

POLITICS OF EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Vol. 28, No. 2

BULLETIN

Spring, 2004

Under the leadership of PEA president, Kenneth Wong, a committee was formed to consider and plan a PEA grants program as a vital way of encouraging and supporting research on the politics of education. The committee, chaired by Lora Cohen-Vogel (Florida State U.) and comprised of Katie McDermott (U Mass.), Bruce S. Cooper (Fordham U.), and Sandra Vergari (University at Albany, SUNY) is using the Bulletin as a forum by which to distribute the program proposal with and solicit input from the membership. Please let the Committee know what you think by emailing Lora at cohenvog@coe.fsu.edu, and make suggestions about the criteria for the award and the funding thereof. The Committee's next task is to work with members to locate money to support the dissertation and post-doctoral fellowships either by working alone as an organization or in partnership with another agency or group.

We are also pleased to publish an article by Kate McDermott on education reform in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Finally, we hope that you will join us for the Annual Business Meeting to be held during AERA in San Diego the week of April 12th.



PEA Considers a Dissertation/New Scholars Fellowship Program

Proposal to the Membership

In order to promote timely, innovative approaches to the study of educational politics and to encourage entrants to the field, the Politics of Education Association is eager to establish two new fellowship programs: a Dissertation Fellowship and a (Post-

Doctoral) New Scholars Grant Program.

This document is in four parts: 1) a brief overview of the rationale for the proposed programs; 2) a presentation of two possible models for the dissertation fellowships, upon which appeals to foundations might be based; 3) possible models for a new scholars grant program; 4) general issues pertinent to both the dissertation fellowships and the new scholars grants.

Why these fellowships?

Founded in 1969, the Politics of Education Association (PEA) is a nonpartisan, professional, international organization of scholars, researchers, and government officials. As an organization, PEA fosters and supports the conduct, dissemination, discussion, and application of research on the political functions and outcomes of education at all levels, with the final view of contributing to the betterment of society. Politics of education researchers focus on the relationships between government and educational institutions; explore how and by whom education is governed; and, produce information germane to discussions on social justice, democracy, and the purposes of education.

Through the proposed fellowships, PEA hopes to encourage new and developing scholars to produce high-quality research on the politics of education. These fellowships will benefit the recipients themselves, PEA and its funding partners, and the field.

Inside this Issue...

Page 1: PEA Considers a Dissertation / New Scholars Grants Program

Page 3: The View from the Front of the Parade: What Education Reform in Massachusetts Can Tell Us About the No Child Left Behind Act, *Kathryn A. McDermott, University of Massachusetts, Amherst*

Page 11: New PEA Yearbook Published

Page 11: Message from Ken Wong, President of PEA

Page 12: Message from Lance D. Fusarelli, PEA Treasurer

**Attention: PEA Business Meeting, Tuesday, April 13, 2004
6:15-7:45 p.m. in Hyatt-Annie A, Third Level in San Diego, AERA**

Two possible models for a Dissertation Fellowship

A Dissertation Fellowship Program would support dissertation research conducted by students who have demonstrated outstanding potential for scholarship at their home institutions. Proposals would likely be submitted by Ph.D. candidates enrolled in education politics and policy programs, departments of political science, and departments of related social science disciplines such as history and sociology.

1. Direct Support to PEA.

The simplest and most direct way of launching a Dissertation Fellowship program would be to solicit funds from one or more sources, which would flow to PEA as an organization to be used for the Fellowships. Ideally, we would establish an endowment in order to eliminate or lessen the need to raise funds annually for the Fellowships. If PEA awarded three fellowships per year of \$5,000 each, for example, the total annual cost of the fellowships would be \$15,000. Assuming a 5% rate of return, we would need an endowment of \$300,000, plus whatever funds might be needed to pay for a financial manager. The advantage of structuring the program in this way is that it would allow the widest possible freedom to select research topics, both for PEA and for fellowship applicants.

2. Co-sponsorship or partnership.

Given the large amount of funds that would be necessary to launch an independent PEA dissertation fellowship, it might be attractive to form a partnership with one or more government or private agencies, much as AERA has done with National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Dept. of Education and the National Science Foundation. AERA solicits and screens the proposals, relieving NCES and NSF of the burden of selecting candidates for the five

yearly fellowships. The funding, however, comes from the agencies. Another model might be to have PEA and another agency select several research themes or projects. Taking the co-sponsorship or partnership approach would reduce the fund-raising challenge, but also might deprive PEA of some freedom to select the research to be funded.

These two models need not be mutually exclusive; perhaps we could find funds to support one directly-funded PEA dissertation fellow, plus one or more fellows funded through a partnership.

Possible models for a New Scholars Grant Program

A New Scholars Grant Program would support projects conducted by researchers within the first seven years of obtaining their doctorates.

1. Research awards of \$15,000 would support research on the political dimensions of educational reform. Funds could be used to support graduate students, summer salary for faculty, software and technological needs, salary offset, field research/travel, and other appropriate uses as proposed by the applicant.

2. If designed as a postdoctoral program for faculty and other applicants with a year of salary support, a New Scholars program could be substantially more expensive. However, such a design might encourage recipients to combine their own research agendas with work that fits the interests of a partner organization, such as the National Conference of State Legislatures. For example, the United States Conference of Mayors is interested in helping its members to address education issues of importance to mayors.

Little systematic research is available on the political strategies, activities and influence of mayors in supporting and improving schools in their jurisdictions. Accordingly, the Conference of Mayors might consider funding a PEA Postdoctoral Fellow to look at this topic. Alternately, PEA might partner with a university where the fellows could work or be involved.

General issues

Application Requirements

The application requirements will be finalized in accordance with the preferences of the sponsoring partners, if any, and the mission of the Politics of Education Association.

