reforms of the 1980s—financial incentive for teachers, more student tests for promotion or graduation, longer school days—there was little improvement in student NAEP performance. The result was growing impatience among business leaders, public officials, and others, and the birth of the more comprehensive standards-based reform movement, with overarching aims to foster student mastery of more challenging academic content and to increase the emphasis on its application. A new systemic standards-based reform bandwagon began to roll, with associations of business executives, governors, education policymakers, subject-matter specialists, and others jumping aboard. Everybody, it seemed, was interested in setting education standards, including the White House.

<u>Impact of Recent Federal Administrations</u>

The George H. W. Bush years included support for more specific national student standards and assessments, but those ideas died in ideological crossfire that doomed the Bush education legislation. President Bill Clinton, however, whose political rise owed much to his education efforts as leader of interstate education groups picked up the torch, and in 1994 won enactment of Goals 2000, a measure that reinforced three key state education reforms spreading across the nation:

1. Creating challenging academic standards for what all students should know and be able to do in each subject area. By 2001, forty-six states had done this in most academic subjects, a remarkable shift in the historic state role.

2. Aligning policies—testing, teacher certification, professional development, and accountability programs—to state curricular standards. All states but Iowa had statewide student achievement tests in 2002, and most were addressing the other systemic components.

The Clinton administration proposed to supplement Goals 2000 in 1995 with a voluntary national test. Although it would have been a logical successor to Goals, the fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics examination were blocked by a rare congressional coalition of conservative Republicans, African-Americans, and Hispanics. The Republicans were wary of excessive federal control from the voluntary test, while the minority Democrats worried about the lack of opportunity of students in low-income schools to learn the content of the federal test.

But as the nation approached the end of 2000, when George W. Bush was elected president, it still had not advanced very far toward the goals set for that year by Bush's father and the governors. So, with little attention, the 2000 goals faded away. Since the 1970s, when states first zeroed in on academic concerns, relatively little progress had been made in U.S. student achievement (except for math), though much centralization of governance had occurred, and much money had been expended.
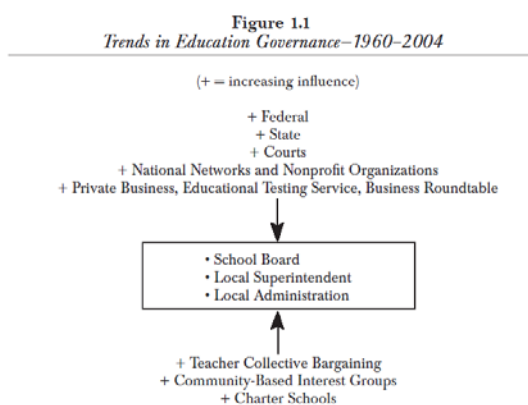
None of this, however, discouraged the new President George W. Bush. Once in office, he pressed hard for his No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. While NCLB generally extends the approach of the 1994 ESEA, it compels states to comply with scores of stricter assessment, accountability, and performance requirements. States must test all students in grades three through eight each year in several subjects, starting with reading and mathematics and then adding science. They must develop

"adequate yearly progress" objectives that result in all students becoming "proficient" in core subjects within twelve years. They must participate biennially in the state-level version of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), as a check on the rigor of their standards and assessments. They must find "highly qualified" teachers for every classroom and much better prepared paraprofessionals for Title I schools. They must issue a public school "report card," with basic aggregate and disaggregated information on assessment, graduation, teacher qualifications, and the identification of low-performing schools.

President Obama included education in his 2009 economic stimulus package despite the lack of priority on education in the 2008 campaign. Obama's proposals were mostly more money for existing federal programs, like Title I and special education. But his Race To The Top created more change as a subsequent section demonstrates.

Changes in School Politics and Influence: 1960-2010

This evolution has shown that, over the past four decades, many forces have squeezed the authority of local school boards and superintendents into a smaller and smaller space (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1
Trends in Education Governance–1960–2004

(+ = increasing influence)

+ Federal
+ State
+ Courts
+ National Networks and Nonprofit Organizations
+ Private Business, Educational Testing Service, Business Roundtable

• School Board
• Local Superintendent
• Local Administration

+ Teacher Collective Bargaining
+ Community-Based Interest Groups
+ Charter Schools

From the top, local discretion has been eroded by the growing education power of the states, the federal government, and the courts. Greater education influence also has accrued to business elites and other private interests, professional "reformers" (such as the Ford or Gates foundations), interstate organizations (such as the National Governors Association), and nationally oriented groups (such as the Council for Exceptional Children). From the bottom, superintendents and local boards have been hemmed in by such forces as teachers' collective bargaining, pressures from local offshoots of national social movements, and the growth of charter schools and related decentralizing forces.

