

**NEW EDUCATION  
ADVOCACY  
ORGANIZATIONS**

*in the*

**U.S. STATES:**

NATIONAL SNAPSHOT  
*and a CASE STUDY*  
*of ADVANCE ILLINOIS*

*By Paul Manna and Susan Moffitt*

*Prepared for*





# **New Education Advocacy Organizations in the U.S. States: National Snapshot and a Case Study of Advance Illinois**

by

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May 9, 2014

Acknowledgements: We owe many thanks to our outstanding research assistants for their diligent and careful work. At the College of William & Mary we thank Elizabeth Pelletier, Keenan Kelley, Andrew Engelhardt, and Micah Bouchard, and at Brown University we thank Kelly Branham, Cadence Willse, and Gayatri Sahgal. In the field, we are grateful to Robin Steans and the entire staff and board at Advance Illinois for their cooperation, their patience in answering our many questions, and their engaging and forthcoming conversations about their work. We thank our other interview respondents who were generous with their time and provided us with keen insights about the work of Advance Illinois, and the broader education policy landscape in Illinois and across the nation.

Disclosure: The Wallace Foundation funded this study, and the foundation also supported Advance Illinois (\$300,000 over two years) during its initial startup.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ***Research questions and approach***

New education advocacy organizations are an increasingly important force in state politics and, given the trajectory of growth in this sector, are likely to be influential into the future. During the last decade, these organizations have emerged often with comprehensive agendas focused on accountability, educator quality, data transparency, and choice. Operationally, new education advocacy organizations tend to differ from more traditional advocacy groups in two main respects.

- First, the new education advocacy organizations usually do not have large membership rolls drawn from the ranks of people who are employed by or are elected to serve in traditional school districts. Some do not even have formal members beyond individuals who might be signed up to receive informational items, such as a regular email update. Among the new education advocates that do operate as membership organizations, these groups tend to recruit into their ranks parents or business leaders who may have some interest in education but do not necessarily work for schools or school districts.
- A second related difference is that the new education advocacy organizations tend to be financially supported either completely or in large part by foundation grants and donations from individual contributors rather than membership dues.

We provide two vantage points from which to view new education advocacy organizations. A high-altitude view summarizes conditions across the U.S. states, and an in-depth case study of one group, Advance Illinois, provides a detailed perspective. The study addresses the following ***research questions***:

- What are the characteristics of new education advocacy organizations, including their basic organizational features and their priorities?
- In what ways have new education advocacy organizations contributed to public discussions and education policy agendas in states?
- What factors help to explain the track records of new education advocacy organizations?
- What does the evidence suggest for new education advocacy organizations themselves as they attempt to refine their work, and for foundations making decisions about supporting their efforts?
- What are some of the potential broader implications of the work of new education advocacy organizations on the prospects for improving education in the United States?

A framework grounded in the concept of “policy entrepreneurship” organizes the study. We use the following ***six dimensions of policy entrepreneurship*** to help us answer our research questions. These dimensions identify successful policy entrepreneurs as being:

- *creative and insightful*, which means they offer novel ways of discussing policy challenges that help others to see potential problems with current practices as well as possible future solutions;
- *socially perceptive*, which allows them to see issues from a variety of perspectives, even as they develop and carve out their own preferred policy agendas;
- *nimble by mixing in a variety of social and political settings* to find and build bridges to potential allies, while also engaging potential critics to better understand their perspectives and possibly persuade them to see issues in a different way;

- *persuasive advocates* that offer an overall general message that is consistent and compelling, while also crafting their arguments in ways that connect to the more specific needs of particular groups or individuals;
- *strategic team builders* that understand how to help foster coalitions that will have high chances of working together to move policy in the direction that the policy entrepreneur prefers; and finally
- *prepared to lead by example* by signaling their strong commitment to the arguments, proposals, and to the coalitions that they attempt to help build.

Our *methods and data sources* include:

- coding the characteristics of 62 new education advocacy organizations across the country, drawing on publically available information;
- in-depth elite interviews with 27 individuals familiar with education policy developments in Illinois;
- coding of traditional and new media coverage of education issues in Illinois;
- analysis of publically available primary source documents describing the activities of new education advocacy groups across the United States; and
- analysis of publically available and confidential primary source documents describing the work of Advance Illinois.

### ***National snapshot of the new education advocacy***

Our broad overview strongly suggests that new education advocacy organizations have contributed to the discussion of policy issues and the machinations of the legislative and regulatory processes in states. The burgeoning number of these groups suggests how individuals interested in agitating for policy change in education have found new education advocacy organizations to be useful vehicles for moving their agendas forward.

The 62 new education advocacy groups we studied fall into two broad categories. The first are groups that operate as stand-alone entities within individual states. The second are state groups associated with national umbrella organizations. The total number of groups operating has expanded rapidly since the year 2000.

Key findings on *leadership* are:

- Not all new education advocacy organizations operate with a board of directors or advisors. Among those that do, the size of these boards vary with most maintaining between 6 and 15 members.
- Among the board members for which we have biographical information, the evidence shows that these individuals come from a variety of professional perspectives. They bring diverse prior experiences working in education, for example. Additionally, 54.5 percent have business experience and another 29.2 percent have worked in politics either in staff positions or as elected officials at local, state, or federal levels.
- In terms of partisan political involvement, board member bios indicated an equal split between those who have worked as or for members of the nation's two major political parties. Where evidence of partisan affiliation was available, we found 13.5 percent affiliating with Democrats and the same percentage with Republicans.

- Patterns of campaign contributions from board members tended to favor Republicans, although the number of contributions was more balanced. During the 2012 federal election cycle, we found evidence of 36.3 percent of board members making a total of 1,238 contributions to candidates or groups, with some contributing to both. Of those contributions, 502 favored Democratic candidates or groups, 569 favored Republican candidates or groups, and 167 (all to other groups) did not have a partisan affiliation. The amount of the contributions favored Republicans by more than a 2 to 1 margin. Contributions to Democratic candidates or groups totaled \$686,383, contributions to Republican candidates or groups totaled \$1,693,213, and contributions to groups not affiliated with a party amounted to \$343,022.
- Organizational leaders, meaning the individuals who direct and oversee the daily operations of these groups tend to have titles such as “executive director” or “president” and are compensated typically between \$100,000 and \$200,000 per year, based on available data in IRS filings from 2011. In general, leader compensation represented a relatively small part of overall organizational budgets.
- The most common professional experience of these organizational leaders is prior work in the non-profit sector, with 60.7 percent of leaders having worked in a non-profit before joining their new education advocacy organization. Additionally, 54.1 percent had political experience either as an elected official or staff member. Numerous leaders had prior experience in education with 31.1 percent having been teachers, 27.9 percent working to support school choice efforts, 18.0 percent in education research or consulting, and 16.4 percent in traditional school or school district administration.
- Organizational leaders tended to have stronger affiliations with the Democratic Party than the Republican Party. We found evidence of Democratic affiliations among 26.2 percent and Republican affiliations at half that rate, 13.1 percent. Our analysis discovered extremely few political contributions from organizational leaders in the 2012 election cycle, unlike board members where there was much more data to analyze.
- Regarding their educational backgrounds, 76.6 percent of organizational leaders had graduate training, with most having completed a Master’s degree.

Key findings on *funding and staffing* are:

- Based on available data in IRS filings from 2011, the majority of groups tend to have operating expenses and revenues hovering at or below \$2 million.
- Foundation support, although inconsistently reported, appears to be an important source of revenue for new education advocacy organizations. In addition, 75.8 percent of these groups invite donations from individuals to support their efforts. Among the stand-alone groups, which lack a national umbrella office, 48.1 percent had a donate option, while 97.1 percent of the state affiliates of national organizations did.
- The modal category is for these groups to have only one staff member. Beyond such groups, the number of staff varied widely. Some clustering appears in a few spots (around 4, 8, and 12 staff members), but clear patterns are not apparent, suggesting that these organizations have adopted diverse staffing models.

Key findings on *issue priorities* are:

- Most of the groups’ mission statements suggest a broad focus, encompassing numerous facets of education policy. Many groups refer to the general aims of improving student achievement and increasing the quality of their states’ education systems. Another

common theme is improving college and career readiness. Many also mention a focus on the achievement gap and the imperative to address the specific needs of disadvantaged students.

- The five national organizations with state affiliates that we examined (50CAN, Democrats for Education Reform, Stand for Children, The Education Trust, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute) have policy portfolios that embrace wide-ranging topics. These organizations commonly address policies involving teachers including evaluation, hiring and firing practices, and teacher distribution. The groups also share a focus on policies involving standards, testing, and accountability. Multiple groups have addressed school choice as an issue, but not all groups embrace all versions of choice. Other issues, which frequently touch on the theme of equity, also emerge.
- Our examination also included brief reviews of five new education advocacy organizations that are not state affiliates of a national group: the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, the Texas Institute for Education Reform, Mass Insight Education, and DC School Reform Now. These groups embraced some of the same priorities just described. Yet their priorities and their approach to advocacy varied, with some being more active at the state level and others focusing more on the local level, with one group, Mass Insight Education, proving to be equally active in both arenas.

Three *overall conclusions* about new education advocacy organizations emerge from our national snapshot and the policy entrepreneur framework that we used to study them.

- First, there is interesting variation in how these groups appear to act as strategic team builders. Some build coalitions along more narrow partisan lines while others seek to be more inclusive.
- Second, the groups also vary in the degree to which they seem able to mix in a variety of social and political settings. Some groups appeared to focus more heavily on treetops policy advocacy work, interacting mainly with decision-makers and those working at the state level on developing and passing legislation. In contrast, other groups seemed to engage much more in outreach activities on the district or school level, involving themselves in the ground-level implementation of education policy initiatives.
- Third, these groups are not necessarily coming up with new ideas of their own because they seem to share many of the same issue priorities and reform preferences, which themselves carry much weight in national reform debates. Examples include advocacy to support the various elements of the federal Race to the Top agenda and the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Yet while the ideas may not be novel, these groups still appear to be making strong efforts to draw out potential implications of these approaches by adapting them and explaining what they could mean for their individual states.

### *Case study of Advance Illinois*

Advance Illinois is a new education advocacy organization that began its work in 2008. Its stated mission is to be “An independent, objective, voice to promote a public education system in Illinois that prepares all students to be ready for work, college, and democratic citizenship.” It was founded with the support of the Chicago-based Joyce Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and leading figures in Illinois from across the political spectrum. During its initial startup phase it also received support from the Wallace Foundation. Its original board chairmen were the state’s former Republican governor Jim Edgar, and Democrat Bill Daley, a

native Chicagoan and son of the city's former iconic mayor, the late Richard J. Daley. Edgar and Daley's presence provided Advance Illinois with bipartisan bona fides and, given their stature in state politics, helped recruit additional well-known state leaders to serve on the board.

Since its founding, Advance Illinois has grown as an organization and it has developed a multidimensional agenda that spans pre-K, K-12, and higher education. It has become a well-known and consequential participant in the state's education policy arena. Its most general main objectives have been to influence discussions about education in the state and to influence the content of policy.

Key findings on Advance Illinois's *contributions to discourse about education* are:

- Advance Illinois has been influential in shaping education policy debates in Illinois. Three contributions stand out. First, the group has been recognized as a key source of information for state policy elites inside and outside government. Second, it has effectively engaged the media and generated favorable coverage of its work and the agendas it supports. Third, it has positioned itself as a valuable intermediary between groups and individuals, helping to transmit information and build bridges between supporters and sometimes even otherwise reluctant or potentially unknown partners. Much evidence reveals that Advance Illinois has contributed positively to education policy discussions in Illinois. Several of our respondents noted how the organization has a reputation for doing its homework before taking its positions. On balance the organization deserves high marks for its effectiveness in advancing discussions consistent with the agenda it has embraced.
- Additional perspectives on the organization's contribution to discourse also exist, although these came up less frequently in our research than the points just noted. Consider these three perspectives. First, among its critics and some of its friends, Advance Illinois has received criticism for how it grades the quality of education in the state, using an A to F system published in its *The State We're In* reports. Second, as the organization has matured, and it has become more focused on advancing its agenda, some people feel that it has been less likely to be open to different perspectives as it appeared to be when it began its work. Third, some of our interview respondents indicated that Advance Illinois sometimes may use data and evidence too narrowly, focusing on findings that support its work and not considering alternative perspectives as well as it should. These last two points seem at least partly due to a predictable evolution that one would expect to see as a new organization develops and begins establishing itself. It is also consistent with behavior of other new or traditional education advocacy groups.

Key findings on Advance Illinois's *contributions to education policymaking* are:

- Interview respondents and additional evidence attest that Advance Illinois has positioned itself to make consequential contributions to education policymaking in the state. Three particular examples of this work stand out. First, it has influenced the lawmaking process in Illinois on important legislation in recent years, including the state's major changes to its teacher evaluation policies. Second, it has assumed formal and informal roles in partnerships with traditional governing institutions, including the state education agency (known as the Illinois State Board of Education, or ISBE) and the state's P-20 Council. Third, it has contributed to policy development in the state by being an effective resource

mobilizer for state agencies and other groups, helping to enable these organizations to carry out their increasingly complicated and numerous duties.

- Advance Illinois's efforts in the legislative process and as a supporter, either as collaborator or resource mobilizer for traditional state institutions, has enabled it to amass an impressive array of policy accomplishments in its relatively brief history. While we found no evidence challenging the claim that the organization has had much influence, two alternative perspectives on its contributions to education policymaking did emerge. First, the speed with which Advance Illinois has forged its connections with traditional state institutions has created some perceptions that the group has too much influence that sometimes lacks transparency. Second, its main focus on state-level advocacy, treetops work as our respondents described it, has created the potential for Advance Illinois to be less attentive to whether the policies it supports align with the enabling conditions on the ground required for reforms to succeed.

Our *overall observations* about Advance Illinois and its work are:

- An assessment of Advance Illinois should begin by evaluating the organization based on the goals and objectives that it has outlined for itself and by the promises it has made to its supporters. Using those criteria as a basis for judgment, which are independent of whether one agrees with the advocacy agenda that Advance Illinois has developed, the organization deserves high marks. In a remarkably short period of time, the Advance Illinois staff and board members have demonstrated an impressive ability to weave the organization into the fabric of the education policy quilt in the state and to push forward many elements of its expansive agenda.
- Looking ahead, potential opportunities and new challenges will emerge for Advance Illinois as the policy system turns attention to implementing the blizzard of recent reforms that have become law. On numerous issues, Advance Illinois will be in the position of defending the current system to protect prior victories, rather than advocating for policy change that shifts from the status quo. The move from "offense" to "defense" will likely be challenging because reform initiatives have been so broad and sweeping, future costs of implementing them are still uncertain, and some of the practical details of the initiatives themselves, as with Common Core and its accompanying assessments, are still taking shape.
- One factor that will be missing in the future, which helped prompt a sense of urgency in 2009 and 2010 and contributed to some of Advance Illinois's early successes, is the absence of the Race to the Top carrot and its promise of a potential windfall of resources for the winning states. Given the dysfunction in the U.S. Congress, future injections of similar federal funding likely will be more limited, if available at all, in the coming years. As a result, Illinois, as with other states, will be relying on the generosity of its own taxpayers and the judgments of its state legislators to supply adequate funding and flexibility to move their initiatives forward.

### ***Implications and Conclusions***

Two sets of implications emerge from the study. The first is directed towards the new education advocacy organizations themselves who are working across the country and the second addresses foundation leaders that see these groups as potentially valuable recipients for their giving.

We encourage *new education advocacy organizations* to attend to the following five issues as they develop their advocacy agendas:

- the distinction between policy development and policy implementation, and the need to be attentive to both;
- the potential virtues of working with traditional groups and institutions, such as state education agencies, union affiliates, or management groups;
- the degree to which they might pursue elite-level strategies that focus on state leaders or mass-level strategies that mobilize local leaders or individuals;
- the need to think through the timing of their proposals so that local districts are not overwhelmed with too many initiatives at once; and
- the issue of constructing their own identities while still developing network partnerships with other new and traditional education advocacy groups.

We encourage *foundations* considering supporting new education advocacy organizations to attend to the following five issues:

- the methods and metrics used to measure performance of new education advocacy organizations;
- the degree to which foundation grants should support narrow or broad objectives;
- the virtues of considering grant strategies that simultaneously engage state-level policy development and local-level implementation so that useful models can eventually be brought to scale;
- the degree to which state enabling conditions, including the political environment, should be used as criteria to evaluate the merits of supporting new education advocacy organizations; and
- the implications for state capacity building that might unfold due to grant awards to new education advocacy organizations.