We anticipate that applicants would propose a broad range of topics, including but not limited to the political antecedents of education policy; the development and implications of specific governance arrangements for education; and, participants in the education politics arena, their issues, and influences. Topics need not be limited to K-12 education or to issues in the United States. Possible projects might investigate, for example, the factors that led to legislation prohibiting bilingual education programs in the Southwest; patterns of higher education policy adoption, and the political features of the American states that influence such patterns; and, the changing relationship between the federal and state governments after *No Child Left Behind*.

Application Review and Fellowship Award Process

In order to assure an impartial, fair review of all applications received, we plan to use a blind review process for the proposals, similar to the processes used by peer-reviewed, scholarly journals. The precise details of the process will vary depending upon whether PEA is working in partnership with another

organization. If PEA were to partner with a foundation having an existing dissertation fellowship program, for example, it would be important to work in accordance with that foundation's existing procedures. Office support personnel will keep records of the names of applicants and their particular applications, but applicant names will not appear on the applications sent out for professional review. Similarly, an applicant would not be informed about the identity of the particular reviewers of his or her proposal.

Proposal reviewers would be selected according to a process approved by the funding partners, the Grants Committee, and the Politics of Education Association Executive Board.

Reviewers would be asked to evaluate the proposals through use of a standard evaluation form to be developed by the Grants Committee. Potential evaluation criteria include currency of the research questions, extent to which the research questions have not yet been addressed by others, applicability to the politics of education field, and suitability of the proposed research methodology. Applications would then be rank ordered according to the reports of the reviewers and the fellowships awarded.

Funding Cycle, Fellowship Amounts, Number of Fellowships

We propose to award the Dissertation Fellowship annually. The amount of the individual awards and the number of fellowships to be awarded in a given year will depend on the generosity of our sponsoring partners.

In addition to providing direct support for the dissertation itself, we would like the fellowship to include funding to support the recipient's participation in a professional conference pertinent to his or her disserta-

tion research.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this brief summary of our plans for the new Politics of Education Grants Program. We hope that you find the possibilities as exciting as we do.

Sincerely,

The Grants Committee
Politics of Education Association

Lora Cohen-Vogel (Chair)
Florida State University

Bruce S. Cooper
Fordham University

Kathryn McDermott
*University of
Massachusetts-Amherst*

Sandra Vergari
University at Albany, SUNY



The View from the Front of the Parade: What Education Reform in Massachusetts Can Tell Us About the No Child Left Behind Act

*Kathryn A. McDermott,
University of Massachusetts,
Amherst¹*

The state of Massachusetts has a long history of innovation in public education, dating back to the founding of the Boston Latin School (the nation's oldest continuously operated public school) in 1635. In the 1800s, Horace Mann led the movement for state laws requiring towns to support public,

¹ This article draws upon reports prepared by the University of Massachusetts Center for Education Policy for the Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission (McDermott et. al., 2001; Churchill et. al. 2002), and a paper presented at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Manage-

ment 2003 Research Conference (McDermott, 2003). The author gratefully acknowledges financial support from The Spencer Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, through the Advanced Studies Fellowship Program at Brown University. Andy Churchill provided helpful comments on a draft. The data presented, the statements made, and the views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

common schools. The Boston Public Schools and the Massachusetts legislature were often in the vanguard of late 20th-century education policymaking, enacting several programs that became models for federal laws. Boston's Operation Counterpoise provided compensatory education for disadvantaged children two years before Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Massachusetts legislature enacted several laws in pursuit of educational equity that preceded federal legislation in the same areas. These included a 1970 gender-equity law, a 1971 requirement that school districts provide bilingual education, and a 1972 guarantee that students with disabilities would receive special educational services.²

The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993

In 1993, the Massachusetts legislature continued this pattern of innovation by passing the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) of 1993. MERA was one of the first statewide, comprehensive education reform laws based on the goal of educating all children to high standards. MERA committed the state to doubling its spending on education so

ment 2003 Research Conference (McDermott, 2003). The author gratefully acknowledges financial support from The Spencer Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, through the Advanced Studies Fellowship Program at Brown University. Andy Churchill provided helpful comments on a draft. The data presented, the statements made, and the views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

² The first federal laws in these areas were Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (gender equity), the *Lau* remedies of 1974 (bilingual education) and Public Law 94-142 (special education), passed in 1975. Thanks to Adam Nelson of the University of Wisconsin for alerting me to this pattern and passing along the legislative details.

that all school districts would be able to attain at least a “foundation” level of per-pupil spending. The law also required the state to develop Curriculum Frameworks, test students’ mastery of the material in the Frameworks, and hold schools and districts accountable for students’ test performance. Accountability extended to students, in the form of a requirement that students pass the 10th-grade level tests as a prerequisite for high-school graduation. In support of these changes, MERA shifted some power over personnel matters from School Committees to principals and superintendents, required the creation of School Councils to advise principals, and reduced job protection for teachers and principals. Instead of holding lifelong certification, teachers would have to renew their licenses every five years. New teachers would have to pass tests of their literacy and subject-matter knowledge. The law replaced teacher tenure with “professional status,” which meant that in theory it would be easier to dismiss ineffective teachers. It also eliminated tenure and collective bargaining rights for principals, in favor of multi-year, individual contracts.

Like earlier state laws, MERA put Massachusetts slightly ahead of developments at the federal level. When Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1994, it added assessment and accountability requirements to Title I. The Massachusetts system was also fairly consistent with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). In January, 2003, Massachusetts was one of five states granted “fast-track” approval for its No Child Left Behind implementation plan.