The general public may think that school boards still have the most power to improve schools, but the reality is that boards have been greatly weakened. This does not mean local authorities are helpless. Rather, it means they have much less control over their agenda and policies than in the past. Superintendents and administrative staff now are frequently reactive forces trying to juggle diverse and changing coalitions across different issues and levels of government. They must deal, for example, with a small army of administrative specialists in remedial reading, bilingual

education, child nutrition, and other areas who are paid by the higher levels of government. Indeed, the specialists' allegiance often is to the higher levels of education governance rather than to the local community.

New state requirements specifying the grade level at which particular mathematical concepts must be taught can create rigid timetables for teachers, conflicting with the autonomy that enhances teacher responses and professionalism. Teachers' unions, like a vocal minority of parents, are troubled by the growth of most state tests, and form coalitions on the issue with parents.

Because of the growing belief among business leaders and others that improving deeply troubled city schools is critical to urban economic development, mayors no longer can avoid education-related issues. Such mayors as Richard M. Daley in Chicago, Thomas Menino in Boston, and Michael Bloomberg in New York have mustered support at both the city and state levels for their efforts to assert more control over education. There are limits, however, to the spread of mayoral involvement. Many cities, for example, are not contiguous with school districts.

While the scope of state activity is wide, however, the effectiveness of state influence on local practice often has been questioned. Some think it is quite potent, while others see a "loose coupling" between state policy and local schools that leads to local symbolic compliance. In light of all this, will the nation's big bet on centralized, standards-based reform pay off in the significant student gains(at least as measured by NAEP) that have eluded the nation in recent decades? Unfortunately, nobody can say with any confidence.

Although officials at all levels no doubt will claim credit if U.S. schools are seen as improving, for example, it is difficult to think of any president, governor, state legislator, or member of Congress who has lost an election because of U.S. education failures. Yet, these officials increasingly have been driving education policy in recent decades, with modest results to show for it. On the other hand, while local school board members, as well as superintendents, principals, and teachers, have less and less say over education, the public still holds them accountable for school results.

The impact of new federal and state policy began with incremental additions to school programs like special education and career/technology courses. Now external interventions influence what and how teachers do their daily work. Policy connects the federal and state capitols to classrooms, and Obama is pushing this approach even more. The USA has moved well beyond K-12 "reform by addition" that was the primary strategy in 1965. But student achievement and education policies and organizations had not changed enough to satisfy the public and politicians in 2008.

<div align="center">Obama and Race To The Top</div>

  After his election in 2008, president Obama began new policy directions that expanded on the prior federal role. Obama included a $5 billion Race To the Top (RTTT) in his economic stimulus program. This competitive program has galvanized many states to expand their accountability, choice, testing, curriculum standards, and data laws in order to qualify for the money. Before any federal grants were made, the politics of productivity had been increased

significantly. For example, the Secretary of Education claims 34 states enacted significant reforms to increase the chances that their RTTT application would be successful.

RTTT overcame political resistance from large education organizations (NEA, School Boards) and a broad civil rights coalition. RTTT specifies that competitive points for funding be provided to state applications that include use of state tests to evaluate teachers. It provides incentives for charter school expansion, and fewer constraints on charter school operations. It encourages states to fire principals and teachers in low performing schools. RTTT demonstrates that the sea change in K-12 politics that began with NCLB in 2002 is getting deeper as organized education cannot stop ever more intrusive reforms.

The most recent example of this sea change is the common core curriculum adoption by over 40 of the states. State education political analysis has featured the distinctively different political cultures of most states concerning curriculum choices (Kirst and Wirt, 2009). But the nationwide common core effort spearheaded by the National Governors Association and Chief State School Officers has swept across the country without regard to/for historic state patterns of curriculum policy making. Only a few bastions such as Texas and Alaska have bucked this tide. RTTT made common core adoption by August 2010 one of its significant criteria for successful state applicants. The common core curriculum will be followed by new common state assessments to uniformly measure progress across states.