Our charge in conducting this analysis was to assess the work of new education advocacy organizations and to describe their basic features, examine how they have contributed to state policy discussions and agendas, attempt to discern the factors that help to explain their track records, and then to conclude by offering advice to new education advocates themselves and to their potential foundation supporters. The evidence shows that the new education advocacy organizations are making increasing contributions to state-level discussions and policy.

An important issue beyond the scope of our study is the degree to which new education advocacy organizations have advanced agendas that are likely to best address the challenges facing the nation's education system, which broadly focus on promoting educational equity and excellence. This larger issue is vital for education observers, policymakers, and advocates to consider. New education advocacy organizations ultimately will prove their value not simply by offering something new or different, but by showing that their preferred policies produce more success than the alternatives.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research questions

Pressure to improve education has built across the United States for at least three decades. Debates about the quality American public schools are myriad, often focusing on student achievement and persistent achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Not surprisingly, the factors contributing to student success, such as conditions in students' homes and neighborhoods, teacher and principal quality, resources, government policy, and others have received close scrutiny. Related challenges that book-end the nation's K-12 system also have gained attention. These are the need for children, especially disadvantaged ones, to have excellent pre-school experiences and the subsequent post-secondary need to ensure that students begin college prepared to learn and then finish with a degree but without oppressive debt.<sup>1</sup>

The state policy processes that attempt to address challenges such as student achievement, educator quality, equity, and system capacity presently are in transition. Historically, state-level conversations about these matters tended to involve well-established institutions such as legislative committees, governors' offices, state courts, and relevant state government organizations, in particular K-12 education agencies and boards of education. Seeking to influence these institutions were local school district leaders and personnel, including the management organizations representing the perspectives of principals, school boards, and superintendents, and teacher union affiliates. State policy initiatives and priorities typically would emerge as individuals from these groups inside and outside government traded ideas and debated alternatives.<sup>2</sup>

Today, the state education policy landscape involves additional actors and interests who are relatively new to the scene compared with the more traditional players. During the last decade, especially, new education advocacy organizations, often with comprehensive agendas but without formal members, have emerged in the states and strived to offer new perspectives. These groups have tended to embrace education reform proposals centered around accountability, educator quality, data transparency, and choice, however, variation exists in their advocacy and engagement strategies across states.

We use multiple sources of evidence and rigorous, systematic methods to provide two vantage points on new education advocacy organizations.<sup>3</sup> A high-altitude view summarizes conditions across the U.S. states, and an in-depth case study of Advance Illinois, a new education advocacy organization operating to influence debates and policy in the Land of Lincoln, provides a detailed perspective. A framework grounded in the concept of "policy entrepreneurship" informs our examination of the following research questions.

- What are the characteristics of new education advocacy organizations, including their basic organizational features and priorities?
- How have new education advocacy organizations contributed to public discussions and education policy agendas in states?
- What factors help to explain the track records of new education advocacy organizations?
- What does the evidence suggest for new education advocacy organizations themselves as they attempt to refine their work, and for foundations making decisions about supporting their efforts?

- What are some of the potential broader implications of the work of new education advocacy organizations on the prospects for improving education in the United States?

### ***1.2. The critical role of states in education***

Our focus on state-level dynamics and policy is important given the increasingly critical roles that states play in elementary and secondary education. Federal policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) or Race to the Top (RTTT) often gain much attention, as do charismatic and sometimes controversial local education officials who work in urban areas with huge media markets. In contrast, unless embroiled in controversy, state leaders generally operate under dimmer spotlights, despite the important roles that these leaders and their initiatives play in the nation's schools.

Although federal interest and involvement in education have expanded, the federal government remains a fundamentally weak player in the education policy arena given its distance from ground-level actors, the small fraction of money it contributes to the nation's schools, and hesitance from politicians and citizens alike for a more muscular federal role. Most important, perhaps, is that federal leaders rely heavily on state governments to administer federal programs and align them with on-going state initiatives. What federal policy like NCLB or RTTT creates, then, is not an orderly national system of education, but rather 50 different systems that emerge from state capitals across the country and then are carried out with local adaptations in the nation's nearly 14,000 school districts. State efforts are crucial for filling out the details of federal policy and supporting local implementation.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, one should remember that while the nation's K-12 education system is fragmented, diverse, and organized around local control, school districts are agents of state governments. That means the states may create, consolidate, and even abolish them, influence their ability to raise and spend revenues, and develop policies or regulations that both enable and constrain how they respond to federal mandates. Since the early 1990s, especially, states have made aggressive moves to develop standards and accountability systems for their schools, which today have evolved with the emergence of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (henceforth, "Common Core").<sup>5</sup>

Leaders of new education advocacy organizations have recognized the pivotal role of state governments. Studying how these new education advocates have emerged and contributed to state policy debates is therefore important, especially as state decisions involve higher stakes and new diverse forms of advocacy become more widespread. As one of our interview respondents noted, new education advocacy organizations largely have been an overlooked part of the policy ecosystem. Our work, then, not only helps bring needed attention to the states themselves, but also to this relatively understudied actor in state policy arenas.

### ***1.3. Policy entrepreneurship***

Seeing new education advocacy organizations as "policy entrepreneurs" is a useful way to conceptualize their work.<sup>6</sup> Although specific definitions vary, researchers generally consider policy entrepreneurs to be engaged participants in the policy process who operate inside or outside government and work doggedly to advance their priorities.

Michael Mintrom has used the case of education to develop a general framework that describes what successful policy entrepreneurs do. Before considering the dimensions of the framework, an important clarification is in order. Readers should not misinterpret the policy entrepreneur concept to mean that such individuals necessarily prefer market or market-like solutions to the nation's educational challenges, an idea that the word "entrepreneur" might imply. The framework is agnostic about the types of policies that advocates could pursue. Policy entrepreneurs can embrace agendas that involve assertive government action, more market-oriented perspectives, or something in between.<sup>7</sup>

The framework that Mintrom proposes contains these six key elements, which define the behaviors of successful policy entrepreneurs.<sup>8</sup> Successes tend to emerge when policy entrepreneurs are:

- *creative and insightful*, which means they offer novel ways of discussing policy challenges that help others to see potential problems with current practices as well as possible future solutions;
- *socially perceptive*, which allows them to see issues from multiple perspectives, even as they develop and carve out their own preferred policy agendas;
- *nimble by mixing in a variety of social and political settings* to find and build bridges to potential allies, while also engaging potential critics to better understand their perspectives and possibly persuade them to see issues in a different way;
- *persuasive advocates* that offer an overall general message that is consistent and compelling, while also crafting their arguments in ways that connect to the more specific needs of particular groups or individuals;
- *strategic team builders* that understand how to help foster coalitions that will have high chances of working together to move policy in the direction that the policy entrepreneur prefers; and finally
- *prepared to lead by example* by signaling their strong commitment to the arguments, proposals, and to the coalitions that they attempt to help build.

Although the concept of policy entrepreneurship may be less familiar than more common terms such as "interest group" or "organized interest," we find Mintrom's notion especially useful for three main reasons. First, the lens of policy entrepreneurship helps to focus one's attention not only on the topics that new education advocates might support—their "interests," one could say—but also on how they attempt to advance their ideas via entrepreneurial actions. Second, the term "interest group" can lead readers to think narrowly in terms of groups that serve individuals who are formal dues-paying members that sustain the group's activities and who influence how it is governed. As our evidence will show, however, new education advocacy organizations often lack formal members so thinking of them in this way would mischaracterize numerous groups that operate. Third, Mintrom's approach provides a particularly good descriptive lens given that people working for new education advocacy organizations commonly attempt to construct their work around the different dimensions of the framework. The notion of policy entrepreneurship, then, can help one describe and evaluate the work that new education advocacy groups perform. By itself, the more generic term "interest group" provides less specific guidance.

## **Chapter 2. National Snapshot of the New Education Advocacy**

### ***2.1. Conceptualizing new education advocacy organizations***

Even though a long literature exists on policy advocacy, including studies of lobbying, interest groups, and the aforementioned works on policy entrepreneurship, academic studies of new education advocacy organizations do not exist.<sup>9</sup> We identify these groups as “new education advocacy organizations” to contrast them with more traditional education advocacy groups, such as teacher unions and membership organizations that represent principals, school districts, and school boards that have operated in some form since the early to mid-1900s. The groups in our study have tended to emerge within the last two decades. Some writers have characterized such groups as “education reform advocacy organizations.”<sup>10</sup> We prefer the term “new education advocacy organizations” because education organizations of all types, including traditional groups, frequently propose reforms to current policy and practice. Reform, per se, is not what differentiates these groups from one another.<sup>11</sup> Distinguishing between “new” and “traditional” education advocacy organizations is a better, more neutral summary and also signals that, in a chronological sense, these groups have become active more recently than the traditional groups representing teachers, administrators, and school districts.<sup>12</sup>

Operationally, new and traditional education advocacy organizations tend to differ in two main respects. First, as we alluded to above, the new education advocates usually do not have large membership rolls drawn from the ranks of people who are employed by or are elected to serve in traditional school districts. Some do not even have formal members beyond individuals who might be signed up to receive informational items, such as a regular email update. Among the new education advocates that do operate as membership organizations, these groups tend to recruit into their ranks parents or business leaders who may have some interest in education but do not necessarily work for schools or school districts. A second related difference is that the new education advocacy organizations tend to be financially supported either completely or in large part by foundation grants and donations from individual contributors rather than membership dues.

Variation also exists among the new education advocates themselves. As evidence of this variation consider first members of the Policy Innovators in Education (PIE) Network, comprised of 45 organizations spread across 28 states and Washington, DC. The PIE Network was a project launched in 2007 with the support of four national organizations ranging across the political spectrum.<sup>13</sup> In 2011 it became a stand-alone non-profit organization with a goal of helping new education advocacy organizations to advance their reform agendas.<sup>14</sup> PIE Network members consider multiple issues within the broad field of education policy and are not single-issue groups. They embrace a common interest in holding overseers of the education system accountable for their work, rather than delivering specific services or products to schools, such as curriculum materials or professional development opportunities, nor do they engage in partisan political activities, although two of the PIE Network’s advocacy partners (technically not members of the network) are Democrats for Education Reform and Stand for Children, which do contribute funds to political campaigns.<sup>15</sup> Our interview respondents and written documents describing PIE Network members reveal that they see their work contrasting with other traditional advocacy organizations that either represent groups working within schools and school systems, or groups that operate on the periphery of state legislative and regulatory debates.

Other versions of new education advocacy also exist. Some advocates focus much energy on the ground to mobilize parents or other citizens, but may engage less in the state legislative process via the crafting of white papers or lobbying. A different version, still, involves more limited forms of direct advocacy with politicians or state agencies, and a more robust effort to synthesize or produce original research, as in a think-tank-type setting. Advocacy from those groups may primarily involve producing ideas and then presenting them in occasional meetings with government officials, interviews with the media, and conferences or smaller events. But such groups may avoid the rough and tumble of the legislative and the regulatory process, arenas where PIE Network members and other new education advocates engage.

This study considers new education advocacy organizations across these different types, which means that our definition of advocacy is broader than other researchers or advocates themselves might use. Because there exists no national registry of new education advocacy organizations, our analysis is based on a convenient sample of 62 groups that we identified by drawing on our own working knowledge of these groups based on prior research, references to such groups in articles and reports, and suggestions from others. We proceed by describing these groups' organizational characteristics and issue priorities, and then we use the policy entrepreneur framework to offer some conclusions about their activities.

## ***2.2. Organizational characteristics***

We begin by noting two broad categories of new education advocacy organizations. The first are groups that operate as stand-alone entities within individual states. The second are affiliates of larger national organizations. The three largest such national networks in our analysis are Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), Stand for Children, and the 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now (50CAN) network, which operate in 13, 11, and 8 states, respectively.<sup>16</sup> 50CAN technically has 7 affiliates, but we include another group in the total, ConnCAN, because it participates in its network and helped to launch the CAN movement, even though it is organizationally independent.

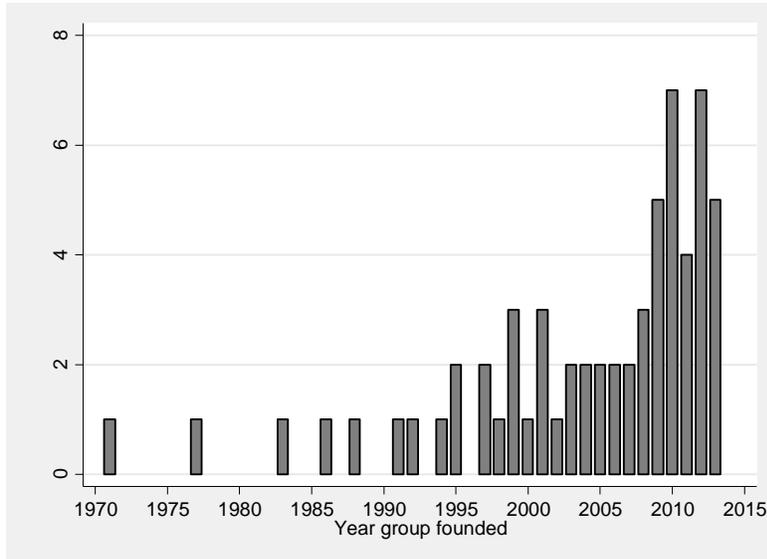
Among those three national organizations, Stand for Children is the oldest, having been founded in 1996, DFER was founded in 2007, and 50CAN in 2010. (ConnCAN was founded in 2005.) Although we consider DFER a new education advocacy organization, unlike most other groups in our data base, DFER is not a non-profit 501(c)(3), but instead is a Political Action Committee (PAC). Stand for Children operates a PAC as well, but that is in addition to another part of its organization, the Stand for Children Leadership Center, that is a 501(c)(3).

**2.2.1. Founding year.** Figure 1 notes the year that the groups in our database were founded. The figure suggests that the total number of groups has expanded rapidly since 2000. Still, some new education advocates have longer histories, including two groups founded in the 1970s in California (Public Advocates, 1971; EdSource, 1977) and three more in the 1980s in Kentucky (Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, 1983), North Carolina (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 1986), and Massachusetts (Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, 1988). As part A of Figure 1 shows, 10 groups, including the first Stand for Children affiliate (Tennessee, 1996), were founded in the 1990s, and the remaining groups were founded

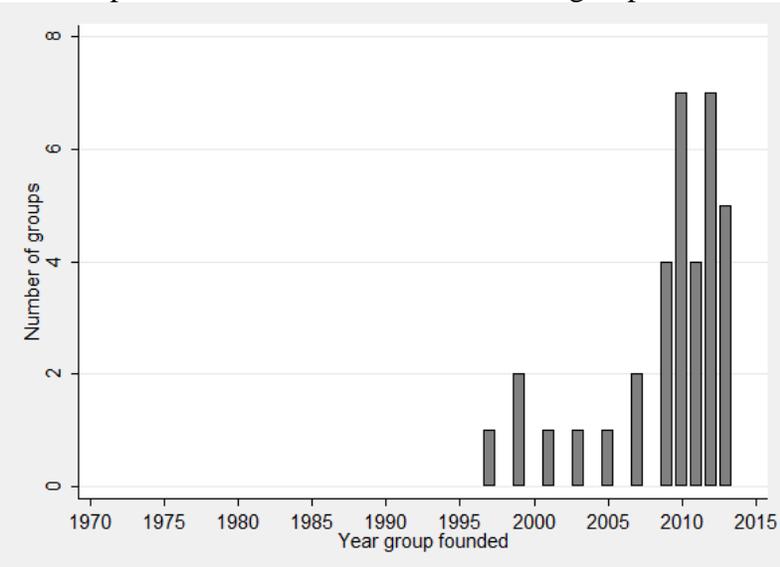
during or after the year 2000. The vast majority of the state affiliates of national groups have emerged within the last five years, as illustrated in part B of Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Founding year of new education advocacy organizations`

A. All groups



B. Groups that are affiliated with a national group

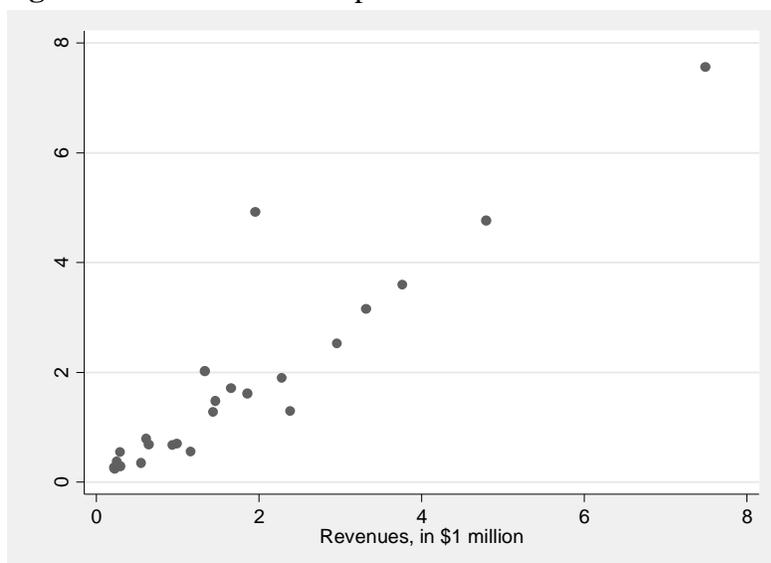


Note: N=62 for part A, which includes all groups in our database. N=35 for part B, which only considers groups that are state affiliates of national groups. A complete list of all groups appears in the Appendix. Results are based on data collected as of August 2013.