Comparing the Massachusetts Education Reform Act with the No Child Left Behind Act

Overall, the logic of MERA is quite

similar to that of NCLB. Both reflect the influence of the standards-based reform movement, defined as “reforms intended to anchor key aspects of policy—curriculum, assessment, teacher education, and professional development—around policy level statements of what students should know and be able to do” (Fuhrman, 2001, p. 1). Both MERA and NCLB require state authorities to set standards in major academic subject areas, develop statewide tests to measure students’ progress towards mastering the standards, and impose sanctions on schools and districts that are failing to raise students’ performance on the assessments.³

Both MERA and NCLB also are based on the assumption that earlier attempts at reform were too focused on monitoring inputs and procedures, rather than measuring outputs. MERA grew out of a set of recommendations for education reform issued by the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) in 1991. MBAE called for the state to act primarily as a “top-level setter of goals and standards,” and as “an ‘enabler,’ a ‘stimulator,’ and a ‘helper’ to local school districts as they develop new initiatives and adjust to reform” (Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education 1991, pp.4-6). MBAE advocated decentralization of most decisions about how to reach the state’s goals and standards, with principals taking on the role of “pivotal operating managers” (Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education 1991, p. ES-5). Similarly, statements about NCLB made by President

³ NCLB does make an exception to the requirement of statewide tests for states whose existing laws preclude such tests. Iowa and Nebraska are both using a combination of state and local assessments to comply with the NCLB.

Bush and representatives of the U.S. Department of Education have emphasized the ways in which the law increases flexibility for state and local decision makers to decide how to meet students’ needs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Five Key Insights

Massachusetts’ decade of experience implementing MERA thus can provide other states with insights into the challenges and controversies they are likely to face as they implement NCLB. The five key insights are

- 1. Progress takes a long time;**
- 2. “Sticks” should be accompanied by “carrots;”**
- 3. Special education poses financial challenges that must be addressed;**
- 4. Incentives work only to the extent that state and local actors have the capacity to respond in the intended ways;**
- 5. Political consensus is crucial, but fragile.**

1. Progress takes a long time.

Advocates of standards-based reform generally see Massachusetts as a success story and as a model for other states. The national organization Achieve, Inc., uses the Massachusetts curriculum framework for English language arts as an exemplar to which it compares other states’ standards. In 2001, Achieve reported favorably on the rest of the Massachusetts standards and assessments (Achieve, Inc., 2001). Despite fears that as many as 30,000 students might be denied diplomas by the MERA graduation test requirement when it took effect in 2003, the Massachusetts Department of Education reported that fewer than 5,000 students in the Class of 2003 failed to earn the Competency Determination for graduation.⁴ Arriving at this point, however, took significantly longer than policy makers expected in 1993 (McDermott, in press).

Implementing Curriculum Frameworks

Curriculum frameworks, which MERA required the Board of Education to approve by January 1, 1995, were not completed for all academic subjects until 1997. Each of the frameworks has been revised since then. In the case of the frameworks for History and Social Science and Science, Technology, and Engineering, the revisions were extensive enough that students do not yet have to pass the MCAS in those subjects as a condition of high-school graduation.

Many of the delays were the result of political disputes over what the curriculum frameworks should include, so it is tempting to say that states should make sure that such disputes do not intrude upon their objective standard-setting processes. However, given that public schools consume a large share of state and local revenues, serve the overwhelming majority of a state's children, and employ thousands of adults who are generally represented by strong labor unions, it is hard to imagine how politics could possibly be "taken out" of the process. Debate over what children should be required to learn and what teachers should be held responsible for teaching is inevitable.

Implementing Assessments

The MCAS tests themselves were first administered several years later than policymakers expected in 1993.

⁴ Students have five chances to pass the test, two of which use shorter "focused retests" designed only to distinguish between the Failing and Needs Improvement levels of performance. Students may also apply to the state Department of Education for MCAS waivers. In order to have the MCAS requirement waived, a student must have taken the test three times, scored within four points of passing, attended school at least 95% of the time, participated in MCAS tutorials, received recommendations from teachers, and earned grades comparable to students in the same classes who had passed MCAS (Kurtz, 2003).

In theory, the test results were to be the main source of evidence that school districts were spending the increased state funds effectively. In practice, the first MCAS was not administered until 1998. By the time the results came out that fall, the state was already in fiscal year 1999, with only one budget cycle remaining in the MERA timetable for increases in state education spending.

Massachusetts is not the only state in which development of standards and assessments has proceeded slowly. Members of Congress who were frustrated with states' failure to satisfy the testing requirements of the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act backed the stricter requirements and timetables of NCLB, intending to push recalcitrant states into compliance. However, imposing tight deadlines will not make the inherently messy, political process of standard-setting any less messy and political, nor will it simplify the technical requirements for producing valid, reliable standardized tests (see Cohen, 2002).

Once the standards have been set and the assessments designed, the hard work of improving student performance still remains to be done. Massachusetts is not yet close to the NCLB goal of "proficiency" for all students, even though passing rates have risen dramatically on the tenth-grade MCAS examination, because a student may pass the MCAS with out scoring in the "proficient" range. After years of effort directed at raising tenth-grade MCAS scores—and a large increase in pass rates when the test became high-stakes—only 59% of all test-takers scored proficient or above on the 2002 English language arts MCAS, and 44% scored proficient or above on

the mathematics MCAS. Far lower proportions of students of color, students with disabilities, and English language learners, scored proficient or above (Churchill et. al. 2002, p. 87).⁵

The pattern is similar for younger students. On the fourth-grade mathematics examination, the only one of the MCAS tests that has remained stable in both its scoring and its stakes for students since 1998, there has not been much movement to suggest either that overall achievement levels are rising or that the achievement gap is closing. The proportion of black and Latino students scoring at or above the Proficient level in 1998 fluctuated around 10% between 1998 and 2001, rising slightly to 14% in 2002 and 15% in 2003. The proportion of white students scoring at or above Proficient rose from 40% in 1998 to 47% in 2000, dropped back to 42% in 2001, and then rose back to 46% in 2002 and 47% in 2003 (Moscovitch, 2002; Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Education, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003).