State data systems have improved dramatically in K-12 education compared to postsecondary education. RTTT and foundations have fueled data progress in 34 states that applied for RTTT . But the student flow between K-12 and postsecondary remains a weak data element demonstrating that there is less policy urgency around higher education, compared to state standardization for high school graduation. The former head of NCES contends higher education lobbies defeated better K-16 data linkages (Schneider, 2009).

<u>Analysis of K-12 Policy Change</u>

The prior section documents changes taking place in many policy and political spheres of K-12. For example, there change epochs were symbolized by historic changes in American society-civil rights, concern for the handicapped, equitable financing of public services, and international economic competition. At the beginning of 1965 the influential concepts were civil rights, equity, and minorities. With the advent of the Reagan administration, policy focus shifted to quality, productivity, and efficiency. The amount of new policy after 1965 is impressive, and most of it was not initiated by education interest groups

The ideas, advocates, and momentum for K-12 reform came mostly from outside the K-12 formal school system. There was substantial resistance from professional educators, school boards, and other organized education interests. A major question of this paper is <u>why </u>these

powerful internal K-12 forces were overwhelmed by many external forces in K-12 , but not in postsecondary education (Peterson).

The K-12 resistance was strong and deeply rooted in professional and bureaucratic ideas, values, organizational culture, and in personal belief systems of policymakers, politicians, and K-12 school officials. Even though the 1983 <u>Nation at Risk</u> report received widespread attention the reaction of K-12 lobbies was to <u>intensify</u> the existing system by adding more school time and resources. During the 1980"s k-12 educators contended that they taught the students, but they did not learn. The entire system had scant connections to productivity or student outcomes debates.

As the pressure mounted in the 21st Century it included using student test scores for educator compensation and promotion. Most educators resisted this. They had never experienced a compensation system other than a civil service system using experience and college credits beyond the BA. Almost no incompetent teacher had ever been dismissed through the legal process specified in the collective bargaining contracts, and teachers unions were powerful in most states (Bridges). Teacher activism in political campaigns resulted in a fear of being branded as anti-teacher as James Kelly observed:

> The stability of the old K-12 system was sustained because of all these reasons-lack of dissatisfaction with results, absence of accountability, minimally satisfactory functioning of the old system, use of collective bargaining to reinforce the status quo and make unions into partners of management in defending bureaucratic systems, and absence of strong political forces demanding change. Thus an informal but complex labyrinth of policies, procedures, beliefs, and political forces acted in relative harmony for several decades, assuring no real change in the status quo tradition of using bureaucratic rules to make decisions about the quality and performance of teachers and principals instead of moving to a more performance-oriented set of policies and practices. In the second decade of the 21st century, the public schools are finally entering a period of transition towards becoming performance-oriented organizations (Kelly, 2010).

K-12 is in an era where there are two main bottom lines- improving classroom instruction and increasing student achievement. K-12 policy has shifted from primary concern with adults, who are employees of school systems, to childrens outcomes. These types of interventionist policy frameworks have not penetrated as deeply into postsecondary education. Moreover, ever since the 1980s K-12 education has used systemic standards based reform to implement a complicated set of policies that require school system practices that are vertically and horizontally aligned to student outcomes. Federal and state policies now influence not only what is taught in classrooms, but also how it is taught.

These latest K-12 transformations have been layered on top of the decades long equity focus. For example, spending differences between k-12 school districts and schools have been mitigated to a much greater extent than the huge per pupil spending gaps between the University of California and California community colleges. Moreover, K-12 reform is in part based on theories of learning and expanded professional development of teachers. However,neither of these k-12 learning approaches has been widely implemented in community colleges to improve basic skills development and remediation (Grubb, 2010). K-12 reform has transformed the instructional leadership role of central offices to support classroom instructional change (Edsource, 2010). No similar development has been extensively used in community colleges for low achieving students (Grubb, 2010). But high schools are the least impacted part of K-12, and high school departmental structures are more similar to college organizational structure than are elementary schools.

Numerous K-12 reforms focus upon classroom teacher practices. Community college placement tests, by contrast are not used for specific diagnosis of pupil strengths and weaknesses. Placement tests at community colleges are not closely linked to developmental education instruction. By contrast, K-12 teachers examine statewide test benchmarks for their classes, and end of year state assessments to review their instructional impact. (Edsource, 2010). K-12 school site accountability and financial allocation data is much more specific than anything in postsecondary institutions (Data Quality Campaign, 2010, Delta Project, 2010).