An alternative explanation for the results in Figure 1 is that many more new education advocacy organizations could have existed prior to the 1990s, yet simply have disbanded or been absorbed into other organizations. Without a consistent census of these groups going back multiple decades it is impossible to know for sure. The secondary literature on these groups does suggest an uptick in their work in more recent years.<sup>17</sup>

**2.2.2. Finances.** Next we consider group finances, which include measures of group revenues and expenditures. Figure 2 reports organizational revenues and expenses for 2011. These data come from the groups' filings of IRS 990 forms. Gathering data from that source ensures accuracy and comparability. It also limits the sample given that not all groups in our database complete these forms because either they are not a 501(c)(3) organization and therefore are not required to file the form, or because another group is their fiscal agent and that group files it. Among the 25 groups for which data are available, well over half are concentrated in the lower left corner of Figure 2 with operating expenses and revenues both hovering at or below the \$2 million range for 2011. (The outlier to the right is Mass Insight Education, which operates in Massachusetts.) As one might expect, the plot contains an upward-sloping pattern as groups with higher revenues tend to have more expenses.

**Figure 2.** Revenues and expenses of new education advocacy organizations, 2011



Note: N=25. Data come from group filings of IRS 990 forms. Not all groups in our database are required to complete those forms, which is why the N size is much lower than in Figure 1.

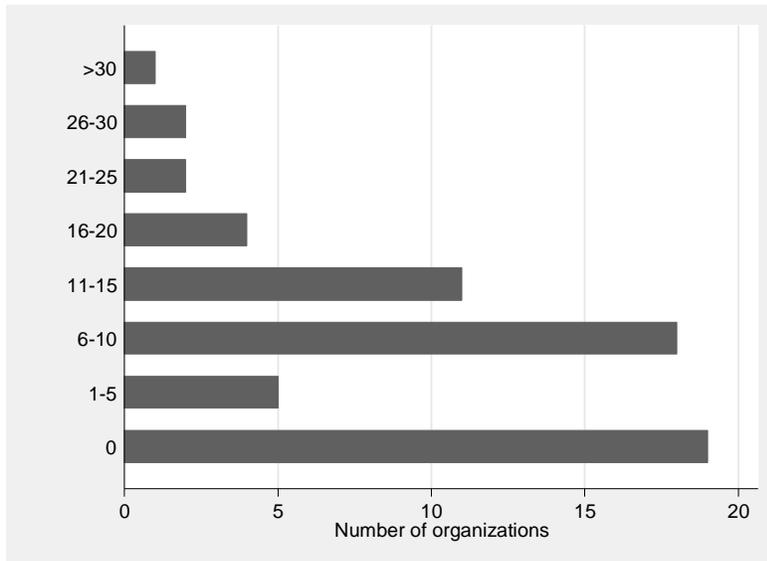
Determining the source of funds for new education advocacy organizations is more difficult because IRS 990 forms do not require individual sources to be listed and groups inconsistently report this information on their websites. Using information that was available provides at least an initial look at these organizations' revenue streams. Among the 19 groups that describe themselves on their websites as receiving foundation support, 14 received some funding from at least one of the nation's top 15 foundations that contribute to the cause of K-12 education.<sup>18</sup> We coded 7 groups as receiving funding from the largest K-12 foundation giver, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. While these results show that large national foundations appeared interested in the work of new education advocacy organizations, these groups also rely on smaller state and local foundations, which appeared among names of foundation contributors.

Some new education advocacy organizations enable individuals to contribute financially to support their work. To gauge this mechanism for fundraising we examined whether new education advocates had a “donate now” button or similar link on their websites. The results show that among the 62 groups we examined, 75.8 percent invite such donations. The distinction we made earlier between stand-alone groups and state affiliates of national organizations is important here. Among the stand-alone groups, 48.1 percent had a donate option, while 97.1 percent of the state affiliates of national organizations did.

**2.2.3. Board members.** We noted earlier that more traditional education advocacy groups tend to have formal members, including teachers, school boards, superintendents, and principals, among others, whereas new education advocacy organizations typically do not. A membership base makes it relatively straightforward to grasp the set of interests that the traditional groups likely represent because they offer policy agendas that their members have endorsed. In contrast, new education advocacy organizations typically lack formal members and are not always transparent about their funding sources, so it can be more difficult to easily identify the inspiration behind their agendas.

Lacking the signals that formal memberships can transmit about a group, we examined the characteristics of board members of the new education advocacy organizations as a way to identify the broad sets of interests informing their work. Figure 3 provides information on the size of these organizations’ boards, which some groups refer to as a “board of directors” and some as “advisory boards.” It is quite common for new education advocacy organizations to

**Figure 3.** Number of board members for new education advocacy organizations, 2013



Note: N=62. We relied on board member names appearing on organizational websites rather than board names appearing on the organization’s IRS 990 forms given that not all of the organizations in our database have filed 990s. That allowed us to increase the number of cases for this part of the analysis. Results are based on data collected as of August 2013.

have large boards, yet a little less than one third of the groups in our data base had 0 board members. Among the 19 groups with 0 board members, 8 are state affiliates of DFER, 5 are

state affiliates of Stand for Children, 4 others are state affiliates that have boards serving their national home office (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, The Education Trust, 50CAN) but not specific boards for these state affiliates. The two remaining groups in the 0 category are Educate Texas and EdVoice. In email exchanges with a few group leaders during summer 2013, we learned that some groups without board members are recruiting people to serve but still need to constitute the board. This detail attests to the burgeoning efforts to start and expand these groups across the states. More groups have emerged even in the relatively brief period since we began our research in May 2013, and current groups have seen changes in their board composition since then, too.

We further examined the perspectives of board members by considering their personal backgrounds and their patterns of political giving. These characteristics help reveal the degree to which these individuals tend to bring professional and political diversity to the boards on which they serve, or whether they seem to represent a more narrow set of perspectives. Such features can be important, as prior literature on descriptive representation in the policy process has documented.<sup>19</sup> Background information came from board member biographies, typically short narrative paragraphs, and from patterns of political giving available through the on-line database OpenSecrets.org, which tracks political contributions to candidates for federal office, political party organizations, and PACs. More details on the strengths and weaknesses of these data sources and how we used them appear in the Appendix.

Table 1 summarizes our findings from board member biographies. Part A of the table shows that new education advocacy organizations tend to provide minimal information on their board members' backgrounds. Among the 477 board members we identified across the groups we studied, 27.7 percent had biographies posted on the website of the new education advocacy organization that they oversee. Further searching on-line did enable us to find brief biographies of 62.7 percent of the other board members yet we failed to locate biographical information for the remaining 9.6 percent.

Considering the 431 board members for whom we identified biographical information, the bios revealed that these leaders bring multiple experiences to their organizations. Numerous members had prior experience in education in some capacity, with the most common experiences being work at the university level as a faculty member or administrator (18.6 percent of board members), classroom teaching (13.0 percent), education research or consulting (9.7 percent) and school or school district administration (9.3 percent). Outside of education, 54.5 percent had experience in business, and 29.2 percent had been involved in politics, either as an elected official, a staff member to a politician or a political appointee. Where we could find evidence in the biographies of past work in partisan politics, the results were evenly split between the two major parties. We found that 13.5 percent of board members had some experience with the Democratic Party and the same percentage had that experience with the Republican Party.

**Table 1.** Prior experience and affiliations in board members' biographies

Category	Percent
A. Board members (N=477)	
Biography available from new education advocacy group	27.7
Biography available from another source	62.7
Unable to find biography	9.6
B. Board members with biography available (N=431)	
B1. Experience in education	
Higher education faculty or administration	18.6
Teaching (includes Teach for America teachers)	13.0
Education research or consulting	9.7
School or school district administration	9.3
School choice work or advocacy	6.0
Local board of education	3.7
Education membership organization	3.0
State board of education	2.8
State education agency	2.6
Teach for America board or administrative role	2.1
Teach for America teacher (also in Teaching category)	1.4
Federal education agency	0.9
B2. Other experience	
Business	54.5
Politics (elected official or staff)	29.2
Elected official at local, state, federal level	13.7
B3. Party affiliation	
Democratic Party affiliation	13.5
Republican Party affiliation	13.5

Note: Data come from authors' coding of board member biographies, which were gathered between September 2013 and January 2014. In the Part B results, board members could be coded into multiple categories if their experience reflected work across the areas appearing in the table.

The partisan story becomes more nuanced in Table 2, which examines board members' campaign contributions during the 2012 federal election cycle using data collected by OpenSecrets.org. Based on these results, Republicans appear to hold an advantage regarding the number and value of the contributions from these board members. Among the 477 board members in our database, we identified 36.3 percent, or 173 total, as having made at least one contribution to a candidate or group. Using the OpenSecrets.org database we could not confirm that the other 63.7 percent made any contributions. As part A of Table 2 shows, in sum we identified 1,238 contributions totaling \$2,722,618.

**Table 2.** Summary of campaign contributions by board members, 2012 federal election cycle

Target of contribution	Board members contributing (%)	Number of contributions	Value of contributions (\$)	Median contribution (\$)
A. Board members (N=477)				
Any target	36.3	1,238	2,722,618	1,000
No contribution identified	63.7	n/a	n/a	n/a
B. Among board members who contributed (N=173)				
B1. Contribution to Democrat				
Democratic candidates	58.4	409	400,872	500
Democratic groups	16.1	93	285,511	1,000
B2. Contribution to Republican				
Republican candidates	49.1	434	632,588	1,000
Republican groups	22.0	135	1,060,625	4,175
B3. Group without party label				
	21.4	167	343,022	346

Note: "n/a" = not applicable. The sum of the candidate and group percentages in the first column do not equal the overall party percentages, nor do the percentages in B1, B2 and B3 sum to 100 percent because board members could contribute to candidates and groups across both parties. Data were collected from OpenSecrets.org from October to December 2013 and cover the 2012 federal election cycle.

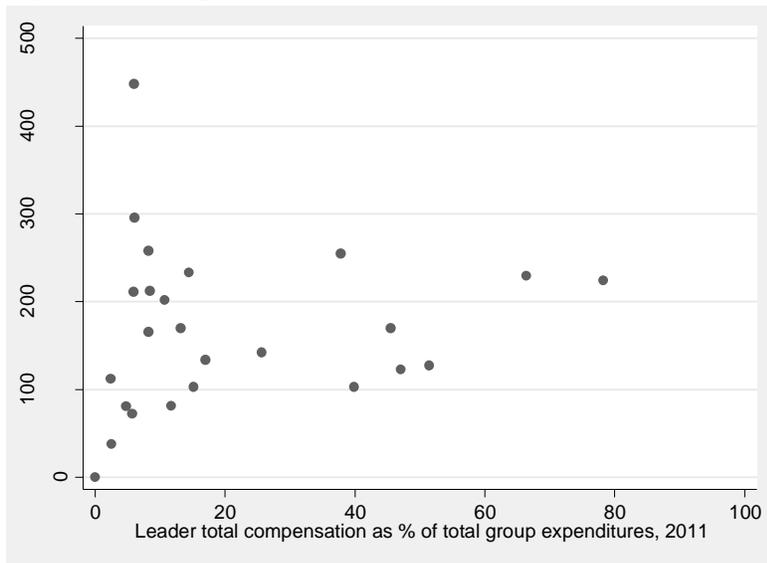
Part B of Table 2 breaks down contributions by party affiliation and target. Although a higher percentage of board members contributed to Democratic causes (60.1 percent) than Republican ones (49.7 percent), the weight of giving heavily favored Republican candidates or groups. As part B1 and B2 show, among the 1,238 contributions we identified, Democrats received 502, Republicans received 569, and groups without a clear party affiliation received 167. Regarding the dollar value of these contributions, Republicans possessed more than a 2 to 1 advantage over Democrats. Democratic candidates and groups received \$686,383 with the median contribution being \$700, whereas Republican candidates and groups received \$1,693,213 with much higher median contribution of \$2,500. Part B3 shows that groups without a clear partisan affiliation received \$343,022 in contributions with a median contribution of \$346.

**2.2.4. Leadership.** In addition to board members, we examined background characteristics of the operational leaders of the new education advocacy organizations. The individuals identified as the leader for each group typically had job titles such as “executive director” or “president and chief executive officer.” We identified these individuals using the organizations’ websites and IRS 990 forms, where available. The IRS 990 forms provided us with information about compensation. Nearly all the websites provided leader biographies that we coded to examine the leaders’ prior experiences. When the new education advocacy organization failed to provide a leader biography, as in our analysis of board members, we searched on-line to identify biographical information from another organization.

Data on leader compensation appear in Figure 4. The scatterplot presents the leader’s total compensation package for 2011 (vertical axis) and the percent of total group expenditures that go towards compensating the leader (horizontal axis). The results show some variation in leader compensation with the bulk of the compensation packages hovering around the \$100 to \$200 thousand range. In the majority of these organizations, leader compensation appears to be a relatively low fraction of the organization’s overall spending. In only 8 out of 25 groups do we see leader compensation exceeding 20 percent of total group expenditures.

Much like our examination of board members, we also coded leader biographies to identify these leaders’ prior experiences and affiliations. We also explored leader campaign contributions, but because we could identify so few leaders in the OpenSecrets.org database, we focused on the biographies instead. Table 3 reports the results, which reveal some parallels and contrasts with the board member backgrounds in Table 2. Like the board members, the leaders of new education advocacy organizations, as a group, bring a diverse range of experiences to their jobs, including work in traditional and less traditional sectors of education. As part B1 of Table 3 shows, 31.1 percent have been classroom teachers, 16.4 percent worked in school or school district administration, and 9.8 percent had experience working for groups representing more traditional educational interests, such as teacher unions or school district management organizations (e.g., school board groups, superintendent groups and the like). Prior work in areas or organizations that are more non-traditional appeared as well, with 27.9 percent doing advocacy or other work to promote school choice (e.g., charter schools or vouchers), 9.8 percent having been a Teach for America teacher, and another 8.2 percent working in an administrative role for Teach for America.

**Figure 4.** Compensation of leaders of new education advocacy organizations, 2011



Note: N=25. Data come from group filings of IRS 990 forms. Not all groups in our database are required to complete those forms, which is why the N size is much lower than in Figure 1.

Considering other experience and party affiliations we see additional leader characteristics as well. Given the nature of advocacy work, as part B2 shows, it is perhaps not surprising that group leaders had much prior experience in the non-profit sector (60.7 percent of leaders), politics (54.1 percent), and advocacy or lobbying (32.8 percent). Finally, the results on partisanship, appearing in part B3 of Table 3, show a tilt toward the Democratic Party, with 26.2 percent of leaders having some evidence of prior work with Democrats, whereas the evidence showed half as many, 13.1 percent, having done work affiliated with the Republican Party.

Finally, in part C of Table 3 we note the leaders' formal academic training. The results show that 76.6 percent had graduate training of some sort with most stopping at the Master's degree level. Those holding master's degrees or doctoral degrees tended to complete programs in social science fields or in education.