Implications for NCLB

The Massachusetts experience suggests that NCLB's requirements of 100% proficiency on state tests by 2014 and steady annual progress toward that goal need to be adjusted. Even to get the tests in place, states whose tests are less well-aligned with NCLB requirements than MCAS is will need to do time-consuming design work, including design of alternate assessments for students with disabilities. The improved student performance that is the goal of NCLB may take much

⁵ Students who fail the MCAS on their first attempt have four more opportunities to earn a passing score. Two of these opportunities are "focused retests," which distinguish only between the "failing" and "needs improvement" levels and thus cannot produce scores of "proficient" or higher.

longer than 12 years to achieve.

2. *“Sticks” should be accompanied by “carrots.”*

The MERA Tradeoff

Policy makers in Massachusetts have consistently viewed MERA as a trade between resources and accountability. The state promised to double its spending on education aid to local school districts, in exchange for which it would also hold educators accountable for students' performance. This exchange was crucial to the business community's support of MERA. In its 1991 position paper on education reform, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education had pledged its support for increased state education spending, so long as the increased spending came with “the expectation, indeed the requirement, that those involved in Massachusetts' system of public education accept thoughtful changes which must occur in how the system is operated, guided, and managed” (Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education 1991, Section 2, p. 5).

Funding MERA

Although many observers doubted whether the legislature would really follow through on MERA's seven-year commitment to increased education spending, the state did in fact meet these commitments. The state's share of total educational expenditures rose from 33% in FY 1993 to 40% in FY 2000, with much of the increase targeted to communities with small tax bases and low expenditures in order to bring their spending up to foundation level⁶. By

FY 2000, all but 5 of the state's over 300 school districts were spending at or above foundation level, and the 5 districts below foundation were all spending at least 90% of foundation (Churchill, et. al., 2002, p. 45).

The foundation level of spending is not lavish, and students in lower-spending school districts are again challenging the adequacy of the state's education finance system in court (*Hancock v. Driscoll*, argued in 2003). But, the increase in funding for resource-poor school districts does seem to have increased support in those districts for the other components of MERA—including, in many cases, the graduation test requirement and other accountability measures that fall disproportionately hard on urban schools. Much of the opposition to MERA and to the MCAS examination has come from more affluent suburban communities with high MCAS pass rates (see Alexakis, 2001).

Implications for NCLB

In contrast to MERA's inclusion of both “carrots” and “sticks,” NCLB looks to many people like a big stick paired with a small or nonexistent carrot. State policy makers around the country are worried about how they will pay for the increased tests required by NCLB, and local educators worry about the Title I funds they will have to spend on transportation for school choice students and supplemental services for children in schools identified for improvement.

clerical staff, health care staff, central office staff, and custodial staff, 2 categories of employee benefits, expanded programs for low-income students, professional development, athletics, extracurricular activities, utilities and ordinary maintenance, special needs student tuitions, miscellaneous expenses, books and instructional supplies, and extraordinary maintenance.

Rather than responding in the anticipated way to the incentives in NCLB, state and local policy makers may instead put their energy into evading the penalties, or may decide to decline Title I funds.

3. *Special education poses financial challenges that must be addressed.*

Despite its comprehensive ambitions, MERA did not attempt to make changes in Massachusetts' special-education policy. As of 1993, Massachusetts law required a higher level of services for students in special-education programs than did federal law. The Massachusetts standard entitled students to services yielding the “maximum feasible benefit.”

Financial Challenges of Special Education

Some local educators in Massachusetts have argued that because of rising special education expenditures, the increases in state aid under MERA simply make it possible to continue providing the services they had before 1993, rather than enabling them to implement reforms. Massachusetts districts' average per-pupil spending increased \$1216 (in 2001 dollars) between 1993 and 2000. However, spending on students in special education increased far more than spending on students in regular programs. Average per-pupil spending in special education rose by \$2893 (in 2001 dollars) compared with \$841 in regular education (Churchill et. al. 2002, p. 53).

In 2000, legislation attached to the state budget attempted to reduce the costs of special education by replacing the “maximum feasible benefit” standard with the federal “free and appropriate education” language (Crowley, 2000). The legal and moral imperative of serving students with disabilities continues to produce financial challenges for school

⁶ A district's foundation budget is based on per-pupil spending allowances for each of 19 spending categories, and on its “foundation enrollment,” which is its total number of students adjusted so that districts with more students in certain categories, like low-income students, get more funds (Churchill, et. al, 2002, p. 44). The spending categories are salaries for teachers, support staff, school aides, principals and assistant principals,

districts. In October, 2003, the state announced a large reduction in the payments it makes to school districts to cover “extraordinary” special-education costs (Schworm, 2003).

Special Education and NCLB

NCLB does not specifically address special education policy, which at the federal level is covered by the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). But, because NCLB requires that 100% of students with disabilities who take their states’ tests must score “proficient” or above, and that 95% of students with disabilities participate in testing,⁷ it puts schools under new pressure to teach special-education students the same curriculum offered in regular education.

Just as the costs of special education have made it hard for Massachusetts school districts to innovate in response to MERA, federal failure to appropriate sufficient funds for special education exacerbates the challenges of NCLB. When Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (the precursor to IDEA) in 1975, the law included per-pupil special education grants to states that would be equal to 40% of the national average per-pupil expenditure, which would be in place by 1982 (Posner, 1998, p. 131). Congress has never even come close to funding the program at this level, and the costs of educating children with disabilities have continued to increase. If the federal government were to make good on the funding it promised in the 1975 special education law, the fiscal strain on all states’ education systems would be lessened, freeing more of their resources for improvements in teaching and learning.