Causes of K-12 Change

What caused these K-12 changes and how do the causes differ from postsecondary politics? Why was the powerful organized resistance of traditional K-12 education groups overcome to a greater extent than in postsecondary? Why was the equilibrium punctuated in K-12 more than postsecondary? Why have policy entrepreneurs and change invented networks been more effective in K-12? Before turning to this interlevel comparative analysis, it is necessary to understand the underlying causes of K-12 reform.

There are several descriptive/analytical approaches to political developments in K-12, and a few that focus on theoretical constructs (McDonnell, 2010). These theoretical publications have some implications for predicting postsecondary future changes (Doyle, 2010).One way to analyze K-12 change is through case studies. Kerchner's approach focuses upon a single school district- Los Angeles Unified- with 700,000 students. Here is an excerpt from his first chapter:

"Apolitical governance and local control allowed a logic of confidence to surround the District. The District had a positive organizational saga in which it spoke well of itself and people spoke well of it. It had external scrutiny, and internally the linkages between resource allocation and results were not heavily monitored. Today, this has been replaced

by a low-trust logic of consequences in which both management operations and school achievement outcomes are closely watched from outside the District.

The steps we lay out are not entirely sequential—one does not stop before another begins—but they are roughly chronological:

1. The old institution is discredited and delegitimated.
2. Significant portions of its most vocal clients exit system.
3. The functions of the system are removed, "hollowed out", and given to other levels of government.
4. There are frantic efforts at reform and the auditioning of new ideas.
5. There is a defining crisis, or a recognized end to a long term boil of crisis and uncertainty.
6. The new institution is operationally recognized. Someone writes a text about how it should operate.

A basic contention of this paper is that public concern and disapproval of K-12 education is much greater and/deeper than of postsecondary education. NCLB passed in 2001 when public ratings of k-12 reached a low point. For decades, the annual K-12 Gallup poll gives schools in a state or nation a C-, while recent polls demonstrated that the public gives higher education a B/B+ (Gallup, for many years of polls see http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0304pol.pdf , and Immerwahr,2001, AP2010). Higher education polls indicated the public wanted higher education to keep doing what it had been doing, but at a lower price (Immerwahr,2009). A later poll in 2009, however, indicated rising public concern about high tuition and skepticism about the intentions of higher education leaders to hold down prices (Immerwahr (2010). Moreover, the public believes colleges today operate more like businesses, focused more on their bottom lines than the educational experience of students. Could this be the beginning of an aroused and negative public opinion that will galvanize external intervention in higher education?

.

A crucial reason for a fundamental shift to enlarged k-12 state education control is the widespread loss of confidence in local K-12 educators and their communities. The public is not negative about individual teachers, but has lost confidence in the overall school systems at the state and national level (PDK, 2010, AP, 2010) The federal government led in 1965 with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that embodied a view that local educators could not be trusted to improve education for low income and minority children. As state governance capacity improved,state laws expanded concerning education for handicapped children, English learners, and other special categories. In 1978 with the passage of proposition 13 the key instrument of

local control—the property tax—began to diminish through state equity and tax limitation policies.

By 1983, the public and state policymakers believed that local communities could no longer adequately educate the average student with no special needs. So state systemic standards-based reform began by influencing what and how teachers taught. No Child Left Behind was the capstone of accountability pressure on local schools, and it is administered through states. State policymakers now have the instruments to connect the capitol to what goes on weekly inside local classrooms. Over forty states between 1991 and 2010 passed charter school laws to allow more parental choice,and create competition.

Increased state intervention in local schools is palpable and well documented (Fusarelli and Cooper, 2009). It varies in form and intensity by state, but the trend toward more state control of local schools is similar (McGuinn, 2006, pp 206-209). However, we must be careful not to view the aggregate impact of state policy growth as strictly a zero sum game whereby one level gains and another loses influence on policy and school administration. Rather, the result can be an increased volume of policy and control at all levels. For example, state academic standards policies can stimulate more curriculum activity at the district and principals' offices. State policies can be the local springboard for local authorities to devise new solutions.