**2.2.5. Staffing.** The last organizational characteristic we considered was staffing. Results appear in Figure 5. Two findings stand out in part A, which considers all groups. First, the modal category is for these groups to have only 1 staff member. Second, beyond those groups, the number of staff varied widely. Some slight clustering appears in a few spots on the figure (around 4, 8, and 12 staff members), but clear patterns are not apparent, suggesting that new education advocacy organizations have adopted diverse staffing models with some perhaps still in development. Part B helps to clarify the results by focusing only on the groups that are state affiliates of national organizations. Here we see that the groups with only a single staff

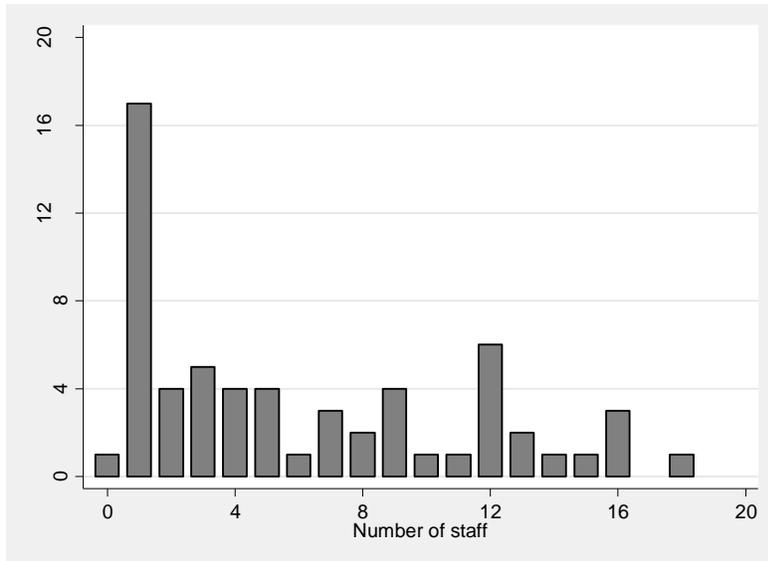
**Table 3.** Prior experience and affiliations in leader biographies

Category	Percent
A. Leaders (N=61)	
Biography available from new education advocacy group	93.4
Biography available from another source	6.6
B. Leader experiences (N=61)	
B1. Experience in education	
Teaching (includes Teach for America teachers)	31.1
Choice work or advocacy	27.9
Education research or consulting	18.0
School or school district administration	16.4
Teach for America teacher (also in Teaching category)	9.8
Traditional education group (e.g., union, management group)	9.8
State education agency or state board of education	8.2
Teach for America administrative role	8.2
Federal education agency	4.9
B2. Other work experience	
Non-profit sector (may include education non-profits)	60.7
Politics (elected official or staff)	54.1
Policy areas other than education	45.9
Advocacy or lobbying	32.8
Business	24.6
Law	6.6
B3. Party affiliation	
Democratic Party affiliation	26.2
Republican Party affiliation	13.1
C. Academic training (N=47)	
Any graduate degree	76.6
Master's degree (any field)	53.2
J.D.	19.1
Ph.D. (any field)	10.6
Ed.D.	4.2

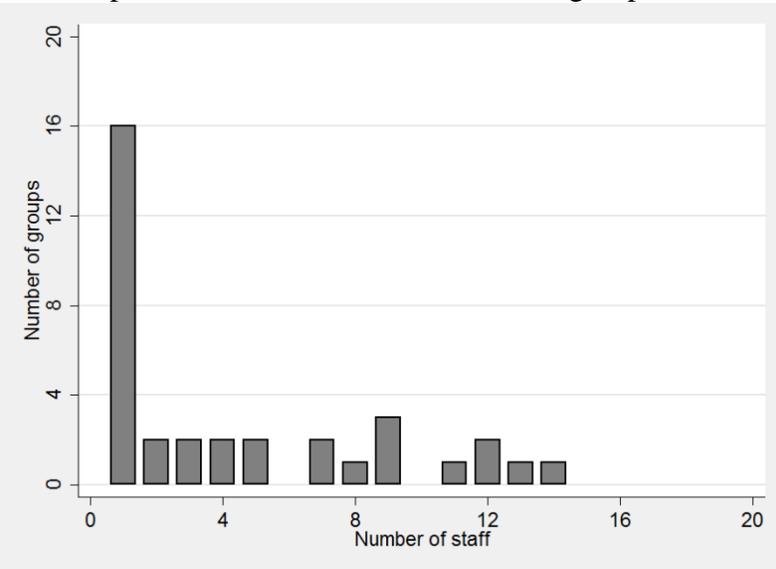
Note: N=61 in this table, but N=62 in Figures 1 and 3. The discrepancy exists because one group's leader position was vacant when we did our coding. Leaders could be coded into multiple categories based on their experience, which is why the columns in each part do not necessarily sum to 100 percent. Data come from coding of leader biographies, which we gathered during July and August of 2013.

**Figure 5.** New education advocacy organizations’ staff members, 2013

A. All groups



B. Groups that are affiliated with a national group



Note: N=62 in part A and N=35 in part B. Results reflect data as of August 2013 and come from a count of staff listed on organization websites. We relied on websites rather than staff counts appearing on the organizations’ IRS 990 forms given that not all of the organizations in our database have filed 990s. That allowed us to increase the number of cases for this part of the analysis. The total number of staff includes the group leader. In order to improve the visual presentation, part A omits the group Mass Insight Education, which reports 52 total staff. Among those 52 staff members, 8 serve as core staff for the overall organization, 16 work on the Mass Math & Science Initiative, and 29, which includes one core staff member, work on the School Turnaround Group.

member come overwhelmingly from that subset. Among the 17 groups identified in part A that have only a single staff member, part B shows that 16 of them are state affiliates of a national group with 11 being DFER affiliates and 5 being 50CAN affiliates.

### **2.3. Issue priorities**

In addition to group characteristics, we also examined the issues that new education advocacy organizations have explored.<sup>20</sup> Due to the number of groups in our database and the number of issues they address, a detailed systematic coding of documents or prior work was not possible. Instead, we have briefly examined the groups' work by considering three topics. First, we discuss the groups' mission statements, which provide a limited but interesting high-altitude look at their general focus. Second, we consider the topics explored by the national offices of groups that have state affiliates, using the national groups' descriptions of their policy priorities, goals, and accomplishments. Third, we drew from our database a random sample of 5 groups that are not state affiliates of national organizations and used those groups' descriptions of their priorities, goals, and accomplishments, as well as their published reports and state-level media coverage of them, to begin understanding their work. Additional more systematic study of all these groups would be required to fully explore the substance of their efforts. For that reason we consider results in this section to be suggestive and instructive for future researchers.

**2.3.1. Mission statements.** Unsurprisingly, most of the groups' mission statements suggest a focus on broad goals, encompassing numerous facets of education policy. Many groups refer to the general aims of improving student achievement and increasing the quality of their states' education systems.<sup>21</sup> Another common theme is improving college and career readiness.<sup>22</sup> Many also mention a focus on the achievement gap and the imperative to address the specific needs of disadvantaged students.<sup>23</sup>

There are a handful of groups whose mission statements diverge slightly from these common themes. For example, a few groups mention more specialized issues. The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession and the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning focus on teaching strategies and practices, signaling an interest in professional development, likely reflecting a substantive difference between these two groups and others with a more general policy focus.<sup>24</sup> Other groups mention specific policy goals. Examples include a commitment to increasing funding or funding equity, accountability, and choice, perhaps reflecting a more definitive commitment to specific policy agendas.<sup>25</sup>

Two groups, Public Advocates and KidsOhio, mention issues that extend beyond K-12 education. Public Advocates focuses more broadly on "the systematic causes of poverty and racial discrimination" and addresses the issues of "housing and transit equity" as well as education. KidsOhio states that, in addition to a focus on public education, it works to improve health care and early childhood care. This group also distinguishes itself by mentioning a specific geographic focus on "Columbus and Central Ohio." These groups' mission statements suggest a broader advocacy focus, touching on multiple issues that contribute to students' well-being, which distinguishes them from the other groups in our database.

**2.3.2. National organizations with state affiliates.** The five national organizations with state affiliates that we examined (50CAN, DFER, Stand for Children, The Education Trust, and

the Thomas B. Fordham Institute) have policy portfolios that embrace wide-ranging topics. These organizations commonly address policies involving teachers including evaluation, hiring and firing practices, and teacher distribution. The Education Trust lists “supporting educators and promoting quality instruction” as one of six main components of its multi-pronged advocacy agenda. DFER supports “policies that allow school principals and their school communities to select their teams of educators, holding them accountable for student performance but allowing them flexibility to exercise sound, professional judgment.” All of Stand for Children’s recent state legislative victories included some component involving teacher policy, such as evaluation reforms. The groups also share a focus on policies involving standards, testing, and accountability. These issues feature prominently in the groups’ policy priorities, reports, and advocacy efforts. For example, these groups have tried to increase awareness about the Common Core through publications, blog posts, and other outreach methods. Multiple groups have addressed school choice as an issue<sup>26</sup> with the Thomas B. Fordham Institute as the most committed to that policy. It advocates for “a lively, accessible marketplace of high-quality education options,” including “charter schools, magnet schools, voucher programs, and online courses.” Further, its state affiliate is a charter school authorizer in Ohio. In comparison, such a broad endorsement of choice appears to be a lower overall priority for the other groups, although DFER, Stand for Children, and 50CAN have been charter school advocates.

Other issues, which orbit the theme of equity, also emerge. Some national groups have addressed school funding as a main concern. The topic of “fiscal equity and comparability” features prominently on The Education Trust’s advocacy agenda and in its reports, while Stand for Children’s policy manifesto, “What We Stand For,” cites “sufficient funding, spent wisely” as an essential guideline for policy success. More evidence of the equity theme includes discussion of higher education affordability, the needs of English-language learners, and special education. Cutting across many of these topics and those mentioned in the prior paragraph is more general support for school information and data transparency, and the need for education governance reform.

The remaining paragraphs in this section summarize the work of 5 new education advocacy organizations that are not state affiliates of a national group: the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, the Texas Institute for Education Reform, Mass Insight Education, and DC School Reform Now. Among these groups only Mass Insight Education is not a PIE Network member, which was discussed earlier. We intend the following summaries to be illustrative to help readers begin to see more concretely what these groups do. The anecdotal discussion that follows reveals some issue themes common across all groups, and some more particular to individual states. They also begin to show how advocacy work assumes different forms across the country. In particular, we discuss for each group the main topics that they address, the venues in which they perform their advocacy work, and some illustrative criticisms that have emerged in response to their work.

**2.3.3. Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.**<sup>27</sup> The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education engages numerous education debates in its advocacy. The group has published reports about the Common Core, accountability models in education, school voucher programs, the effects of NCLB, and model school programs or initiatives. As evidence of the variety of issues the group addresses, the 2013 version of the group’s annual “Top 10 Issues to

Watch” report covers school turnarounds and School Improvement Grants, school funding, STEM education, early childhood education, school choice, and changing demographics in schools, among others.<sup>28</sup> The group has supported policy reforms in Georgia relating to early childhood education, school governance, and school funding.<sup>29</sup> Overall, it appears to take a holistic approach to education policy in Georgia. As part of its 20-year anniversary retrospective in 2012, the Partnership listed 12 of its major accomplishments, which help reveal its long-range priorities.<sup>30</sup> Many of these successes related to efforts to publicize education policy issues to the public, the media, future superintendents and legislators, business leaders, and other stakeholders, suggesting a main goal of providing information to diverse audiences.<sup>31</sup> Newspaper coverage of the organization reflects this goal. Local news outlets covered the release of the “Top 10 Issues to Watch” report,<sup>32</sup> reported on Partnership president Stephen Dolinger’s “Economics of Education” presentation to a local Chamber of Commerce,<sup>33</sup> and quoted Partnership policy and research director Dana Rickman<sup>34</sup> and Dolinger<sup>35</sup> in multiple stories about state education issues.

As examples of its successes, the Partnership has highlighted its role in running the Education Policy Fellowship Program, a professional development initiative for education leaders, funding the Next Generation School Project to “turn 51 local school systems into models of academic excellence,” and funding scholarships for teachers seeking National Board certification. The Partnership also emphasizes the success of its Bus Trip Across Georgia, which brings education leaders around the state to showcase successful schools, an event that receives local media coverage.<sup>36</sup> The group has listed successful advocacy for policy reforms as one of its accomplishments,<sup>37</sup> but this was only one accomplishment out of a dozen noted. In addition to positive press coverage, some reports have been more critical of the Partnership. These include stories that have criticized it for inconsistency by calling for new revenues for education without also supporting a tax increase,<sup>38</sup> and for highlighting in its Bus Trip Across Georgia a school that had been involved in the Atlanta cheating scandal.<sup>39</sup>

**2.3.4. Rodel Foundation of Delaware.**<sup>40</sup> The Rodel Foundation of Delaware has a broad focus on education policy. The group was involved in planning for Delaware’s comprehensive Vision 2015 plan, which helped the state become one of two winners in Phase 1 of the RTTT competition. The Foundation continues to serve on the Implementation Team of Vision 2015. It also was part of the partnership that developed the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System, the state’s current assessment. While the group’s involvement in these initiatives would suggest a comprehensive approach, it does highlight a few issues in its advocacy.<sup>41</sup> One key area is teacher training and teacher effectiveness policy, indicated by the group’s advocacy for alternative certification programs and support for strengthening Delaware’s teacher evaluation system. The Foundation also has supported personalized learning, spreading information about best practices in this area and highlighting model classrooms and schools. Additionally, it has addressed early childhood education through its involvement in Delaware’s Early Learning Challenge Race to the Top application, the state’s kindergarten readiness survey, and efforts to rate and improve the quality of early learning programs. The Foundation has recently been supporting the Common Core in Delaware.

In describing its impacts, the group cites its provision of seed funding to “innovative, high-impact programs”—the Vision Network of Delaware, Innovative Schools, Teach for

America-Delaware, and the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System—indicating a wide-ranging focus on many issues including standards, assessments, and teacher training.<sup>42</sup> On the group’s blog, it cites praise from Marc Magee, president and founder of 50CAN, stating that he used the Rodel Foundation (along with Tennessee SCORE) as a model as he launched his own advocacy group.<sup>43</sup> The Foundation’s impact has produced some scrutiny, including claims in one source that the group is too closely tied to wealthy donors and the state’s political establishment, including the governor.<sup>44</sup>

**2.3.5. Texas Institute for Education Reform.**<sup>45</sup> Like other new education advocacy groups, the Texas Institute for Education Reform has pushed for changes to curriculum, proficiency standards, assessments, and the state’s accountability system, with several of the group’s reports examining these topics.<sup>46</sup> The organization has joined a coalition of business groups involved in a debate about the state’s assessment program, known as STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness), which has received significant coverage in local news outlets<sup>47</sup> and produced some controversy given what some reports suggested was the group’s inconsistent support for rigorous testing.<sup>48</sup> It also has focused on teacher policies, including preparation and certification, performance-based compensation, and contracts.

The group supports a general deregulation and decentralization of education policy to enhance authority at the district level. The group also has explored policies relating to competition in schooling, including expanded public school choice, transfers out of failing schools, and charter school authorization, authority, and funding, reflected by a recent debate in the state legislature where it expressed support for state-funded vouchers and expansion of charter schools.<sup>49</sup> Following this debate, state Democrats accused the group of supporting funding cuts for traditional public schools.<sup>50</sup> The group has focused on Texas’s “reading crisis” as a particularly important issue, supporting changes to teacher training, certification, and evaluation and revised reading standards to work towards higher reading proficiency.<sup>51</sup> Regarding tactics, whereas some other groups have engaged in more grassroots outreach efforts to educators and schools, its work appears to emphasize treetops advocacy designed to influence state leaders. State news coverage from 2012 and 2013 focused almost exclusively on the group’s state policy advocacy work.<sup>52</sup>

**2.3.6. Mass Insight Education.**<sup>53</sup> As the education policy landscape in Massachusetts has evolved, so has the work of Mass Insight Education. Around the time of the passage of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act in 1993, Mass Insight focused primarily on policies relating to standards, assessment, and accountability, first supplementing the early planning stages of the reform efforts and then working with policymakers and practitioners to build support for the state’s standards-based reform law and subsequent assessments.<sup>54</sup> In those debates, it sometimes received criticism regarding the state assessment.<sup>55</sup>

Following passage and early implementation of the state reforms, Mass Insight appears to have somewhat shifted to incorporate into its work some efforts to build school and district capacity, train teachers and principals, help districts win grants, and develop materials for use in the field. Recently, the group has begun emphasizing raising math and science achievement, college readiness, and the challenging area of school turnarounds, which sometimes has raised questions about the group’s effectiveness.<sup>56</sup> Mass Insight’s broad goals have manifested

themselves in two specific initiatives: (1) managing the Massachusetts Math and Science Initiative; and (2) developing strategies to turn around low-performing schools through the School Turnaround Group, which is a division of the organization. Recent news coverage of Mass Insight has reflected the emphasis on those initiatives. In particular, the Massachusetts Math and Science Initiative received frequent coverage in local news outlets in 2013.<sup>57</sup>

**2.3.7. DC School Reform Now.**<sup>58</sup> Based on the various projects and initiatives of DC School Reform Now, the group seems to be most focused on grassroots engagement by informing parents about school quality and education policy issues and encouraging them to be active in campaigns and debates over these issues.<sup>59</sup> Current work of the organization reflects this strategy. DC School Reform Now runs a High Quality Schools Campaign to “hel[p] parents identify and pursue quality education options for their children”<sup>60</sup> and it is launching a Parents for Quality Schools campaign to support parental efforts to improve neighborhood schools. The group also provides a variety of resources for parents.<sup>61</sup> DC School Reform Now lists five core policy beliefs that guide its work,<sup>62</sup> including two that center on teacher and leader quality, a common theme across the groups we examined. Much of the group’s work seems to focus on policies that attempt to identify and foster characteristics of effective teachers and principals. The group also cites equitable resource allocation as a core policy belief, indicating an interest in school finance. Further, the importance of accountability and the use of data to measure school performance are highlighted.