⁷ These are the same proficiency and participation targets that must be met for all subgroups under NCLB. See P.L. 107-110, secs. 1111 (C) (v) and 1111(I) (ii).

4. Incentives work only to the extent that state and local actors have the capacity to respond in the intended ways.

NCLB makes unprecedented demands on local and state educational authorities, and many such authorities may not have the capacity they need to respond to those demands in the way policy makers intended.

Incentives and Capacity

In *Policy Paradox*, Deborah Stone illustrates the political complexity of incentives by inventively extending the familiar “carrot and stick” metaphor. She points out that if a committee of trainers wanted to use a bunch of carrots to motivate a herd of donkeys, the committee would need to know whether all donkeys liked carrots, as well as considering possibilities such as one pushy donkey getting all the carrots, or the whole herd attacking the trainers and running off with unearned rewards. Stone’s point is that a simple conception of incentives doesn’t accurately reflect reality when both the imposers and the targets of the incentives are collective entities, like government agencies, schools, or student populations (1997, p.265).

Standards-based education reform depends heavily upon incentives, such as assessments, public reporting of schools’ and districts’ average test scores, graduation and promotion thresholds for students, threats of school take overs. The theory of standards-based reform also makes it clear that there must be an investment in capacity building if the incentives are to work (for example, see Cohen & Spillane, 1993; Clune, 1993). Unfortunately, when the theory of standards-based reform has been put into practice, the capacity-

building part often gets lost in translation.

Capacity Issues in MERA

In Massachusetts, advocates of MERA believed that the changes the law made to state and local education governance would make it possible for local educators to raise all students’ achievement and meet state standards. After ten years, many observers now believe that this assumption was problematic. Many Massachusetts school districts are quite small, and did not have administrative staff available to work on curriculum alignment or analyze test score data. Until very recently, school principals’ training did not include preparation to carry out standards-based reform.

A survey conducted by the Massachusetts Teachers’ Association in 2000 found that only about half the state’s districts had completed curriculum alignment in mathematics by that date (Massachusetts Teachers’ Association, 2000). In 2001, the Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission (MERRC) funded a study of capacity to implement MERA. 66.3% of local teachers and administrators surveyed for the study either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “the state has reasonable expectations regarding the role of districts in implementing the Education Reform Act.” Given the same statement, referring to schools instead of districts, 61.1% either agreed or strongly agreed (McDermott et. al. 2001, p. 38). One of the stakeholders interviewed for the MERRC study warned that,

**Attention: PEA Business Meeting,
Tuesday, April 13, 2004
6:15-7:45 p.m. in Hyatt-Annie A,
Third Level in San Diego, AERA**

The schools are overwhelmed with all they have to do. Don't assume they know best how to do Ed Reform in their schools. There's very little planning, or analysis of what's working. Schools need help—time to plan, resources to evaluate, change what they're doing... There aren't the kind of support systems that need to happen for underperforming schools—more resources, experts to help schools work through problems—schools are trying to figure it out on their own and running in a lot of directions (McDermott et. al. 2001, p. 7).

Returning to the carrot-and-stick metaphor, we may be giving the donkeys commands they don't understand or asking them to carry excessive burdens. We should also ask whether the people driving the donkeys have a sufficient supply of carrots, the ability to steer the donkeys once they get going, and good directions to where they want the donkeys to go. In other words, the state's capacity to lead reform implementation is critical.

State Staffing

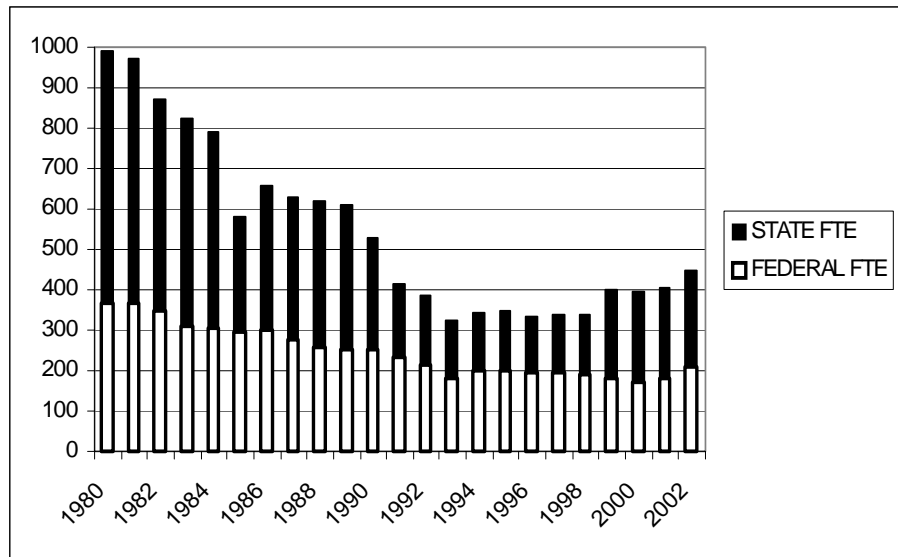
One component of capacity is staffing. When MERA was enacted in 1993, the recession of the early 1990s had led to massive cutbacks in many Massachusetts state agencies, including the Department of Education. In FY 1980, MDOE had 990 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members, of whom 367 were federally-funded and 623 were state-funded. The number of state-funded positions dropped sharply in FY 1982 and again in FY 1985, by which time there were only 286 (296 federally-funded positions brought the department's total staffing up to 582 FTE). The number of federally-funded positions dropped gradually through the 1980s and early 1990s. By the time MERA was enacted at the end of FY 1993, MDOE had 180 federally-funded positions and 145 state-funded positions, for a total of 325 FTE

(see Figure 1). The major effect of the pre-MERA staff cuts was the elimination of the MDOE's regional offices between 1988 and 1991. These offices had been an important source of technical assistance for school districts.