Theoretical Concepts of K-12 Policy Change

Descriptive /analytical studies of K-12 reform focus upon the top down/bottom up pressure that K-12 local education faced in figure 1 on page 7. But a more theoretically based analysis is needed to illuminate the complexity of K-12 change. One place to start is a useful historical synthesis of the dynamics of political change in K-12 (McDonnell, 2010). As McDonnell writes:

> "To some extent, the political conditions for major policy change are straight-forward: an engaging and feasible idea framed as a solution to a pressing problem, skilled policy entrepreneurs willing to invest resources in advancing that idea, interests dissatisfied with the status quo and able to be mobilized, weak or neutralized opposition, multiple points of access into decision-making arenas, administrative institutions vulnerable to change, and sufficient time for agenda-setting and change processes to work. We can identify categories of significant variables, but assessing the status of each variable requires in depth, context specific information. Consequently, a synthesis provides only a starting point for assessing how amenable current conditions are to fundamental change in postsecondary education." (McDonnell, 2010, pp 264-265)

If we step back to a more theoretical frame there are three partial theories that have been prominent in the K-12 literature.

1. **Converging Policy Stream Model:** Policy emerges from the coupling of three independent process streams: problems, proposals, and politics. Policy entrepreneurs play a crucial role in bringing the three streams together, and promising a policy window opens it at particular time. For example, the Nation at Risk report in 1985 came at a time of USA economic recession that was alleged to have been created by international education competition (Kingdon, 1995). Numerous state passed large scale policy changes in the early 1980's. Will Doyle's companion paper on postsecondary politics explains this model in more detail

2.**The Punctuated Equilibrium Model:** Policy change is incremental (punctuated equilibrium), characterized as long periods of stability interrupted by changes to the system. Stability is maintained by policy monopolies and supported by policy ideas linked to core values. Changes occur when those opposed or excluded from policy monopolies redefine the dominant policy image, provide new understandings of policy problems, and new ways of thinking about solutions (Baumgartner and Jones, 2002). This paper demonstrates this model through charter school initiation and expansion.

Factors common to theories of agenda setting and policy change are: 1) the content and appeal of an alternative policy, 2) structures that support current policy monopolies, and 3) interests supporting vs. those mobilizing to change the status quo. McDonnell applies these factors to two types of education policy: policies that link education finance systems with student learning outcomes and policies that focus on student learning and school performance standards and accountability.

3   Historical Policy Regime Change -the gradual evolution of changes in policy ideas, interests, and institutions that structure governmental and institutional activity in a durable way. The evolution of the federal role in k-12 education is used to elaborate on these concepts beginning in 1965 with the federal passage of ESEA.

Presenting a postsecondary policy strategically is important as a way to persuade and engage policymaker and constituents, gain leverage over opponents (perhaps by assigning blame to specific individuals or institutions), and pointing to solutions (Campbell, 2002). **Rhetorical framing** helps resonate with widely accepted values, mobilize support, and minimize opposition (see appendix1). Successful framing embodies a theory that assumes a positive relationship between the policy and improved educational outcomes, is grounded in evidence, is universal and inclusive, and uses everyday language (Stone, 2002)

A major reason why policy ideas endure, become monopolies, and are resistant to change is because they are **embedded** within institutions. **Path dependence,** the process in which policy choices create institutional arrangements that make it costly to reverse or change them, has been used to explain how policies became embedded.

In determining how the institutional context of education policy is likely to affect change efforts, there are two relevant aspects. One is the **fragmentation of education policy** in the US. Multiple levels of government share authority over public education and are responsible for its funding, and power is fragmented among institutions within each level. This fragmentation has resulted in less-coherent policy, but has also increased access by having multiple entry points to the policy system. Multiple access points affect the framing of ideas (some ideas may be accepted in certain areas over others [courts, for example].

Another factor is the **tension between state authority and localism.** Although there has been a trend away from local control, it persistence (for instance, through electoral representation, property taxes) shapes public attitudes towards educational opportunity and influences the behavior of state legislatures. This has reinforced geographical inequalities by preserving local control over a significant proportion of education funding. Advantaged communities seek to maintain the status quo, even as state courts move towards more equitable redistribution of resources.

The Interests

In determining the prospects for policy change, one needs to identify and mobilize groups who are dissatisfied with the status quo and are open to change. McDonnell suggests that there are four factors in assessing the interest environment for policies linking finance and student learning:

1. A Crowded Environment: The interest environment is dense and includes a wide range of stakeholders and groups.
2. Variation in Stakeholder Views: Note that positions by group can vary by state to state, depending on historical and political factors.
3. Different Policy Arenas: Types of groups differ as issues move from one arena to another (i.e. from courts to legislative arenas). Each arena has different norms and rules with respect to decision making. In legislative arenas, broad based coalitions and public opinion serve as factors.
4. Importance of National Organizations: Prominent national organizations transmit new ideas to state and local affiliates and communicate information about operational models.