While not appearing as a core policy belief, the group’s materials indicate significant engagement with charter school policy (authorization, accountability, and so on), which makes sense given the prevalence of charters in the District of Columbia. That sort of choice advocacy sometimes has prompted criticism for the group in local press coverage of its efforts, especially among observers who were critical of former DC schools chancellor Michelle Rhee.<sup>63</sup>

#### **2.4. Overall observations**

Our national snapshot of new education advocacy organizations perhaps raises more interesting questions and potential lines of inquiry than it offers definitive conclusions. Without studying individual groups close up, as we do in subsequent sections for Advance Illinois, it is difficult to speak in much detail. Our goal here was not to provide a comprehensive audit of these groups’ activities, but to sketch in broad brushes their basic features and the ways that they present themselves to the public, elected officials, and other new and traditional education advocates. Given the high-stakes issues that these groups have addressed it is not surprising that while they have energized their supporters, simultaneously they have prompted critics that disagree with their preferred reform strategies.

Our broad overview strongly suggests that new education advocacy organizations have contributed to discussion of policy issues and the legislative and regulatory processes in states. The burgeoning number of these groups, which Figure 1 showed, reveals how individuals interested in agitating for policy change in education appear to have found new education advocacy organizations to be potentially useful vehicles for advancing their agendas. Relating our findings to Mintrom’s policy entrepreneur framework, three main conclusions emerge based on our high-altitude study of these groups.

First, there is interesting variation in how new education advocacy organizations appear to act as *strategic team builders*. DFER is the most narrow of the groups, it seems, given that it focuses on advocacy designed to benefit Democratic candidates for office. Compared to other groups, that partisan approach would limit its ability to engage other state actors that possess more diverse partisan or ideological perspectives. Further, the finding in Table 3 that group leaders tended to have backgrounds in nonprofit work, politics, or in prior advocacy work, also underscores the premium that they place on leveraging networks with other groups and strategically building coalitions. For some groups, the persuasiveness of their advocacy and the insights they offer have impressed state education agency leaders and led them to invite these groups to help design or manage major state initiatives, such as in Mass Insight Education's work on school turnarounds in Massachusetts.

Second, new education advocacy organizations also vary in their ability to *mix in a variety of social and political settings*. In the small sample of groups we briefly examined, the groups' time allocations suggest a preference for some settings over others. Some appeared to focus more heavily on treetops policy advocacy work, interacting mainly with decision-makers at the state level working on developing and passing legislation and crafting agency regulations. For example, newspaper accounts of work by the Texas Institute for Education Reform indicate a strong focus on state arenas, especially the state legislature. In contrast, other groups devoted time to outreach activities on the district or school level, sometimes even involving themselves in ground-level implementation of state or local initiatives. The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession and the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning appear to have that implementation focus. DC School Reform Now engages in a different type of ground-level approach, working directly with parents to try to empower them in local advocacy efforts to improve their children's schools. Stand for Children and its affiliates have a grassroots mobilizing component, but they also are aggressive advocates in treetops advocacy, a finding that our Advance Illinois case study will subsequently illustrate. In Massachusetts, Mass Insight Education appears to have developed great flexibility to operate in both state and local settings given its past work on that state's comprehensive reforms from the 1990s and its current work on teaching math and science, and on school turnarounds.

Finally, without deeper knowledge of the states in which these groups work, it is hard to specifically gauge the broader perceptions of their efforts, yet the evidence does offer insights about their ability to offer *creative and insightful* ideas that listeners find *persuasive*. Here it appears that in general these groups are not necessarily coming up with new ideas of their own because they seem to share many of the same issue priorities and reform preferences, which themselves carry much weight in national reform debates. For example, the topics of standards, assessments, accountability, and teacher evaluation seem to be commonly addressed by the groups. In picking up those issues, numerous new education advocacy organizations have advocated for reforms that parallel larger national efforts as revealed in NCLB, RTTT, and school turnaround efforts. Yet while the ideas may not be novel, these groups still appear to be attempting to draw out the implications of these approaches by adapting them and explaining what they may mean for their individual states. In that sense, the creativity and insightfulness of these groups appears to emerge not in their own production of reform ideas but rather in their ability, as one of our interview respondents noted, "to sweat the details in a way that national

groups can't" in order to argue for and engage critics over various reform proposals that their states are considering.

### **Chapter 3. Case Study of Advance Illinois**

In this chapter, we develop a more nuanced look at the themes we have been exploring via a case study of one new education advocacy organization, Advance Illinois. It is a useful case for several reasons. First, it is a relatively new group, which continues to establish itself and find its niche. Due to its short history it is possible to get a detailed perspective on its launch and early initiatives. With the growth of new education advocacy organizations in recent years, studying a group like Advance Illinois early in its existence will help shed light on how these groups establish themselves and emerge. Second, demographically, Illinois reflects important national trends with its large and growing immigrant populations and its expanding numbers of disadvantaged students. As the nation's public school students shift and these categories grow, new education advocates will need to plan their strategies with these conditions in mind. Third, as a practical matter, the design of this study, conducted in partnership with Advance Illinois and the Wallace Foundation, one of Advance Illinois's initial funders, allowed us phenomenal access to individuals, documents, and data that would be unavailable to typical researchers. Importantly, we were afforded that access but allowed to draw our own conclusions based on the evidence. For these three reasons, studying Advance Illinois and its work provides a great opportunity to better understand how new education advocacy organizations operate. The discussion in this chapter focuses on Advance Illinois's background, goals and priorities, and how it has contributed to education discussions and policy development.

#### **3.1. Overview of Advance Illinois**

This section focuses on how and why Advance Illinois was founded, the nuts and bolts of its operations, and its self-described goals and priorities. The sources informing the discussion, which we describe in the Appendix, include our interview respondents (comprised of Advance Illinois staff and other policy elites in the state) and our study of relevant print and electronic documents from or about Advance Illinois.

**3.1.1. Founding.** Concerns among state and local leaders in Illinois about student performance and the quality of state policy, along with support from national and state foundations, motivated discussions, a search for alternatives, and eventually a plan to launch Advance Illinois in 2008. Even earlier, politicians and other state residents came to believe that Illinois had much room to improve public education. Some of those discussions were informal, while others emerged in existing formal institutions in the state legislature and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).<sup>64</sup> Evidence of these concerns, for example, revealed themselves in the formation of the bipartisan Legislative Education Caucus, formed by State Representative Bob Pritchard (R-Sycamore) shortly after he was elected in 2004.

Leaders at the Chicago-based Joyce Foundation, which supports efforts in the Great Lakes region and includes major work in Illinois, observed that although there was increasing national and state attention to issues such as teacher quality and comprehensive education reform, they believed those topics had not gained significant traction in Illinois. Interest seemed to exist primarily among policy analysts and news reporters, but not the state's political leaders. Yet foundation leaders did see evidence of other states initiating policy changes in these areas.

Joyce commissioned a study to find out what distinguished these states from Illinois. Published in 2006, the study concluded that states with the most aggressive reform efforts tended to have active civic organizations, which the study's authors called "rabble rousers." These organizations were distinct from traditional education advocacy groups—the professional associations and others noted in the introduction to this report—and made a concerted effort to engage state policymakers to push these topics forward.<sup>65</sup>

The findings in the "rabble rousers" study motivated Joyce to work with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to fund a second study of the Illinois policy environment. The goal of that research was to better understand the state's landscape of organized groups and interests active in education. Work from the Chicago branch of the Boston Consulting Group, along with other partners, produced an analysis in 2007 concluding that an advocacy void in Illinois existed. Although numerous education-related groups operated in the state, they tended to be membership-based, which constrained their abilities to operate more freely, or they tended to be more narrowly focused on specific issues, such as funding, pre-school, or other topics. The analysis could identify no extant group in Illinois operating with much autonomy, focusing on broad, system-wide education reform that could craft an agenda focusing mainly around student interests. The groups that did exist in Illinois, the analysis concluded, tended to focus on the priorities of the members of traditional groups themselves, which did not always appear to take student needs into account.

Emboldened by these two studies, also in 2007 leaders at Joyce collaborated with their state and local partners in Illinois and leveraged substantial funding from Gates to lead a process of bringing Advance Illinois into existence. Joyce convened a "kitchen cabinet" of state leaders, some of whom eventually became Advance Illinois board members, and began clarifying the organization's goals, structure, funding and staffing models, and strategy. That early thinking envisioned a three-pronged theory of change, quite consistent with Mintrom's policy entrepreneur framework. It focused on (1) *research and public awareness*, designed not to produce original research but rather to synthesize existing research or commission additional studies that could influence the policy agenda and educate leaders and other stakeholders; (2) *power-broker mobilization* to persuade key opinion leaders in the state to support comprehensive education reform; and (3) *grassroots mobilization through coalition-building* to cultivate strong network partnerships with organizations working across Illinois at the state and local levels. That last point was critical. As one interview respondent noted, although Advance Illinois was filling what its supporters saw as a gaping void in the advocacy space, its ability to affect change would be limited without broader mobilization of key groups and state stakeholders.

**3.1.2. Operations.** Advance Illinois launched in 2008 as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with a mission of being "An independent, objective, voice to promote a public education system in Illinois that prepares all students to be ready for work, college, and democratic citizenship." Numerous interview respondents described the organization's board of directors as a crucial and distinguishing feature of Advance Illinois. Our respondents described them as a "power board" and a "gold plated board," that is comprised of Illinois "heavyweights." The board's initial co-chairs were the state's former Republican governor Jim Edgar, and Democrat Bill Daley, a native Chicagoan and son of the city's former iconic mayor, the late Richard J. Daley. Edgar and Daley's presence provided Advance Illinois with bipartisan bona

vides and, given their stature in state politics, helped make it possible to recruit additional well-known state leaders to serve on the board. “Heavy hitters want to be with other heavy hitters,” noted one of our interview respondents. Members of the board appear in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Advance Illinois Board, 2013

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
John A. Edwardson, Co-chair	Chairman, CDW LLC
Jim Edgar, Chair emeritus*	Former Republican governor of Illinois
Ellen Alberding	President, The Joyce Foundation
Lew Collens	President Emeritus, Illinois Institute of Technology
Miguel del Valle	Chair, Illinois P-20 Council
Judy Erwin	Managing Director, ASGK Public Strategies, Inc.
Paul Finnegan	Co-CEO, Madison Dearborn Partners LLC
James C. Franczek, Jr.	Partner, Franczek Radelet PC
Marin Gjaja	Senior Partner and Managing Director, Boston Consulting Group
Timothy Knowles	John Dewey Director, Urban Education Institute, Univ. of Chicago
Craig Lindvahl*	Executive Director, Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship, filmmaker, and teacher
Sylvia Puente	Executive Director, Latino Policy Forum
Gene Reineke	Founder and President, Hawthorne Strategy Group, LLC
Edward B. Rust, Jr.*	Chairman and CEO, State Farm Insurance Co.
Juan Salgado	President and CEO, Instituto del Progreso Latino
Rick Stephens	Senior Vice President, The Boeing Company
Cheryl Watkins	Principal, Pershing West Middle School

Note: All board members except those marked with an asterisk (\*) are based in Chicago. Jim Edgar is retired and lives in Springfield, Craig Lindvahl is based in Effingham, and Edward B. Rust, Jr. is based in Bloomington. Source: Advance Illinois website as of July 2013, <http://www.advanceillinois.org/board-pages-18.php>.

The Advance Illinois board contains people who possess multiple professional, partisan, ideological, and other perspectives, along with valuable personal networks. All but three board members work in or around Chicago. Interview respondents noted that the board is very active and involved in Advance Illinois’s work, more active than the typical uncompensated non-profit board—even to the point of probably “picking out the paint colors” of the organization’s office, joked one person we interviewed.

One of the board’s initial key tasks was to staff the organization, which it began in 2008 by hiring Robin Steans as executive director, a position she still holds today. Steans grew up in the Chicago area and has lived in Chicago for 25 years. She previously worked as a high school social studies teacher in the Chicago Public Schools and San Mateo, California, and had prior experience working with emotionally and behaviorally disturbed high school students in Boston.

She has held various positions with other education advocacy groups, such as the Small Schools Coalition and Leadership for Quality Education. All of her children have attended the Chicago Public Schools, and she has served on two local school councils in the city.<sup>66</sup> Her undergraduate degree is from Brown University, and she has graduate degrees in education from Stanford and in law from the University of Chicago.

Interview respondents describe Steans as a vitally important element of Advance Illinois. Words like “tireless,” “powerhouse,” “motivator,” “incredibly thoughtful,” a “great thinker” and “collaborator,” and a keen negotiator who “is so key” are some of the ideas and phrases that emerged in our discussions. In addition to her talents and knowledge, Steans also brings important personal connections to Advance Illinois given her family’s deep involvement in civic affairs, industry, and Illinois state politics. Her father, Harrison Steans, is a successful businessman and philanthropist, who, along with his wife and daughters, started the Steans Family Foundation in 1986.<sup>67</sup> In addition, one of her sisters, Heather Steans, is an Illinois state senator, elected in 2008, who represents District 7 and chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee.

As leader, Steans has helped to manage the growth and development of Advance Illinois. The organization’s staff has doubled in size since 2008. In that founding year, the board aimed to have 6 staff members. By 2013, the Advance Illinois website showed 12 staff in all, with additional support from contractors and interns. The array of job titles, staff responsibilities, and continuity of personnel within various positions helps to reveal the organization’s priorities. The most developed, based on staffing patterns, appear to be policy development, policy advocacy, and communications. The current executive director, government relations director (who works with another government relations staff member in Springfield, the state capital), policy director (who works with two policy associates), and communications director (who works with a digital management fellow and a communications and policy fellow) all have been with Advance Illinois for between 3 and 5 years.

Outreach is another top priority of Advance Illinois, which gets marbled into the policy development, policy advocacy, and communications work. It involves multidimensional efforts to engage state stakeholders and others in the state interested in education. The most systematic, concerted, and repeated efforts involve outreach to the treetops at the state level, which the organization’s founding documents describe as a main focus. As one Advance Illinois member noted, the organization’s “reason for being, our core mission” is “to stimulate state-level policy change.” Such outreach involves connecting to and building relationships with state elected officials, state agency leaders and staff, foundation leaders, and leaders of other new and traditional advocacy organizations in the state.

Although the theory of change that guided the launch of Advance Illinois stated an interest in “grassroots mobilization through coalition-building,” the original kitchen cabinet that shaped Advance Illinois did not envision it operating much of a direct grassroots function. In other words, the organization would primarily work to influence state policy. In addition, and unlike some groups that we described in Chapter 2, which invest more heavily in ground-level work, it would rely on its coalition partners, especially those with strong grassroots ties, to help transmit its message to local arenas. Interview respondents both inside and outside the

organization and documents reporting on its activities indicate that the main outreach focus has been on treetops or grasstops outreach, focusing on state and community leaders, and less so on ground-level or grassroots efforts to explicitly engage front-line educators and parents, efforts that Advance Illinois staff members note has lagged in part because it is incredibly resource-intensive. Connecting to people working at the treetops level also seems more consistent with the group's overall mission and allows it to use its resources more efficiently.

Still, while focusing on the state arenas, Advance Illinois has done work to engage the ground level. Consider these two examples. First, Advance Illinois employs an outreach director who travels the state to build relationships and gather information.<sup>68</sup> Given the vastness of the state and Advance Illinois's limited staffing in this area relative to those challenges, outreach mainly has manifested itself in efforts to connect to grasstops leaders in these local communities. Second, in 2009, Advance Illinois created its Educator Advisory Council (EAC) to better connect to the perspectives of classroom teachers. Comprised of 23 award-winning educators in the state, Advance Illinois convenes this group, which appears in Table 5, for advice and assistance in promoting the organization's message. Names of possible EAC members come from several sources and include informal searches of lists of winners and nominees for various state teaching awards.<sup>69</sup> Preliminary names are identified and then Advance Illinois seeks feedback from other groups, including teacher union officials. In choosing EAC members, Advance Illinois tries to strike a balance between subjects and levels taught by EAC members, where they live in the state, and the mix of students that attend their schools. Members of the EAC are expected to attend meetings (in-person and on-line) to discuss policy and advocacy, and to help in subsequent EAC recruitment.

