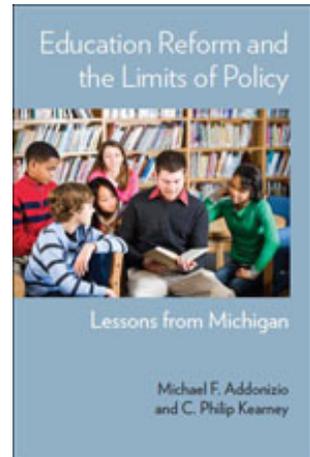

Upjohn Institute Press

Introduction

Michael F. Addonizio
Wayne State University

C. Philip Kearney
University of Michigan



Chapter 1 (pp. 1-7) in:

Education Reform and the Limits of Policy: Lessons from Michigan

Michael F. Addonizio, C. Philip Kearney

Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2012

1

Introduction

On April 20, 2006, Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm signed legislation that set the most demanding high school graduation requirements in the nation. These standards, effective for all students in the 2011 graduating class, require four years of English language arts; four years of mathematics, including algebra II; three years of science; and three years of social studies. Additional requirements in world languages take effect with the class of 2016. These ambitious standards, typically required only for the college bound, were motivated by concerns over Michigan's struggling economy and workforce, concerns brought to public attention by the Lt. Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth (the so-called Cherry Commission). The Cherry Commission's 2004 report issues this challenge:

Michigan's residents, businesses, and governments can either move forward to a future of prosperity and growth fueled by the knowledge and skills of the nation's best-educated population, or they can drift backward to a future characterized by ever-diminishing economic opportunity, decaying cities, and population flight—a stagnant backwater in a dynamic world economy. (Cherry Commission 2004, p. 3)

These standards, prompted by concerns over a state economy that has shrunk steadily since 2001, are the most recent in a series of substantial K–12 education policy reforms dating back to 1990, when the Michigan legislature passed Public Act 25, a sweeping reform that established a state model curriculum, a state accreditation program for all elementary and secondary schools, and formal processes for improving schools and publishing school reports on a regular basis.

The pace of Michigan's education reform accelerated dramatically during Governor John Engler's first term, 1991–94, with new legislation on teacher tenure, charter schools, interdistrict school choice, and, most notably, comprehensive tax reform and a complete overhaul of K–12 school finance. Passage of these sweeping reforms was aided by a generally robust state economy and some measure of bipartisan cooperation in the legislature. The cumulative impact of these reforms

eventually came to be nothing less than a new landscape for public schools in Michigan, with more centralized and less stable funding, volatile district enrollments, and, with charter schools, the advent of nonunionized teachers.

But the pace of education reform slowed dramatically during Engler's third term in 1999–2002 as policymakers, recognizing the apparent limits of many of the measures they so quickly had enacted, began to evaluate and fine-tune their dramatic innovations. Constraints were placed on charter school growth, school choice options were broadened to allow cross-county student movement, and local district options for enhanced operating funds were curtailed. However, the bulk of the Engler-era reforms remained essentially unchanged during the administration of Governor Granholm, perhaps owing to popular support for the charter and choice initiatives and a faltering state economy that has generated little new revenue with which to facilitate further school finance reforms. However, while choice and charters continue to enjoy popular support, a growing number of educators, parents, and other school advocates have expressed concern over the state's dwindling financial support, measured in real terms, for most school districts in Michigan.

CONCURRENT NATIONAL REFORMS

With the notable exception of the state's dwindling financial support for public schools, Michigan's K–12 education reforms have paralleled recent nationwide trends. Here we need to distinguish between nationwide reform movements and reforms advanced under federal legislation. While some reforms, such as school choice and charter schools, become nationwide movements as they are adopted in state after state, fewer initiatives of comparable scope are instituted by the U.S. Congress. The U.S. Constitution makes no mention of education, leaving such matters "to the States . . . or to the people."¹ Indeed, it was not until 1958, following the Soviet Union's launch of the satellite Sputnik, that Congress entered the education policy arena in any substantial way, with passage of the National Defense Education Act, a federal financial aid program designed to improve education in mathematics, science,

and foreign languages. The next important piece of federal education legislation was passed a few years later as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, with the educational centerpiece being the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This act signaled for the first time a broadly conceived federal program of financial assistance to the nation's elementary and secondary schools, with its central thrust being the provision of funds to local school districts to design and implement new compensatory education programs for low-income children.