Policy Entrepreneurs

Keys to Policy Entrepreneurship include:

1. Creativity and Insight: Policy Entrepreneurs (PEs) should be able to recognize how proposing policies can change the nature of policy debates. They should also be able to frame proposals as appropriate solutions to a current problem.
2. Social Perceptiveness: PEs should spend time talking to people from a range of backgrounds in order to best frame a policy that appeals to others and understands certain social conditions.
3. Social and Political Dexterity: PEs are "inveterate networkers: that are able to interact in a variety of social and political settings. Doing so strengthens networks and leads to a better understanding of opponents' views.
4. Persuasiveness: PEs should be able to argue persuasively across different groups.
5. Strategic Sense: PEs should be able to build coalitions and discern what type of collation will best support their pursuit of policy change.
6. Leadership by Example: PEs translate ideas into action, demonstrating their commitment and that their visions are believable and feasible (McDonnell, 2010, Mintrom, 2000)

Punctuated Equilibrium and Charter School Advocacy Coalitions

Charter schools were created initially by the state of Minnesota in 1991. After that, charters became a powerful new idea that spread across the country through advocacy by policy entrepreneurs who galvanized an interstate policy issue network (Mintrom, 2000; Kirst, Meister, Rowley, 1984). Forty states have passed charter laws enrolling over one million pupils in 3, 600 schools. The spread of charters fits the political science theory of "punctuated equilibrium" where a policy change takes place after a long period of control by a dominant coalition (e.g. traditional education interest groups). As charters spread across the nation, an opposing coalition and policy issue network formed to restrict further charter expansion and impose more state and local regulations. There pro and con "advocacy coalition" engage in major policy disputes and minor skirmishes across the United States (Sabatier and Smith, 1993). At the national level charters are part of political competition between two competing advocacy coalitions that want to expand or constrain school choice. Mintrom (2000) defines an advocacy coalition as:

"People from a variety of positions (e.g., elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system—i.e., a set of basic values, casual assumptions, and problem perceptions—and who show a nontrivial degree of coordinated activity over time"). The "glue" that holds an advocacy coalition together is its members' shared beliefs over core policy matters. The framework assumes that members of coalitions will often disagree on minor matters, but that disagreement will be limited."

Charter supporters come from both political parties and comprise a new political center that encompasses organizations like Democrats for Education Reform. The right wants vouchers, a

more radical market reform. Charter school opponents assert that charter expansion will undermine the public school system.

State charter proponents who want a "strong charter law" confront broad-based and formidable coalitions of opponents. One such advocacy coalition opposing charter school expansion is presented in Table I for Texas:

Table 1.

Texas Coalition for Public Schools Organizations

American Association of University Women	American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union of Texas	American Civil Liberties Union of Texas
Anti-Defamation League	Texas Classroom Teachers Association
Association of Texas Professional Educators	Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers Association
Delta Kappa Gamma - Texas	
League of United Latin American Citizens	Texas Counseling Association
League of Women Voters of Texas	Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education
Let Freedom Ring	
Parents for Public Schools of Houston	Texas Educational Support Staff Association
People for the American Way Action Foundation	Texas Elementary Principals & Supervisors Association
Texas Advocacy, Inc.	Texas Federation of Teachers
Texas AFL-CIO	Texas Freedom Network
Texas Association for Bilingual Education	Texas IMPACT
Texas Association of Community Schools	Texas Retired Teachers Association
Texas Association of Mid-Size Schools	Texas Rural Education Association
Texas Association of School Administrators	Texas School Public Relations Association
Texas Association of Secondary School Principals	Texas State Teachers Association

But the pro charter advocacy coalition has a strong fiscal base as demonstrated by Table 2.

Table 2

Financial Supporters of Choice Reforms, 2003

Contributors
Wal-Mart Foundation
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
American Education Reform Foundation
Black Alliance for Educational Options
Institute for Transformational Learning
Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation (foundation consortium)
Henry Hazlitt Foundation
Heartland Institute
SchoolReformers.com
Children First
Parents in Charge
Heritage Foundation
Institute for Justice

Helen Bader
Bradley Milton and Rose Friedman
Grover Hermann
Koch Family Foundations
John Olin Foundation
Scaife Family Foundation
Walton Family Foundation
Pisces Foundation
Annie E. Casey Foundation

Source: Nicholas Penning, *Vouchers: Who's Behind It All?* (Arlington, Va.: American
Association of School Administrators, 2003).