Across its projects, Advance Illinois prides itself on being deeply knowledgeable of research literatures focusing on different dimensions of education policy, and strives to be a consumer and synthesizer of that work to inform its advocacy. The research function itself, however, appears to receive less explicit attention in the organization's formal structure than other core functions. Although the original planning template the board used when it commenced hiring called for two positions with research responsibilities, a "Research and Policy Director" and "Research and Policy Associate," the word "Research" no longer appears in their job titles, and no new positions explicitly devoted to research exist. Instead, research appears to be an activity that is broadly distributed across the organization's staff members, reflecting a collective effort by all to help keep the organization informed on the various literatures relevant to its work. That contrasts with other activities such as government relations, policy development, communications, and outreach, areas where lead staff members possess specific responsibilities.

Financially, Advance Illinois relies on a mix of funding from national and Illinois-based foundations. Unlike traditional education advocacy groups, such as school administrator or teacher associations, Advance Illinois is not a membership organization so it does not collect membership dues. In contrast to other new education advocacy organizations, Advance Illinois does not have a "giving button" on its home page where individuals can make financial donations. Table 6 lists the foundation sources reported on the Advance Illinois website that have financially supported its work in recent years. Other sources of direct and sometimes

indirect support not appearing there include consultants and other organizations in Illinois that provide the group with low-cost or sometimes in-kind services on various projects.

**Table 5.** Members of the Advance Illinois Educator Advisory Council (EAC), 2013

<b>EAC member</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Location</b>
Peggy Allan	Middle School	Greenville Jr. High	Greenville
Carol Broos	Music	Sunset Ridge School	Northfield
Cara Bucciarelli	Elementary Spanish	Lasalle II	Chicago
Robert Canada	Fifth Grade	Columbus Elementary	Edwardsville
Joe Fatheree	Multimedia & Social Studies	Effingham H.S.	Effingham
Terri Goggin	Soc. Studies & Hist.	Greenville Jr. High	Greenville
Jacob Gourley	Gov't & U.S. History	Thornton Fractional South	Lansing
Jonnia Jackson	Early Childhood	National Teachers Academy	Chicago
Paul Kelly	Social Studies Chair	John Hersey H.S.	Arlington Heights
Rana Khan	5th grade	Sexton Elementary	Chicago
Craig Lindvahl	CEO / Entrepreneurship	n/a	Effingham County
Tim Mccollum	Science	Charleston M.S.	Charleston
Anne Mckenna	Second Grade	Dewey Elementary	Evanston
Natalie Neris-Guereca	Assistant Principal	Pershing West	Chicago
Eliza Ramirez	Middle grades literacy	Zapata Academy	Chicago
Kevin Rutter	Economics	Finance Academy, Carl Schurz H.S.	Chicago
Tim Schnoeker	Tech. / Vocational	Coulterville H.S.	Coulterville
Astrid Schuler	Bilingual Kindergarten	Liberty Elementary	Cicero
Mike Sementa	Science & technology	Carl Sandburg Middle	Mundelein
Melissa Sievers	Special Education	Riverton Elementary	Riverton
Linda Smerge	Second Grade	Woodrow Wilson	Cicero
Cheryl Watkins	Principal	Pershing West	Chicago
Rebecca Wattleworth	Math and science	Warrensburg-Latham H.S.	Warrensburg

Source: Advance Illinois website as of July 2013, <http://www.advanceillinois.org/educator-advisory-council-pages-67.php>.

A common criticism of new education advocacy organizations is that these groups are fronts or “astroturf” groups that really represent large national interests or deep-pocketed givers who are disconnected from the states where they operate. These arguments tend to appear under the critical heading of “corporate” education reform, and frequently emerge when foundation funding, especially money from Gates, the nation’s largest giver to K-12 causes, is involved.<sup>70</sup> Although Gates funds have helped to launch and sustain Advance Illinois, the organization’s support from Illinois-based funders and its board of directors with deep state ties should make it immune from charges that it is serving out-of-state interests. There may be legitimate disagreements over whether Advance Illinois’s in-state supporters have embraced the right set of reform ideas—discussion of those debates appear later in this study—but the notion that Advance Illinois is somehow an outside group that has infiltrated Illinois is a baseless charge given the mix of funders that support the group and the leaders that are guiding its work.<sup>71</sup>

**Table 6.** Advance Illinois’s Recent Foundation Supporters, 2013

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*	JPMorgan Chase Foundation
Boeing Company Charitable Trust	Morrison Family Foundation
CME Group Foundation	OSA Foundation
Finnegan Family Foundation*	Polk Bros. Foundation
Grand Victoria Foundation	Robert R. McCormick Foundation
John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	Spencer Foundation
Joyce Foundation	Steans Family Foundation

Note: Foundations appear in alphabetical order. All foundation supporters are based in Chicago with the exception of those marked with an asterisk (\*). The Bill and Melinda Gates foundation is based in Seattle, Washington, and the Finnegan Family Foundation is based in Evanston, Illinois, a Chicago suburb.

Source: Foundations appearing here reflect groups appearing on the Advance Illinois website as of July 2013 (<http://www.advanceillinois.org/supporters-pages-21.php>). Not all of these foundations have funded Advance Illinois in every year that it has operated since 2008. The Wallace Foundation, which funded this study, was one of Advance Illinois’s early foundation supporters.

**3.1.3. Goals and priorities.** A common feature of new education advocacy organizations is that they typically have considerable flexibility to set their agendas. In contrast to membership organizations, priorities emerge from discussions between a relatively small number of board members and staff, and the cast of funders that the organization courts. That leaves much room for new education advocates to maneuver. In charting its organizational course, Advance Illinois has indeed enjoyed much flexibility in identifying its overall goals and specific priorities. The initial round of funding from its largest backers was essentially unconstrained. The only general requirements were to work toward advancing a broad reform-minded approach that was outlined in the organization’s founding documents to support the goal of preparing all students for college, careers, and democratic citizenship—“every student world ready,” as the Advance Illinois motto states. In extremely rare instances has Advance Illinois discovered its overall objectives to be mismatched with funder preferences, and in those cases it sought support from elsewhere.

Such flexibility has provided advantages and created challenges. On the positive side, possessing much operational autonomy during its launch was especially important because it provided Advance Illinois with rebuttals to potential claims that it was serving out-of-state interests. The deep state roots of its board members, especially, have worked in tandem with that point to deflect these claims. Some state actors we interviewed attested to Advance Illinois’s ability to operate with much flexibility, seemingly unconstrained and very nimble. Advance Illinois staff members also noted the ability to adjust quickly to leverage new opportunities or to attend to newly discovered needs, which might take other state groups longer to engage. As a result, one staff member noted that it allows the organization to stay “twenty steps ahead of the game.”

Especially in a new organization trying to develop its agenda, flexibility can pose important challenges, too. With the frenetic pace of contemporary education policy development unfolding in Illinois and elsewhere (a key theme that we will explore later as well), Advance Illinois has needed to avoid being pulled into every issue or debate. As one member of the organization noted, the agenda essentially could be infinite. Another state actor who sometimes

works with Advance Illinois told us how the group must beware not to be drawn into “trendy” issues. In discussions with its board, the staff has had to strategically identify sets of manageable, yet consequential, topics that will enable Advance Illinois to secure important successes without burning too quickly through its finances and the energy or enthusiasm of its staff. This recognition was one factor that motivated the organization to avoid aggressively engaging the issue of education funding during its early years of operation. Interview respondents inside and outside Advance Illinois noted how that topic, especially its equity dimensions, has been a perennial challenge in the state. In light of the thorniness of this issue and the need to strategically manage its agenda, it is understandable why Advance Illinois’s board and staff, the key drivers of the organization’s agenda, would have engaged other topics earlier and more recently has advocated for education finance reforms.

In shaping its goals and priorities, Advance Illinois staff members describe four key ideas that have guided their work. First is a sense of urgency to improve student achievement. Interviews with staff and a review of the organization’s published materials convey concerns that trends in student performance in Illinois alongside the increasing demands of citizenship and global economic competition require swift action. A common theme across different sources, both written and in interviews with staff, was that although Illinois may not be among the worst performers in the nation, it has languished with mediocre performance for too long. A role of Advance Illinois, then, according to one staff member, is to help sound the alarm that Illinois has been a “do-nothing state” that “needs to get hit with a two-by-four” to motivate action.

A second key idea is the need to focus on kids and their interests. When asked how Advance Illinois compares to other state groups, staff noted that their organization is not beholden to members and so it can focus on advocating what staff believe will best serve students to help prepare them for college, the workforce, and democratic citizenship, regardless of whether it makes for good politics. One respondent outside the organization noted the implicit calculation that this approach appears to embrace. Whereas prior policies may have created “collateral damage” for students by protecting teachers who may not have met children’s needs, Advance Illinois, according to this respondent, is more willing to reverse that dynamic and have adults take on the potential collateral damage of policy changes if doing so protects the interests of students.

Third, Advance Illinois staff and their supporters describe how they offer proposals based on evidence. Proposals should emerge, they argue, because research supports them rather than what seems to fit a particular partisan or ideological agenda. In fact, one staff member noted how Advance Illinois takes “delight in confounding people” because its advocacy is hard to pinpoint using common frames (liberal or conservative, Democratic or Republican) that dominate political discussions and that the news media frequently use in organizing their coverage of issues. Among the other state actors we interviewed, several noted how the organization has a reputation for doing its homework before taking its positions. Others attributed this result to its bipartisan and diverse board. Members of Advance Illinois definitely do not see themselves as a traditional interest group, beholden to party-line positions, and they note how they work to minimize those perceptions when they may surface.

Fourth, Advance Illinois prefers to support work that is informed by system-wide perspectives, rather than a “piecemeal” approach, as one respondent put it. Consistent with the views of the kitchen cabinet that formed the group in 2008, policy tinkering, the Advance Illinois staff believe, cannot produce needed breakthrough improvements. This idea was prevalent in interviews with staff and in the organization’s internal documents and published work. The founders that developed the initial concept for Advance Illinois noted a vacuum in the state’s political landscape because no independent group appeared to be pushing for system-wide reforms. In developing its agenda, Advance Illinois has considered issues from pre-kindergarten through college, and across topics within those different levels.

Advance Illinois’s operational flexibility and the key ideas shaping its work have helped it produce a multifaceted agenda. Annual reports that it develops internally to monitor its progress reveal that the number of initiatives expanded and remained high from 2009 through 2012. The data show 24 specific initiatives identified in 2009, rising to 66 in 2010, peaking at 72 in 2011, followed by a decline in 2012 to 51. These specific activities cluster into broad categories with the most prevalent being teacher quality, setting high standards, school accountability, and providing adequate resources with flexibility. Board members review annually the progress made on these initiatives and then engage the organization’s staff as they collectively determine its future priorities.

Unsurprisingly, the topics that Advance Illinois has promoted in its print and electronic publications align with the areas where it has attempted to influence discussions and policy. Table 7 lists these reports, the date of their release, and their focus. The vast majority present a broad menu of topics and highlight connections between them. This is especially true of Advance Illinois’s series of state report cards, entitled *The State We’re In*, and its additional call to action, *We Can Do Better*. Two publications aimed to support the state’s effort to win an RTTT grant reveal that broad integrative focus as well. Other efforts have addressed more specific topics including school improvement, teacher work, and most recently, funding. Advance Illinois also has endorsed and helped to publicize reports from other organizations, including the National Council on Teacher Quality’s report on teacher preparation in Illinois, for example, and other work that is summarized and linked in its regular email News Update, on its Facebook page, and in its Twitter feed. Finally, Advance Illinois is a member of the Core Coalition, a group of diverse organizations in Illinois supporting the Common Core, and has provided support to, among other things, help maintain the coalition’s web presence.<sup>72</sup> As a final example that aligns with the group’s issue priorities, among the 100 most read posts on the Advance Illinois Facebook page between 2011 and 2013, the plurality topic receiving the most attention was effective educators, which appeared in 25 of those posts.

### **3.2. Assessing Advance Illinois’s Organizational Characteristics**

Evidence from numerous sources, including documents and our interviews, reveal how the efforts of Advance Illinois staff and board members to launch the organization have been received in Illinois. The previous section offered a baseline description of Advance Illinois’s work, drawing primarily on perspectives of people inside the organization and on documents that it has produced. How do those descriptions compare to the perceptions of other state actors and additional sources of evidence? This section explores those views and reveals much overlap but some disconnect with the ways that Advance Illinois sees itself and its work.

**Table 7.** Publications of Advance Illinois, 2008-2013

<b>Year</b>	<b>Title and publication date</b>	<b>Focus</b>
2013	<i>Funding Expectations</i> (no month indicated)	Explains how the state’s K-12 funding system hinders schools and fosters inequity.
2012	<i>The State We’re In: 2012. A Report Card on Public Education in Illinois</i> (November)	Reviews policy reforms and grades state’s education performance.
	<i>Improving our Lowest Performing Schools: Illinois Progress Report 2011-2012</i> (April)	Reports on progress for schools receiving School Improvement (SIG) grants.
2011	<i>Transforming Teacher Work for a Better Educated Tomorrow</i> (November)	Offers a vision for how to rethink what teachers do and how they are supported.
2010	<i>The State We’re In: 2010. A Report Card on Education in Illinois</i> (September)	Reviews policy reforms and grades state’s education performance.
2009	<i>Can Illinois ‘Race to the Top?’ Yes, We Can!</i> (December)	Summarizes and endorses Illinois’s participation in RTTT.
	<i>We Can Do Better: Advancing Public Education in Illinois</i> (June)	Summarizes state education performance and offers a reform agenda for the future.
	<i>American Recovery and Reinvestment Act [ARRA]: Doing Better for All Students</i> (June)	Briefly summarizes education aid in the ARRA and describes big ideas the aid should support.
2008	<i>The State We’re In: Advancing Public Education in Illinois</i> (no month indicated)	Reports on education performance in Illinois.

Note: Reports appear in reverse chronological order. Advance Illinois also endorsed and helped to promote in Illinois two additional major publications during this time: (1) Advance Illinois was one of the stakeholder groups involved in assembling this report: Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Stakeholder Committee. 2011 (April). *A New Beginning: The Illinois Kindergarten Individual Development Survey. A Report to the Illinois State Board of Education*.; (2) National Council on Teacher Quality. [not dated]. *Ed School Essentials: A Review of Illinois Teacher Preparation*.

**3.2.1 Evidence consistent with Advance Illinois’s stated goals and priorities.** Two broad areas produced much alignment between the perceptions of Advance Illinois staff and founders and other state actors. First, when asked to describe the kind of organization that Advance Illinois is, respondents overwhelmingly tended to use terms consistent with what the organization’s founders envisioned. Respondents repeatedly described it as an “advocacy” and

“reform” group. Some additional individuals noted that it possesses a “research” function that contributes to policy development and best practices, and is willing to challenge the status quo. Others either raised the “bipartisan” label or, in response to questioning, agreed that Advance Illinois works in a bipartisan manner. Others elaborated with interesting metaphors or more colorful language. One called it a reform group and “do-gooders.” Another suggested it is “a lever” because as an outside entity it can force state leaders to reflect on their work and then prod them in certain areas. Given its wide-spanning agenda, another person said it is an “education improvement organization” and that people characterize Advance Illinois as being “like a state agency without the requirements.” That same person agreed that ISBE (the state education agency), and Advance Illinois have a “shared interest” in that both want kids to do well.

Our systematic analysis of 850 news articles published by Illinois sources from 2008-2013 that reference Advance Illinois supports the perceptions that emerged from these interviews. (See the Appendix for a description of the news article database that we constructed.) Frequently used phrases to describe Advance Illinois in the media were as an education reform group, appearing in 308 articles; a statewide or Illinois-based organization, appearing in 203 articles; an independent or nonpartisan group, appearing in 169 articles; and an education advocacy organization, appearing in 168 articles.

Second, our interview respondents also believe Advance Illinois plays unique role in the state. Recall that the foundation and state leaders who launched Advance Illinois identified gaps in the state’s education advocacy space and believed that a new group, uniquely positioned and resourced, was needed. In general, our interview respondents confirmed that the goal of creating a different sort of group appears to have been accomplished, a conclusion that Advance Illinois itself reached in an earlier self-study from 2011-12. Respondents whose comments revealed themselves to be strong, lukewarm, or even weak supporters of Advance Illinois, including more critical individuals, indicate that it is unique among organizations in the state. Respondents did identify additional advocacy organizations, including Ounce of Prevention, Voices for Illinois, and the Illinois affiliate of Stand for Children, among others. They noted two features distinguishing Advance Illinois from these other groups: its substantive focus and its orientation toward politics. Consider each in turn.