A few short years later, concern over the performance of public schools rose appreciably across the nation following the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983), a controversial report highly critical of U.S. public schools. Despite its faulty conclusion that the stagflation plaguing the U.S. economy at that time was attributable to poor performance by our public schools (our economy prospered in the 1990s without dramatic school improvement), the report ignited a flurry of education policy reforms across the states. These reforms—which included teacher certification tests, early childhood education initiatives, high school graduation requirements, and more statewide standardized student testing—emphasized student and school performance, in contrast to the concerns of equity and access that had dominated school policy debates in the 1970s. Public schools were now expected to be adequate or even excellent, not just equal.

This debate over public school performance and the accompanying cries for accountability have risen several more decibels since the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Under NCLB, schools and districts that fail to make “adequate yearly progress” for two consecutive years are subject to a set of reforms and sanctions designed to improve school performance. As a school continues to fall short of adequate yearly progress, the scope of the required remedial measures widens to include offer of transfer to children who wish to leave the school, the provision of supplementary educational services outside the normal school day, the replacement of school staff, and the conversion of the school to charter status.

Further, the school accountability movement, with its emphasis on educational outcomes, has changed the focus of school finance policy

analysis and litigation from equity and the relative spending levels of local school districts to the more fundamental matter of student achievement. That is, school funding should now address adequacy as well as equity. More specifically, a state's school finance system should provide all schools with resources sufficient to support high levels of achievement by all students, regardless of their social or economic background. This concept of educational adequacy, which received its first explicit judicial expression in a notable 1989 Kentucky case (*Rose v. Council for Better Education* 1989), has been applied by courts in more than a dozen states to declare school finance systems unconstitutional and has prompted school finance reforms in other states as well, including Michigan.

This confluence of reform efforts has led to the proliferation of a vast array of new and revised education policies at both state and national levels, policies aimed at producing a veritable renaissance in American public education. As the problems abound, the policies keep pace, but the answers and solutions—for a variety of reasons—continue to come hard. If we have learned anything over these past years, we have learned that there are definite limits to policy, limits to implementing even well-constructed reforms, and limits to what reforms can accomplish. Yet we soldier on, experiencing both victories and defeats, and ever striving to better understand and overcome the constraints and limits we face in attempting to fashion and effect substantive reforms in our nation's public schools. While there is no doubt that an abundance of newly enacted education policies abounds across the state and across the nation, more fundamental questions remain. What is the nature of these reforms? What do they hope to accomplish? How successful have they been?

In this book, we attempt to provide some answers to these questions by examining a set of major education policy reforms undertaken in Michigan and across the country over the past 20 or more years, a time of unprecedented educational innovation in the United States. These innovations include finance reform, state assessment of student performance, a series of school accountability measures, charter schools, schools of choice, and, for Detroit, a bevy of oft-conflicting policies and reform efforts that have belabored but seldom helped its public schools.

In the pages that follow, we examine the decidedly mixed outcomes and effects of this large array of reform policies and programs. Each

chapter addresses a specific policy area, outlining reform activity across the nation with an emphasis on Michigan's efforts as well as on one or two states that led these changes.