MDOE attempted to make up the staffing shortfall by hiring consultants, since the process for doing so was less complex than the process of creating new permanent positions. Using consultants filled some key gaps—such as a staff psychometrician in the assessment

that directly serve students. One Massachusetts DOE official interviewed for the MERRC state capacity study said that the agency basically functions like an automatic teller machine—passing funds through to the districts, but not using much of the increased state funding itself. The Massachusetts state legislature typically does not specify a percentage of the appropriation for a given grant program that may be used for administration and evaluation, and as a result the state often ends up with no program administration funds at all.

Figure 1
Staffing of MDOE, FY 1980-FY 2002¹
(Consultants Excluded)



¹ Source: Churchill et. al. 2002, p. 117.

office—but in a way that produced a two-tiered and more transient staff (McDermott et. al., 2001, p. 26). In the late 1990s and early 2000's, MDOE did gain some new state positions, but the gains are unlikely to continue, given the current fiscal crisis.

Where do Capacity Problems Come From?

One reason why state and local educational authorities often lack sufficient staff capacity is that legislators prefer to fund programs

These choices make a great deal of sense politically. Voters generally evaluate the performance of their state legislators more on the basis of the funds they bring home to their districts than on the basis of the money they vote to spend on statewide programs or on hiring state bureaucrats. To an extent, these choices also make some substantive sense—an additional teacher in an urban school probably has more direct impact on students than does an additional administrator in the state education agency. However,

they weaken the state's ability to lead systemic reform.

Capacity Issues in NCLB

Two years into implementation of NCLB, state and local education officials are experiencing strain on their capacity. The Federal law requires more extensive testing and data reporting than many states have done before. The Massachusetts experience shows that capacity is also a crucial requirement for the hard work of improving student and school performance.

5. Political consensus is crucial, but fragile.

This article began with a brief summary of the history of state policy innovation in Massachusetts. This history is important, but it is not the historic tradition that is most salient in the state's ongoing educational politics.

MERA Versus Local Control

Policy makers, educators, and citizens refer far more frequently to the state's history of local control in education than to its record of innovation in state-level policy.

In the ten years since passage of MERA, Massachusetts' history of state-level innovation has collided with its tradition of local control. MERA expanded the state's role in public school finance, curriculum, assessment, and evaluation far beyond what it had previously been. The state's increased responsibility for funding public education has been a relief to many communities, but the other expansions of state power in areas formerly left up to local school districts have been quite controversial.

Controversy is an inevitable part of wide-ranging change in governance structures that have been in place for centuries. Controversy also threat-

ens the implementation of education policy, because educators at the district and school level have tremendous practical power over how the reforms operate at the ground level. The state can mandate changes, but given the impossibility of a state agency directly monitoring what goes on in over 300 school districts and 1,900 schools, the changes are likeliest to be made when actors at the local level perceive them as legitimate.

Politics and Policy Legitimacy

Some decisions made during the design and implementation of MERA have enhanced the law's political legitimacy. For example, in 1999, the Board of Education faced ridicule from some quarters when it decided that high-school students would only need to score at the "Needs Improvement" level rather than "Proficient" on the MCAS in order to earn a Competency Determination and thus, a diploma. But, the Board correctly perceived that it was politically untenable to set a graduation standard that, at the time, well over half the state's students were not meeting. The massive increase in state funding of public education, particularly in low-wealth communities, has also reinforced legitimacy by demonstrating that state authorities intended MERA to produce equity in public education.

On the negative side of the legitimacy equation, because MERA included the creation of charter schools, and the state Board of Education has been chaired since 1999 by an outspoken advocate of privatization and charter schools, some educators believe that MERA has a hidden agenda of advancing privatization by setting the mainstream public schools up for failure.

MERA Challenges in the Silber Years

During the years from 1996 to 1999 when John Silber chaired the state board, Silber's record as a public-school critic coupled with his rapid-fire way of making (and reversing) decisions convinced many local observers that state leaders could not be trusted.

One such decision was the fate of the Common Core of Learning (a set of goals intended to cut across all the academic subject areas) and the early drafts of the subject-area frameworks. These documents were the result of a process that solicited advice from thousands of educators. The process was slow, and the results struck some state leaders, including state Board of Education chairman Silber, as weak and watered-down. The Board revised the curriculum frameworks through a more centralized process, and stopped using the Common Core. As a result, the educators who had participated lost their sense of ownership of standards-based reform (French, 1998).

The most famous incident of the Silber years was the 1998 controversy over the first administration of the state's educator certification test. Originally, officials planned to treat the 1998 test as a trial run, which would not affect whether or not test-takers earned certification, and to use the results to set the passing level on future tests. Silber became concerned that nobody would take the test seriously if it had no consequences. Several weeks prior to the test, the Board of Education decided that the test would count for certification, and set a passing score without using generally accepted psychometric practices (Hambleton, 1999). When 59% of test takers failed to achieve this passing score, state officials used the poor result as evidence that the crisis in public

education was even worse than they had supposed (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2001). Massachusetts House Speaker Thomas Finneran declared that the people who had failed the test were “idiots,” with college degrees “as meaningless as a piece of used Kleenex that’s been lying in the gutter after last week’s rainstorm” (Pressley, 1998). Some of the would-be teachers who failed the test may in fact have been illiterates who deserved to be denied certification, but the way in which the state handled the process convinced many teachers (including good ones) that the state’s main goal was to make them look bad.