Regarding substantive focus, respondents highlighted Advance Illinois’s comprehensive approach. One person noted that no state advocacy organization has as global a perspective, focusing on education from birth to the workforce. Although other groups, in particular the pre-K advocates Ounce of Prevention, were praised for their effectiveness, they were not seen as engaging as many issues as Advance Illinois. Those comments are consistent with the various state report card documents that the organization has published, listed in Table 7, which attempt to present data at all levels of schooling in Illinois. They also are consistent with one of Mintrom’s dimensions, namely, that the best policy entrepreneurs are creative and insightful in the discussions they prompt. In this case, Advance Illinois’s comprehensive focus appears to be helping people to see education issues from a broader, more comprehensive perspective than in the past.

In commenting on Advance Illinois’s orientation toward politics, respondents agreed that the organization does engage the political process via advocacy but they characterized its work

as “not political.” Because Advance Illinois is a member of the PIE Network it is unsurprising that it prioritizes connecting with elected officials and state agency staff to influence policy. In stating that Advance Illinois is not political, our respondents explained it is because of the organization’s neutral approach to electoral politics by not endorsing candidates, not making campaign contributions, and not running a political action committee (PAC). As one respondent noted, other groups attempt to gain leverage with politicians by contributing money to campaigns.<sup>73</sup> In contrast, Advance Illinois attempts to gain influence by forging relationships and prompting dialogue. Discussions of this point inevitably turned to the distinction between the work of Advance Illinois and another relatively new advocate in the state, Stand for Children Illinois. Respondents noted that the latter’s successes have emerged, they believe, because of the unprecedented amounts of money its national PAC has contributed to state legislative campaigns.<sup>74</sup> Although respondents agreed that Advance Illinois and Stand for Children collaborate and even share some common approaches,<sup>75</sup> including lobbying and information provision, Stand for Children’s national and Illinois affiliate are perceived to rely more on raw political force, focusing on campaign funding and lobbying rather than building broad coalitions of policymakers and other advocates.

**3.2.2 Additional perspectives on Advance Illinois’s goals and priorities.** Although many respondents’ views about Advance Illinois’s characteristics tended to align with the opinions we heard from the organization’s staff and board members, other perspectives also emerged in some of our interviews. These additional perspectives mainly centered on the question of who Advance Illinois represents in its advocacy. While the lack of a formal membership base is one reason why Advance Illinois has much leeway to define its agenda, that characteristic also has led some people to challenge the organization’s claims about representation.

Who it represents and on what basis Advance Illinois can claim that it represents them appears to be contested terrain. Membership rolls may create operational constraints, yet they also can confer legitimacy for asserting claims to represent various constituencies. Some interview respondents remain unconvinced that Advance Illinois is distinct because it focuses primarily on the interests of kids and not adults, given that other state actors believe that they are kid-focused, too. A related point addressed the claim that the EAC enables Advance Illinois to connect to teacher voice. That issue drew some skepticism, even from some respondents who generally are agreeable toward many of Advance Illinois’s positions and its approach. Some respondents perceive that EAC members have been selected strategically by Advance Illinois and do not mirror the diverse opinions that the state’s teachers embrace regarding the menu of reforms that have been debated and become law in recent years. Surveys conducted by Advance Illinois provide evidence that contradicts that claim. In responding to regular queries from Advance Illinois, EAC members tended to affirm that their discussions were free-flowing and no ideas that members wanted to raise were excluded. Our discussion with Advance Illinois staff members about the EAC selection process and our review of other documents also revealed no evidence that EAC members were selected to slant the group toward a particular point of view.

Part of the challenge that Advance Illinois faces in claiming to represent certain groups or viewpoints is that it remains relatively new in the state when compared to traditional education organizations. As a result, Illinois residents have had to rely on limited information to help them

better understand the group’s perspective. Those more skeptical of Advance Illinois, especially people who are relatively unconnected to its work, have tried to infer its goals from other variables including the interests of the organization’s board, the affiliations of its staff, and its funding sources to try to understand whose interests it serves. Importantly, even among our respondents who personally did not believe that Advance Illinois served a narrow set of special interests, they understood why other people might reach those conclusions and they have heard others in the state express these opinions.

For example, some observers see Advance Illinois’s board members and foundation supporters operating with specific pre-defined agendas. Those board and funder priorities likely would color, they say, how Advance Illinois proceeds with its work. This is where the virtues of a very powerful and influential board—a group akin to the lineup of megastars of the New York Yankees, commented one respondent—can create challenges. It is hard to imagine, one respondent suggested, that the preferences of such powerful people, who themselves participate in politics and sometimes donate money to politicians, would *not* influence the work of Advance Illinois staff members. And it would be naïve to think, these respondents further suggested, that such board members simply would dispassionately defer to the staff’s expert judgments. In describing the role that the board plays in their work, Advance Illinois staff agreed that the organization’s board members do have strong views that they bring with them to the group’s conversations. Still, that is not necessarily a bad thing, the staff believed, given that the Advance Illinois founders consciously recruited board members with diverse prior experiences and points of view, which, as one Advance Illinois staff member explained, “forces the discussion to the reasonable, fact-based center.”

Another common example concerning representation that we heard focused on charter schools, a reform approach that Advance Illinois supports but, in considering the overall menu of its work, is not a key focus. The charter school support provided by the Steans Family Foundation, and Advance Illinois funder and an organization founded by the family of the Advance Illinois executive director, is one detail that skeptics might use if they wanted to “follow the money,” as one respondent noted, to assert that Advance Illinois is an organization focused on expanding public charter schools. Advance Illinois does support expanding charter school opportunities for students, and in prior work the executive director had helped to found a charter high school in Chicago.<sup>76</sup> However, charter schools represent one of many reform ideas that the organization embraces, one that, compared to teacher reforms, for example, has not received as much attention in Advance Illinois’ publications and daily efforts or outreach. Still, as outsiders try to understand the organization’s work, one can perhaps see why individuals lacking additional information might infer from the Steans Foundation’s charter school work and the executive director’s past role as a charter founder that promoting charter schools must be a top priority of Advance Illinois.

One explanation for these competing perspectives on Advance Illinois’s goals and priorities seems to flow from the difficulties that observers face in forming opinions about a new group that aims to challenge the status quo amidst the fast-moving nature of the Illinois education policy process since 2009 that has tackled numerous agenda items.<sup>77</sup> Advance Illinois generally may be correct, as it stated in a report to one of its funders, that “*Stakeholders* [emphasis added] know that we mean what we say and that we don’t have any hidden agendas in

our work” because those stakeholders can regularly engage Advance Illinois staff in person and via other frequent exchanges of information. Yet people with less intimate contact, especially those working primarily in local settings, may disagree. Even one state actor who we interviewed who was enthusiastic about Advance Illinois noted not always knowing what the group’s goals were, and another that praised the group’s work noted not knowing “the motivation” behind it. That sort of ambiguity, commented another respondent, allows others to interpret Advance Illinois’s motives in multiple ways and attribute policy positions to Advance Illinois that in reality it may barely address in its regular advocacy work.

### ***3.3. Advance Illinois’s Contributions to Discourse about Education***

Advance Illinois’s staff and board have prioritized making positive contributions to education policy discussions in the state. In particular, staff and board members hope to raise issues and work as a convener or facilitator across diverse groups and individuals. In Mintrom’s terms, they have tried to offer creative, insightful, and persuasive ideas while simultaneously helping to strategically build teams or coalitions to promote them. Although Advance Illinois only began its work in 2008, it has contributed substantially to education discourse in the state, earning the respect and praise of numerous people, especially key state stakeholders and members of the news media. Although some more critical perspectives on the organization’s contribution to discourse also surfaced in our research, on balance the evidence shows that Advance Illinois has largely succeeded in contributing positively to discussions.

**3.3.1. Evidence of impactful and useful contributions to discourse.** Interview respondents both inside and outside Advance Illinois have noted that the organization’s efforts have helped to shape state education debates. This is due, in part, to the organization’s style of work and the ideas it puts forward. “It’s unbelievable the impact they’ve had,” said one respondent, who believes that Advance Illinois has been at the center and shaped every major education policy debate in the state for the last 5 years. Another noted the group’s success in “getting to opinion leaders” who in turn advocate for the issues that Advance Illinois supports. Among these positive endorsements include respondents who find useful the materials that Advance Illinois produces, such as publications, briefings, seminars, on-line webinars, and distribution of white papers. According to one respondent, their reports are “thorough” and “specific” in their recommendations, which inspires confidence. Three dimensions of Advance Illinois’s contributions to discourse stand out: its ability to provide information to policy elites, its relationship with the media, and its engagement and outreach.

*Information provision to policy elites.* A major theme in our interviews was that Advance Illinois has played an invaluable role providing information to policy elites in key state institutions, including the legislature, governor’s office, and state education agency and board. In connecting to legislators, one respondent explained, Advance Illinois has forged strong links to staff for the majority and minority parties, evidence of policy entrepreneurship that reveals how the organization operates in multiple political settings.

In-person outreach has included targeting important legislators who receive half-hour or longer briefings on key issues and legislative committees that receive shorter versions of these presentations. Such sessions can be especially valuable for new legislators, including those arriving in 2013 after the 2012 elections. Similarly, Advance Illinois staff routinely brief

members of the governor's office on issues and sometimes give advance briefings to preview findings of the organization's reports before releasing them. With ISBE, Advance Illinois can play what one respondent called a "verification role" in that people may view state board materials and information skeptically, but will find them more persuasive if an outside group, such as Advance Illinois, is reaching similar conclusions. Advance Illinois staff also can be, as one respondent said, a "good sounding board" for ISBE as it contemplates potential new initiatives or its ongoing work.

With numerous actors working on state education policy, allocating credit for shaping the agenda is difficult. Yet, to illustrate with one example, Advance Illinois does appear to deserve much credit for recent increased attention to issues concerning equitable school funding. Multiple respondents inside and outside Advance Illinois attested to this.<sup>78</sup> The particular issue, known in Illinois as proration, focuses on the equity implications of state funding cuts to local districts. Facing budget shortfalls, state law dictates a particular method for cutting district allocations that tend to disproportionately hurt districts with high poverty and low property resources. In 2012, Advance Illinois staff, especially the executive director, began raising this issue in discussions with reporters, news editorial boards, and elected officials. The 2013 release of the organization's report, *Funding Expectations*, made a more concrete case for reform and offered a couple of possible approaches. Respondents noted how Advance Illinois was responsible for stoking media interest in the subject and "raising awareness" in the legislature. Although no policy changes occurred in 2013, a legislative task force to explore the issue was created, and a funding reform bill was introduced in the Illinois Senate in 2014.<sup>79</sup>

*Media.* Engagement with the media also reveals evidence of Advance Illinois's contributions to policy discussions. The organization's staff, board members, and documents describe numerous efforts to establish it as a well-respected source for reporters and editorial boards, competent to discuss pressing education issues confronting the state and the nation. These discussions can occur on or off the record so Advance Illinois may not be directly quoted or mentioned as storylines take shape over weeks or months. For instance, in our news article database that we described earlier, Advance Illinois is mentioned in only 10 percent of articles covering the Performance Evaluation and Reform Act (PERA), and in 7 percent covering Senate Bill 7 (SB 7), the legislation that created new teacher evaluation processes for Illinois. However, media stories highlighted Advance Illinois' contributions to both pieces of legislation. Referring to PERA, the *Chicago Tribune* wrote that Advance Illinois "helped draft the 2010 legislation."<sup>80</sup> Advance Illinois received credit as a sponsor, broker, or negotiator in 32 newspaper articles on PERA or SB 7 including attribution as "the school reform group that played a lead role in the passage of Senate Bill 7."<sup>81</sup>

Analysis of Illinois media coverage tends to confirm that news reporters view the organization positively.<sup>82</sup> To examine the claims of Advance Illinois staff and its internal documents that describe its positive media reputation, we examined our comprehensive database of articles for the years 2008 through 2013. Among the 850 articles we studied, negative portrayals of Advance Illinois are extremely rare, occurring in only 23 articles, which is 2.7 percent of the total.<sup>83</sup>

In a more advanced statistical analysis we also found evidence of Advance Illinois's credibility with the media.<sup>84</sup> While controlling for other factors we found that articles containing Advance Illinois board member names were more likely to result in Advance Illinois being described as independent or nonpartisan or objective than stories without board member names. Further, stories that contained a reference to an Advance Illinois product, such as a report, also were more likely to contain these descriptors. Both results were statistically and substantively significant. Specifically, while holding other factors steady, having a board member's name in the article increased the chance of these positive descriptors appearing by 15.2 percentage points. From the perspective of media tone and coverage, the strategy of assembling a board of major Illinois figures appears to have paid off. Further, using the same statistical model and holding other variables steady, articles mentioning an Advance Illinois product increased the chance of the organization being described as independent or nonpartisan or objective by 27.5 percentage points.

*Outreach and engagement.* Evidence also shows that Advance Illinois has contributed to discussions that attempt to constructively engage numerous state actors and groups. Initial efforts suggested an especially hard push to listen to various leaders around the state. Sections of the 2008 publication of *The State We're In*, for example, attempted to convey an inclusive tone with wording such as this: "Educators and students are not to blame for the poor state of education in Illinois. They are doing the best they can within a policy and funding system that does not promote or reward success. It is time to raise our expectations and work together to speed the pace of reform" (p. 17). More specific efforts to connect to other state or local groups appeared in Advance Illinois's advocacy around the RTTT competition in 2010. In *Can Illinois 'Race to the Top?' Yes, We Can!*, it praised the Illinois Principals Association and the Large Unit District Association (an organization representing the largest Illinois school districts) for their work on principal evaluation (p. 7), and also noted how "union leadership" had been "eager to form partnerships in school turnaround efforts" (p. 11). All these illustrate what Mintrom calls persuasive advocacy in that Advance Illinois is attempting to offer an overall message that is compelling and consistent, while simultaneously connecting its ideas to particular groups.

Efforts to forge personal connections with state and local leaders also have been extensive, as noted in Advance Illinois's documents and our interviews. During its launch in 2008 and 2009, the organization conducted an extensive local outreach effort holding meetings with over 70 community leaders around the state, an additional dozen or so community conversations with small groups of local stakeholders, and another handful of town hall meetings involving broader audiences. Related efforts have persisted, in particular with state actors and in targeted engagements with local communities where the Advance Illinois outreach director has helped cultivate relationships or via events that Advance Illinois sponsors, or more typically co-sponsors, such as a series of talks about the Common Core initiative.

Through its outreach work, Advance Illinois has attempted to position itself as a valuable intermediary that can transmit information and build bridges between allies and reluctant or potentially unknown partners. These are common strategies of successful policy entrepreneurs who attempt to mix in a variety of settings and strategically build networks. The overall effort is especially prominent at the treetops level of discussion, among state actors and their representatives, or the grassstops level with prominent local leaders, given that, as staff noted,

Advance Illinois lacks the capacity for deep grassroots outreach. In documents, Advance Illinois staff describe its intermediary efforts as “connective work,” which can reverberate across the state’s education policy networks. Doing so can help forge alliances and incorporate new voices into policy discussions, as with the EAC, whose members have helped Advance Illinois develop its agenda while also becoming active participants in state policy debates, sometimes testifying at hearings, for example, when opportunities arise.

Collectively, Advance Illinois’s contributions to discussions have made it a useful partner for many groups around the state. As one interview respondent noted, it is easy for discussions to become narrow given the typical groups that always participate, so having a new voice like Advance Illinois, which can introduce new discussion partners and new ways of thinking about policy, has been an asset as groups attempt to form coalitions to advance their overlapping interests. Such efforts aimed at stoking new discussions or lines of thinking are common among the new education advocacy organizations that we examined in Chapter 2.

### **3.3.2. Additional perspectives on Advance Illinois’s contributions to discourse.**

Although much evidence reveals that Advance Illinois has made positive contributions to policy discourse, reactions from some interview respondents and our own analyses of additional sources provide additional perspectives as well. The two most notable issues here, discussed by about half of the state actors we interviewed, are Advance Illinois’s publication of letter grades that rate various dimensions of state performance in education and the nature of some of its outreach efforts. A third area regarding its use of research also was mentioned, albeit less frequently but by some of its supporters and critics alike. We discuss each of these areas in turn.

*Grading state performance.* One of the biggest critiques of Advance Illinois’s contributions to discourse centers around how it grades the quality of education in the state. Using an A to F system, *The State We’re In* reports assign letter grades to the state’s performance in early education, K-12 education, and postsecondary readiness and success. Interview respondents ranging from Advance Illinois’s strongest supporters to its harshest critics noted how they believed that these grades were more for shock value and grabbing headlines rather than to foster constructive discussions about how to improve education in Illinois.<sup>85</sup> Criticisms of the grading approach in *The State We’re In* tended to focus on two issues.