Political Regime Change Theories

Regime change is a supplement to the short term perspectives used by both Kingdon's
policy windows and concepts of punctuated equilibrium. A policy regime change unfolds over a
long period of time, such as the evolution of federal policy from ESEA in 1965 to NCLB in
2002. A "policy regime" is the set of ideas, interests, and institutions that structures
governmental activity in education and tends to be quite durable over time (McGuinn, p. 11).
"Major change" in the policy regime is not fine tuning or incremental, but rather is a
fundamental reshaping of ends and means such as the passage of NCLB and RTTT.

McGuinn contrasts policy regime change with the short bursts of rapid reform after a
long period of hegemony by a regime with a policy monopoly. The rapid 10 year spread of
charter schools from 1998 to 2008 might be an example of Kingdon's theory of punctuated
equilibrium: a particular regime's long dominance is reinforced by iron triangles,
subgovernments, issue networks, and policy monopolies that restrict change to minor tinkering
(Derthick, Brookings, 1990), Agency Under Stress). Punctuated equilibrium theories initially
focused upon agenda setting rather than the overthrow of an entrenched policy regime.

Analysis of policy regime change relies upon historical analysis and the long term shifting of
ideas, interests, and institutions (Orren, 1998). Policy regime theories can examine major change
in the principles, norms, and decision structures that sociology features (Campbell, 2002).

McGuinn posits that policy regimes consist of three dimensions – a policy paradigm, a power
alignment, and policymaking arrangement – that combine to produce a distinctive pattern of
policymaking and policies.

"*Power arrangements* can take many different forms but center on the alignment of
interest groups and governmental actors on the issue. *A policy paradigm* refers to how the

particular issue is conceptualized—how problems, target populations, and solutions are defined by elites and the public. A *policymaking arrangement* is the institutional and procedural context for making decisions about an issue and the implementation process by which these decisions are carried out." (p 17)

Building on several political analyses in fields like regulatory change and immigration reform, McGuinn claims NCLB is the final blow to the old K-12 equity regime created in 1965 (Milkis, 1996, Tichenov, 2002). The 1965 educational interest groups that featured more money and education process change (teachers, civil rights) was not overthrown in a single decisive assault. It was undermined gradually by a major shift in public opinion favoring accountability and pupil outcomes. The data system supporting K-12 reform is much more informative and transparent than data for postsecondary. Education emerged as one of the top issues in the nation during the 1990's and galvanized a new policy debate and result. The "equity regime" was replaced by an "accountability regime," and the old coalition was largely ignored during the passage of NCLB in 2002 and the 2009 design of RTTT.

There is extensive debate in the political science literature about whether public opinion polls accurately assess voters' views or behavior. The linkage between changes in public opinion and changes in policy also are unclear. McGuinn bases his public opinion impact findings on interviews with federal education policymakers, a research technique with significant limitations. But his analysis is provocative and helps stimulate some useful questions concerning postsecondary education.

The transformation of K-12 education, however, should not be overstated. Schools still look very similar to 1965 with a teacher in a classroom using minimal technology. It is a course and class batch processing learning model relying on seat time for credit. Assessments in K-12 are overwhelmingly multiple choice, with minimal attention to creativity, or the demands of student performance measures like the Collegiate Learning Assessment.

Politics, Policy and Major Change in Postsecondary Education

Assuming there is validity to any of these three theories – Kingdon's policy streams, punctuated equilibrium, and policy-regimes- what would it take to bring "major change" to postsecondary education? For example, could a new policy regime feature student progress, learning, and completion? As Mc Guinn notes:

"The majority of policy issues under consideration in the political system at any particular point in time are low-visibility and low salience issues on which there is little

public interest or pressure for reform. A few issues, however, achieve high visibility and high salience with the public and take on wider political significance. These "swing issues" are policy that are given top priority by swing voters and have the power to swing elections in an era of partisan parity and narrow electoral margins. They have become central to the electoral and governing strategies of politicians and parties, with several important consequences for policymaking." (p 205)

What does the current ecology of higher education look like, and what are the potential forces for major change?