Political Legitimacy in NCLB

The Bush administration has, at times, seemed similarly hostile to state and local educational authorities. For example, in response to reports that several states were considering lowering their definitions of “proficiency” so that it would be easier to bring all students up to the standard by, Secretary of Education Rod Paige blasted the officials considering such decisions as “the enemies of equal justice and equal opportunity” and “apologists for failure” (Paige, 2002). The Department of Education’s draft nonregulatory guidance on school choice stated that school districts “may not use lack of capacity to deny students the option to transfer” out of an under-performing school into one that had not been identified for improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). However, the actual approval process for state No Child Left Behind plans in 2003 showed considerable federal flexibility (Manna, 2003).

Conclusion

NCLB implementation poses a greater political challenge to the federal government than MERA does to the Massachusetts state govern-

ment. The increased demands of MERA have been accompanied by increased funding for many districts and more attention to the condition of urban education.

The state now pays about 40% of the total cost of public education in Massachusetts. The federal government, however, still contributes less than 10% of all revenues for public education in the U.S., and Congress has never followed through on its 1975 commitment to share the costs of special education services mandated by federal law.

Despite intense disagreements about how to attain educational equity, whether standardized tests are appropriate measures of achievement, and how fast it is possible to close achievement gaps, nearly all educators and policy makers agree that justice and fairness are values central to the mission of public education. When attention strays from these central values, we risk losing the cooperation necessary to accomplishing any educational goals.

Passage of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act was the culmination of a long legislative process, but also the beginning of an intense public debate over the goals of public education and the best ways of attaining those goals. Ten years into implementation of education reform, the Massachusetts case shows how important it is for policy makers to set realistic deadlines, provide resources, and pay attention to capacity building.

References

Achieve, Inc. (2001). *Measuring up: A report on education standards and assessments for Massachusetts*. Online: [http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/MassachusettsBenchmarking10-2001/\\$fileMassachusettsBenchmarking10-2001.pdf](http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/MassachusettsBenchmarking10-2001/$fileMassachusettsBenchmarking10-2001.pdf)

Alexakis, G. N. (2001). Test prep: What Bush can learn from a tryout of school reform in Massachusetts. *The Washington Monthly*, March.

Churchill, A., et. al. (2002). *2002 Annual Report on the Progress of Education Reform in Massachusetts*. Boston, MA: Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission.

Clune, W. H. (1993). Systemic educational policy : a conceptual framework. In Susan H. Fuhrman, ed., *Designing coherent education policy: Improving the system*. New York: Jossey-Bass.

Cochran-Smith, M. & Dudley-Marling, K. (2001). The flunk heard round the world. *Teaching education* 12: 1: 49-64.

Cohen, M. (2002, Feb. 13). Implementing Title I standards, assessments, and accountability: Lessons from the past, challenges for the future. Prepared for the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. Available: <http://www.edexcellence.net/NCLBconference/NCLBconferenceindex.html>.

Cohen, David K., and Spillane, James P. (1993). Policy and practice : the relations between governance and instruction. In Susan H. Fuhrman, ed., *Designing coherent education policy: Improving the system*. New York: Jossey-Bass.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Education (2000). Spring 2000 MCAS tests: Summary of state results. Online: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2000/results/statewide.pdf>

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Education (2001). Spring 2001 MCAS tests: State results by race/ethnicity and student status. Online: http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2001/results/re_ss.pdf

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Education (2002). Spring 2002 MCAS tests: Summary of state results. Online: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2002/results/summary.pdf>

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Education (2003). Spring 2003 MCAS tests: Summary of state results. Online: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2003/results/summary.pdf>

Crowley, M. (2000, July 19). amid rancor, budget advances; measure approved by House, Senate. *Boston Globe*, p. B4.

- French, D. (1998). The state's role in shaping a progressive vision of public education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 1998, pp. 185-194.
- Fuhrman, S.H. (2001). Introduction. In S.H. Fuhrman (Ed.), *From the capitol to the classroom: Standards-based reform in the states, 100th yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 1-12). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hambleton, R. K. (1999). Politicians fail, not the teachers. *University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Education Connection*, Winter, 1999, pp. 19-22.
- Kurtz, M. (2003a). 277 more who failed MCAS get waivers. *Boston Globe*, May 15, p. B2.
- Manna, P. (2003). States as middle managers in the American policy system: Control, management, and the challenge of leaving no child behind. Paper presented at the 2003 Research Conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Washington, DC.
- Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (1991). *Every child a winner*. Boston, MA: Author.
- Massachusetts Teachers' Association (2000). Partial credit: Half-way to solving the math problem. Online: http://www.massteacher.org/teaching/ceqpd/pd_partial.cfm
- McDermott, K. A., et. al. (2001). An analysis of state capacity to implement the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. Report prepared for the Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission. Available: <http://www.massedreformreview.org/research/pdf/scier.pdf>.
- McDermott, K.A. Capacity to implement: The missing link in education reform. Paper presented at the 2003 Research Conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Washington, DC.
- McDermott, K.A. (in press). Systemic reform in Massachusetts: Implementing the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993-2003. In Kenneth K. Wong & Karen DeMoss, eds., *American Education Finance Association Yearbook 2004*.
- Moscovitch, E. (2002). Incomplete. *CommonWealth*, Summer, 2002, pp. 11-17.
- Paige, R.B. (2002). Letter to chief state school officers, October 22. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/News/Letters/021022.html>.
- Posner, P. L. (1998). *The politics of unfunded mandates: Whither federalism?* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Pressley, D. S. (1998, June 26). Dumb struck; Finneran slams 'idiots' who failed teacher tests. *Boston Herald*, p. 1
- Schworn, P. (2003, October 26). State cuts for special-ed pupils rile towns, parents; Timing of announcement also hit. *Boston Globe*, Globe West, p. 1.
- United States Department of Education (n.d.). The facts about local control and flexibility. Online: http://www.ed.gov/nclb/methods/local/local_control.pdf. Retrieved November 12, 2003.
- United States Department of Education (2002). Public school choice draft non-regulatory guidance, December 4, 2002. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SASA/schoolchoiceguid.doc>.
- Stone, D. (1996). *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. New York: Norton.