In Chapter 2, we examine the seemingly endless controversy over money and schools: Does more money make schools better? We then look at the financing of Michigan's public schools, setting out a brief history of past attempts at reform prior to the enactment of Proposal A in 1994–95 and its promise of increased equity for both taxpayers and students, as well as an adequate and stable revenue source to support quality programs in the schools. We review the factors that led to the reform, the principal components of the reform, and the consequences or effects of the reform, with a particular focus on its fiscal equity effects. But we also include in our discussion the closely related issue of adequacy, for in addition to the question of justice and fairness in the state's distribution of resources, we ask whether the resources are adequate to provide a quality education for all Michigan students, and whether they are supported by a stable revenue stream.

In Chapter 3, we describe and comment on past and particularly more recent efforts to develop a state accountability system for the schools of Michigan, so that, in the words of the U.S. Congress, no child is being left behind, and that all children, all schools, and all school districts are making adequate yearly progress in bringing all students to acceptable levels of academic proficiency by the federally mandated target date of 2013–14. We examine in some detail the nature of Michigan's accountability program, initially entitled EducationYes! and subsequently MI-SAS and later MI-SAAS, and how it meets—or fails to meet—the federal directives of NCLB and its requirements for adequate yearly progress.

In Chapter 4, we address an important corollary to the building of accountability systems, the 40-year effort to develop and implement both a state assessment program, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), and the National Assessment of Educational Progress Program (NAEP). Both efforts are aimed at rigorous measurement of the academic achievement of the students in our public schools, and the public reporting of that information to the citizenry, often to the chagrin of school people. Our examination includes an in-depth look at educational achievement in Michigan over the past four or more years using data from the MEAP and the NAEP, high school graduation rates,

and other evidence. In this examination, we also compare Michigan's performance to that of other states as well as the more demanding standards of the NAEP program, and comment on the substantially lower performance levels reported for Michigan by the NAEP.

In Chapter 5, we introduce the issue of school choice and the increasing attention that policymakers, in Michigan and across the nation, are paying to parents' desires to choose the type and the setting of the school their children will attend. In Michigan, this increasing attention to school choice led initially to the legislature's 1993 establishment and the rapid growth of charter schools, or public school academies, of which there are now some 240 enrolling over 100,000 Michigan pupils. These charter schools are fast becoming a significant force in Michigan public education, but also a force reflecting both successes and failures, and somewhat mixed hopes for the future.

In Chapter 6, we further develop this issue by turning to the second of Michigan's school choice reforms. In 1996, the legislature enhanced parental and student choice with its enactment of the schools of choice program, allowing students to leave their home districts to enroll in neighboring districts with public funding following automatically. Again, we see both benefits and costs—benefits to students who matriculate and to the school districts that receive them, but significant costs and few benefits to the school districts that lose students to their neighboring districts. We also address a serious and increasing problem brought on by the reform, namely, the danger of further segmentation and the “creaming” of more able students from “losing” districts such as Detroit and Benton Harbor.

In Chapter 7, we turn our lens on Detroit Public Schools and its sad history of continuing failure, going from being one of the nation's more prestigious, big city, urban school districts of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, to literally one of the worst in the country by 2011. The picture we present of Detroit Public Schools is one marked by general socioeconomic decline, unrelenting political conflict, fiscal mismanagement, revolving-door leadership, and broken promises. It is a sad but instructive story, particularly with respect to the future of big city, urban education in the United States. We portray a public school system in Detroit that is evolving from a district-based system to a hybrid consisting of traditional district schools, recently subject to dramati-

cally increased state oversight, a diverse and growing array of charter schools, and increased private and philanthropic activity.

We conclude our treatise in Chapter 8 with a discussion of what has been accomplished and learned during this period of dramatic change in American public education. Then, on the basis of these lessons, we pose our thoughts and ideas about the years ahead. We believe now is an opportune time for taking stock of our state's K–12 educational system, and we hope this book will enhance our understanding of the limits of our current state policies as a means of improving outcomes in our public schools. Such understanding is essential as, in the words of the Cherry Commission (2004, p. 3), we “move forward to a future of prosperity and growth fueled by knowledge and skills,” or become “a stagnant backwater in a dynamic world economy.”

Note

1. The 10th amendment states, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”