Is there a dominant pattern of policymaking and politics in postsecondary education that needs to be displaced? Can public opinion be changed so that postsecondary education performance becomes a top political and electoral issue? If major change is a gradual evolution, how far along is postsecondary education from its period of stasis? Is a "short burst" of punctuated political equilibrium possible or likely in the near future? What ideas, interests, and institutions need to emerge or be enhanced? Will better data and transparency help build momentum (e.g., college completion **rates). Will Doyle's companion paper will address these issues.**

Perhaps the first stage is to create a strategy directed at changing the climate of public opinion concerning postsecondary education. This seemed to enhance K-12 regime change. Lenkowsky and Piereson (2007) who led conservative organizations provide a detailed analysis of the fifty year role and impact of conservative foundations. These foundations used an elite strategy.

"That is, to focus the limited funds of the foundations on journals and magazines, academic programs, and research initiatives that would place their ideas in front of an elite audience of journalists, academics, professionals, and policymakers. Populist strategies such as community organizing, launching voter registration drives, and conducting advertising campaigns were deemed too expensive and cumbersome in relation to the resources available. Such strategies were also thought to be relatively ineffective in the context of the increasing "professionalization" of reform, especially in education, where expert knowledge and elite opinion had always been influential." (p 359)

The principal targets were professionals, scholars, policymakers, journalists, and similar elites. The goal was to have these "elites" think differently about the problems and solutions for K-12 education. Traditional postsecondary policy and opinions focus on access for students, and is only beginning to change to student success through the supply side of state systems and institutions. There is some evidence that the elite opinion strategy helped cause the K-12 policy sea change that McGuinn chronicles in his 1965-2005 analysis for K-12 (Kirst and Wirt, 2009).

Foundations that focus upon K-12 have been more aggressive about institutional change and matching federal initiatives like Race to the Top. Charter school laws and schools supported by numerous foundations on page ___ is a good example. But foundations like Broad, Gates, and Wal- Mart provide significant grants to create test based teacher evaluation, mayoral takeover of K-12 school governance, and organizational focus on continuous improvement of instruction. (Ravitch, 2010). Foundations have been vital for bringing in new young reform oriented educators through such organizations as Teach for America, New Leaders for New Schools, and the New Teacher Project. Gates sponsored a hard hitting movie documentary against teacher unions entitled "Waiting for Superman".

But we lack understanding of the causal mechanisms that links K-12 ideas about reform to policy-making outcomes. For example, which actors primarily rely on influencing policy by using ideas? What institutional conditions are most favorable to an actor's success? (Campbell, 2002). John Campbell prepared this chart to illuminate some these complex issues.

Table 1. Types of ideas and their effects on policy making

	Concepts and theories in the foreground of the policy debate	Underlying assumptions in the background of the policy debate
Cognitive level	*Programs* Ideas as elite policy prescriptions that help policy makers to chart a clear and specific course of policy action	*Paradigms* Ideas as elite assumptions that constrain the cognitive range of useful solutions available to policy makers
Normative level	*Frames* Ideas as symbols and concepts that help policy makers to legitimize policy solutions to the public	*Public sentiments* Ideas as public assumptions that constrain the normative range of legitimate solutions available to policy makers

But changing public opinions, policy frames, and injecting new ideas into the college completion debate will only help begin the policy cycle. K-12 reform relied on major external forces including media, government, foundations, and new organizations like charter schools and Teach For America. College completion is emerging on the federal and state policy agendas across the nation. But the policy solutions to combat low completion rates are unclear or untested (e.g. performance funding), and the specific policy debate has barely begun. There are glimmers of completion initiatives from state postsecondary systems such as University of Maryland and California State University, but most of the completion initiatives are scattered and struggling under reduced finances.

My sense is that secondary school college readiness has more momentum than internal institutional postsecondary initiatives for improving college completion. The college debate still relies primarily upon concern about student financial aid and rising tuition. But increased tuition is not connected in the current political debate to college internal allocations of resources. This situation leads us back to the question of what new political dynamics would change drastically

the limited current momentum for postsecondary education reform that focuses upon institutional policy and practice, in addition to improving preparation and financing of students. What obstacles most impede nonincremental institutional policies and practices to enhance college student progress and completion? Will Doyle's companion paper addresses these issues directly, and is a sequel to this K-12 analysis.

Appendix 1

Criteria for a Successful Policy Proposal

Technical feasibility	-level of expertise required -ease of administration and oversight -sufficient evidence that a policy proposal can achieve its instrumental goals.
Value acceptability	-can be a barrier to policy change, since support varies across ideological spectrums
Tolerable Cost	-"acceptable" costs, as perceived by the public, state and federal gov.