PEA YEARBOOK: GET YOUR COPY SOON!

CURRICULUM POLITICS IN MULTICULTURAL AMERICA

Edited by Bonnie C. Fusarelli & William Lowe Boyd

Bonnie C. Fusarelli and William L. Boyd co-edited *Curriculum Politics in Multicultural America: The 2004 Yearbook for the Politics of Education Association*. The ten chapters of the yearbook explore the political dimensions of curriculum making in a pluralistic, decentralized, democratic society. The chapters are divided into three

major sections. The first section is centered on the issues of what are the aims of education in the new America, and the imperatives of the "No Child Left Behind" Act. In section one, Michael Apple, Mindy Kornhaber, and Lance Fusarelli all examine the context of the curriculum debate today.

The second section of the yearbook focuses on cultural issues. Rick Hess, Bob Johnson, Terrence Wiley and Wayne Wright, and Catherine Lugg explore multicultural issues in this era of accountability. The third and final section of this yearbook explores character education and pedagogical issues. Robert Howard, Marvin Berkowitz, and Esther Schaeffer detail the history of character education and examine the politics of character and moral education. The final two chapters address the politics of pedagogy. David Pearson addresses the politics of the "reading wars" and Alan Schoenfeld explores the politics of the "math wars."

Each chapter of the yearbook was written to stand alone in the discussion on the politics of the curriculum in multicultural America. However, taken as a whole, the contributions provide a broader insight into the complexities of curriculum politics. It is hoped that this *Politics of Education Yearbook* will stimulate further discussion and research in this important and politically sensitive arena, as the United States becomes an increasingly multicultural nation.



Message from the PREZ

*Kenneth K. Wong,
Vanderbilt University*

Greetings! As you read this message, I am approaching the end

of my two-year tenure as president of the Politics of Education Association. I am grateful for your support and the opportunity to lead the PEA over the last two years. I am particularly appreciative of the generous support from the executive team, chairs and members of various committees, and *PEA Bulletin*, and web site editors. Because of the commitment from our members, the PEA has regained its SIG status in the American Education Research Association, expanded its publication program, and created its web site. Equally important is our growing network that brings together junior and senior researchers. I hope to see many collaborative projects in the future among PEA researchers.

At our PEA business meeting on April 13, 2004 (6:15-7:45 pm in Hyatt-Annie A, Third Level) in San Diego, we will elect a new slate of office holders. I have appointed a nominating committee to generate a list of candidates for our consideration. I am pleased that James Cibulka, Dean of the College of Education at the University of Kentucky, is willing to chair this important committee, which also involves Bill Firestone (Rutgers University, former PEA president) and Katie McDermott (University of Massachusetts). Make sure to come and have your vote counted!

At our business meeting, the Roald Campbell Award Selection Committee will announce its decision. The committee is consisted of David Monk (committee chair and Dean of the College of Education at Penn State), John Rury (University of Kansas) and Jerry Sroufe (AERA).

Among the new items we will discuss at our business meeting are the proposed recommendations from an ad hoc committee to develop a "dissertation/new scholars grant program." The committee is chaired by Lora Cohen-Vogel (Florida State

University) and is consisted of Bruce Cooper (Fordham), Katie McDermott (University of Massachusetts) and Sandra Vergari (SUNY Albany). The committee's proposal is included in this Bulletin for your review.

Treasurer's Report

Lance D. Fusarelli,
North Carolina State University
The 2004 PEA Yearbook has been mailed to all members who have paid their dues for this year. If you have not yet received your yearbook, please contact me. Since PEA is now again a SIG of AERA, all AERA members should henceforth

As I end my two-year tenure, I am very excited about the prospect of an even more intellectually vibrant PEA in the future. I encourage your continual support for the PEA. I look forward to seeing you at the business meeting in San Diego.

join or rejoin PEA through AERA's registration process. If you are not an AERA member, PEA dues should be mailed directly to me at NC State University, 608-N Poe Hall, CampusBox 7801, Raleigh, NC 27695. PEA dues are \$25 per year, which includes full membership as well as the yearbook. Thank you for our support and membership.

The *Politics of Education Bulletin* is published three times yearly by the Politics of Education Association (PEA) to increase communication among the membership of the Association and the field of education and its political leaders. We are much appreciative of the efforts of Lora Cohen-Vogel and Carolyn Herrington, at Florida State University, for helping to put the *PEA Bulletin* on-line and making it available to our members.

If you have articles, suggestions, announcements, or book reviews, please send them to the co-editors of the *PEA Bulletin*:

Bruce S. Cooper, Co-Editor
Fordham University Graduate School of Education
113 W. 60th Street, Suite 1119
New York, NY 10023
TEL: 212-636-6441 or 636-6430
Email: bscooperph@aol.com

Lance D. Fusarelli, Co-Editor
NC State University
Department of Leadership in Education
Poe Hall, Room 608N
Raleigh, NC 27695-7801
TEL: 919-513-8507

Lora Cohen-Vogel, Electronic Editor
Florida State University
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Stone Building, Suite 113
Tallahassee, FL 32306
Email: cohenvog@coe.fsu.edu

PEA is a Special Interest Group of the American Education Research Association, and holds meeting at AERA and UCEA, and other times.

PLEASE JOIN US!