First, perceptions exist that the grading sets a very negative tone, which does not invite dialogue and collaborative searching for improvements. An otherwise enthusiastic Advance Illinois supporter noted that reform groups sometimes embrace the misconception that people on the ground are not interested in changing to improve conditions, and that giving critical marks to the overall system does not always motivate people to get better. Another person noted that highlighting the grades in the reports is something that “everyone hates” because it simply generates bad press and nobody ends up focusing on “progress that’s been made.” One final person who agreed with the overall contents of *The State We’re In* reports nevertheless still noted that Advance Illinois could do a better job to prepare audiences for the news by modifying its efforts and to be more receptive to the pushback.<sup>86</sup>

Second, some critics have noted that Advance Illinois’s claims about state performance are incomplete, especially when considering other contextual information.<sup>87</sup> These critics admit

that the state still lacks truly excellent schools overall, but they worry that the letter grades that Advance Illinois uses to rate the state's performance are blunt instruments that should be more nuanced in capturing progress and assessing the other factors that can influence it. Critics noted that Illinois's academic progress remaining somewhat stable or even increasing in some areas is remarkable given that over the last decade the numbers of disadvantaged students attending state schools increased while state and local revenues for education declined. The 2012 version of *The State We're In* does summarize the state's efforts to support progress. It also describes "improvement" on NAEP (p. 7), while also pointing out the increasing trajectory of poverty from 2001-2011 (p. 11). In general, *The State We're In* reports routinely provide data on the number of schools in the state, student demographics and enrollment, and funding. In contrast to the other areas discussed in these reports, though, Advance Illinois does not give a letter grade to the state on how well it supports its schools financially or on whether resources and talented teachers are distributed equitably across the state's numerous districts.<sup>88</sup>

*Nature of outreach discussions.* Another topic that about half of our interview respondents noted was that over time Advance Illinois's outreach has seemed to focus more on groups or individuals sympathetic to its message. The respondents believed this is closing off potential lines of discussion that could offer the organization valuable perspectives and improve its policy proposals.<sup>89</sup> These observations came primarily from respondents more critical of Advance Illinois's work, but it also included some who describe themselves as its strongest allies. One very blunt critic noted that for Advance Illinois to be a true partner it needs to realize that "it does not have the only agenda in town." The Advance Illinois outreach director received more explicit credit for engaging critics in her work, but it was also noted that she operates with limited resources and is perceived by some as not used enough.

More extensive, open-ended listening and outreach, respondents noted, would be useful because it would help Advance Illinois connect more fully to local settings where policy reforms ultimately will succeed or fail. Such efforts would have the related benefit of mitigating perceptions, which some respondents inside and outside Advance Illinois relayed to us, that the organization sometimes is seen as a Chicago-based group that is trying to push Chicago-oriented solutions on the rest of the state.<sup>90</sup> To its credit, Advance Illinois staff are aware of this dynamic and one can see efforts in its publications, for example, to draw broadly from across the state when it offers illustrations of reform successes that map onto its preferred approaches.<sup>91</sup> Still, it is an ongoing challenge, especially because of the highly decentralized nature of education governance in Illinois, with dozens of small rural districts, and when some of the specific reform agendas that Advance Illinois supports have such close ties to the Windy City.<sup>92</sup>

It is likely that the outreach criticism noted here is at least partly due to a predictable evolution that one would expect to see as a new organization develops. In the start-up phase, when agendas are still coming together, organizations may seem more open to a broad range of perspectives. As they begin to develop and mature, and positions become more clear or specific, it may suggest a narrowing of the organization's perspective around a key set of priorities or approaches. Thinking about that general sort of evolution is important if one remembers, as our respondents did, how Advance Illinois's leaders launched the organization. Even more critical respondents we interviewed did praise Advance Illinois for its aggressive early efforts to engage with state and local leaders through its community conversations and town hall events. Those

meetings, recall, were a core piece of the initial roll-out strategy as Advance Illinois began its work.

*Use of research and data.* About a quarter of the state actors we interviewed did not entirely agree with the view that Advance Illinois is always a dispassionate broker of information, a point that the majority of respondents said was a strength of the organization. Despite the lower number voicing concerns here, we thought the issue worth considering given that the group raising this topic included some respondents who were generally enthusiastic about Advance Illinois's work, not just its critics.

Some respondents said that Advance Illinois's preferred policies can sometimes be based on evidence where research on effectiveness or applicability to certain contexts is contested. The preference for reforms that have been most thoroughly tested in urban settings, for example, was one such area. Other respondents, including some who were otherwise strong Advance Illinois supporters, were more specific in noting what they believed were problems with how the organization reviews and synthesizes the evidence. One stated that a more rigorous vetting process would improve the quality of their work because it would expose them to research that may contradict some of their preferred ideas.

Others offered more measured critiques and agreed that Advance Illinois does have staff who are skilled at working with research results. And those respondents never questioned the integrity of the individuals working for Advance Illinois. Still, one noted that staff members need to improve their understanding of how research connects to on-the-ground conditions in the state, while the other suggested that they should be more open-minded to different viewpoints that different sources offer. The thrust of these comments was not that Advance Illinois lacks a research base for its work—and no respondent said or implied that it was dishonest in how it used information—but rather that it could bring a more critical eye to research or data and it could think harder about how key findings might translate into practice across the state's numerous diverse school districts.

We find some evidence of these criticisms in our own analysis of the organization's publications and other written advocacy materials. Some of this we attribute to early mistakes in the initial years of the organization's work when it operated with fewer staff resources, missteps that have perhaps lingered in the minds of some respondents and influenced how they have read Advance Illinois's subsequent analyses. Early work (albeit work still posted on the Advance Illinois home page) published to support the organization's positions about the importance of quality teachers, for example, sometimes overstated the conclusions of prior research<sup>93</sup> or drew on published claims that, upon closer inspection, were not backed by empirical evidence.<sup>94</sup> In other more recent work, for example, some comparisons between Illinois and other states would benefit from deeper discussion to clarify what the reported results suggest about the quality of these states' education systems and whether Illinois should emulate their efforts.<sup>95</sup>

We do not mean to overstate these criticisms about the use of research and data, especially given our earlier discussion that the majority of respondents found Advance Illinois's work credible and well-supported. On numerous other issues that are discussed and sourced in their work we see evidence that they have done an excellent job. The point that our respondents

and our own review suggests is simply that Advance Illinois has sometimes opened itself to criticism that it could be more careful. When unforced errors find their way into published work that can be damaging, despite subsequent efforts to remedy them,<sup>96</sup> because they are the very sorts of things that critics can seize to undermine Advance Illinois's larger messages or descriptions that the majority of our respondents agreed do a strong job of reflecting current conditions in the state.

More broadly, in considering these results about the use of research and data it is important to read the critiques in the larger context of education advocacy work, be it new or traditional. Advocacy agendas create perceptual screens that naturally draw their supporters toward some sources or claims and away from others.<sup>97</sup> Thus, it is unsurprising that advocates would be more inclined to believe and report on certain findings but to downplay others. Such is the nature of advocacy work, be it done by Advance Illinois, a business group, teacher union, or school district leader association.

### ***3.4. Advance Illinois's Contributions to Education Policymaking***

Influencing discussions about education policy is a key goal of Advance Illinois. As the previous section showed, it has enjoyed much success on that front, especially with state stakeholders and the media. A main reason to influence debate is to have one's arguments inform concrete changes in policy. In this section we consider the evidence of Advance Illinois's contributions to education policymaking. Overall, considered in light of the organization's primary goals, its substantive reach has been impressive.

**3.4.1 Evidence of consequential contributions to policymaking.** Interview respondents and additional evidence attest that Advance Illinois has positioned itself to make consequential contributions to education policymaking in the state. Three particular examples that stand out are its roles in the lawmaking process, in formal governing institutions, and as a resource mobilizer for other organizations and groups.

*Lawmaking process.* Numerous respondents agreed that Advance Illinois's work has influenced the lawmaking process. These views were shared by people who supported Advance Illinois's initiatives and by its critics who, though they may disagree with some of Advance Illinois's policy preferences, nevertheless agreed that it has wielded substantial influence. In discussing this impact one person generally noted that Advance Illinois "has been very instrumental," while another added the staff have "something to show for their effort" in the legislative process. Another attested to the organization being a big "outside push" and agreed that was a good role because "we need that" in the state. Respondents credited this success to the overall hard work of Advance Illinois staff and the persistence and savvy of executive director Robin Steans. "Whenever we need legislative support, that's who we get in touch with," said another respondent in referring to Steans and the Advance Illinois staff. One other person noted how everyone in Illinois frequently wonders about what the group's next legislative effort will be and "quakes" because they know Advance Illinois can make change happen. A final respondent credited the organization with pushing 7 to 8 major pieces of legislation, an average of more than 1 per year since it began its work.

In our interviews, we asked respondents to identify specific laws or other policy initiatives that Advance Illinois could properly claim as a success or as an area where it made important contributions. Given the organization’s relatively brief history, the responses revealed a long list of policy areas and initiatives for which respondents gave it some (sometimes much) credit for influencing the content of policy. Not all respondents agreed with the substance of the policy or the positions that Advance Illinois took, yet their comments reflected the apparent influence that Advance Illinois has demonstrated. Based on respondents’ answers we identified the areas with the greatest perceived impact, along with others that respondents mentioned less frequently. Considering areas noted by at least 4 people, where at least 2 of them were not members of the Advance Illinois staff or board, the 6 specific policies appearing in Table 8 emerged.

**Table 8.** Policy initiatives where Advance Illinois made substantial contributions, according to interview respondents.

<b>Policy or policy area</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
1. Senate Bill 7 (SB 7)	Built on PERA (see below, item 3) to incorporate consequences for teacher evaluations.
2. Funding equity	Engagement with the issue of proration and funding inequity helped produce a legislative task force on the subject.
3. Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA)	Overhauled the teacher evaluation system in order to include student growth as part of an educator’s evaluation and help standardize evaluations across individuals and schools.
4. School report card reforms	Created a new set of metrics and format for state reporting on school performance.
5. Educator preparation and certification	Included adjustments to teacher and principal certification expectations.
6. Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS)	A survey and process designed to provide information about kindergartners’ development to assess their readiness to succeed in school.

Note: An item made it onto the list if it was mentioned by at least 4 different respondents, with at least 2 respondents being state actors not affiliated with Advance Illinois. Items are listed from most frequently mentioned to least frequently mentioned.

The list in Table 8 reflects, in large part, the advocacy priorities that Advance Illinois has embraced. Recall, especially, that educator quality is a top agenda item for Advance Illinois, and items 1, 3, and 5 in the table address that theme. Smaller numbers of respondents mentioned numerous additional areas, suggesting potential contributions from Advance Illinois on ISBE’s NCLB waiver application; the state’s pathways initiative, which focuses on expectations for

readiness for each step from middle school through college; the state writing assessment; urging the state to activate the P-20 Council; development of the state's longitudinal data system; and adoption of the state's school climate survey known as the 5 Essentials or "5 E's."

*Roles in traditional governing institutions.* In addition to pushing proposals in the legislative process, Advance Illinois staff members have assumed formal roles with traditional governing institutions. This includes serving on various state committees or working groups designed to help ISBE and other state institutions. In so doing, Advance Illinois has demonstrated what Mintrom calls social perceptiveness and being prepared to lead by example, characteristics of successful policy entrepreneurs. Advance Illinois staff members have recognized, as some noted in our interviews, that their advocacy work will have limited impact unless traditional state institutions can capably manage their responsibilities, which, in Illinois, have grown given the menu of recent policies summarized in Table 8. Rather than playing only a gadfly role or pressing elected leaders to stay focused on their reform agenda, Advance Illinois staff have contributed to the work of the traditional institutions themselves. In the process, they have helped to affirm the value that these institutions provide to the state.

Advance Illinois's work in traditional state policymaking venues is wide ranging, and respondents have attested to the organization's seemingly ubiquitous presence. "How the hell did they do this?" asked one respondent rhetorically, before remarking with a bit of hyperbole, "They're on every single statewide committee that there is." Another person who, like the prior respondent, participates in some of these same statewide groups, noted that there is an Advance Illinois representative on every committee that the person attends. Even Advance Illinois staff members have remarked on the broad scope of this involvement, including one who noted that it can be difficult to remember who participates on what group in what capacity. Examples of staff serving on various statewide committees or working groups include, among others, the ISBE stakeholders group, a collection of leaders from key state education organizations representing teachers, management, and other interests; the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC), which is partnering with ISBE, teacher unions, and superintendents to shape a new state teacher evaluation plan; the Learning Performance Management Group, led by ISBE and tasked with developing a comprehensive state strategy to increase use of data for instruction; and the Education Funding Advisory Board, which advises ISBE and the state legislature.

As Table 9 shows, Advance Illinois members play numerous roles on the state's P-20 Council. That group's mission is to advise the governor, legislature, and state agencies to help improve Illinois's ability to serve students from birth through adulthood. Advance Illinois board member Miguel del Valle chairs the entire council and executive director Robin Steans co-chairs the Data, Assessment, and Accountability Committee. Advance Illinois's particular interest in the P-20 work is consistent with its broad system-wide focus that we described earlier.

Participating in these formal institutions has provided Advance Illinois access to key venues where it can engage others and work to incorporate its preferred ideas into policy. This allows Advance Illinois to grapple with the nuts and bolts of policymaking, especially the crucial regulatory work that occurs after bills become laws. Such venues provide the organization with a mechanism for following through on the proposals it has championed in the legislative process, suggesting that Advance Illinois is prepared to lead by example, another characteristic that

Mintrom associates with successful policy entrepreneurs. An added virtue of working with traditional governing institutions, as one Advance Illinois staff member told us, is that participating in these groups creates opportunities for building connections to other state stakeholders. For example, even though the P-20 Council may have particular items on its agenda at any given convening, during breaks or before and after meetings, Advance Illinois staff can informally exchange information or ideas about other business with these stakeholders who also participate on the council or its supporting committees.

**Table 9.** Advance Illinois roles on the Illinois P-20 Council

<b>Advance Illinois member</b>	<b>Role on P-20 Council</b>
Miguel del Valle <sup>(1)</sup>	Chair of the P-20 Council
Robin Steans	Member of the P-20 Council Co-chair: Data, Assessment, and Accountability Committee Member: Coordinating Committee (composed of the co-chairs of each of the P-20 Council committees) Member: Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Committee
Ben Boer	Member: Data, Assessment, and Accountability Committee
Jim O’Connor	Member: Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Committee
“Advance Illinois” <sup>(2)</sup>	Participant in the Report Card Working Group
Sharod Gordon <sup>(3)</sup>	Member: Family, Youth, and Community Engagement Committee

Notes: (1) Miguel del Valle is an Advance Illinois board member; the others are staff members. (2) The documents accompanying this working group say that Advance Illinois worked with the group to help develop the report card, but no specific Advance Illinois names are mentioned. (3) Sharod Gordon is a former Advance Illinois staff member, although his name is still listed on the P-20 Council as a member of the Family, Youth, and Community Engagement Committee. It is unclear whether this particular committee has met very often given that its webpage appears not to have been updated since 2010.

Source: Illinois P-20 Council website accessed on August 8, 2013. The website includes the council’s organizational chart. Committee membership can be accessed by following this link <http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Pages/default.aspx> and selecting the “Our work” menu.

*Resource mobilizer.* Finally, Advance Illinois has contributed to policy development by mobilizing resources for state agencies and other groups. In these instances, Advance Illinois has leveraged its role as a go-between to bring additional capacity—sometimes from its own internal resources and sometimes from others—to enhance the work of different state institutions. These efforts sometimes emerge when Advance Illinois staff participate in state committees and working groups. That involvement helps it to better understand the resource limitations and constraints confronting these state institutions. By leveraging its various network partners and its in-house staff it can help these organizations function by bolstering their capacity. Two respondents noted such general contributions by affirming Advance Illinois’s ability to “enhance the capacity of the state.” Another explained that it has been good at “getting resources” to help facilitate the work of the state’s P-20 Council. This includes offering its own

staff time or drumming up in-kind consulting support for the council's work. Sometimes this work to bolster capacity has a more local flavor, as when Advance Illinois seeks opportunities to connect struggling districts, such as North Chicago, to state resources that ISBE can provide.

This resource-mobilizing role has proven especially useful for ISBE. As with nearly all state education agencies across the nation, the agency's operating budget and staffing have shrunk during the last two decades, even as its responsibilities have mushroomed. As one respondent noted, those demands have emerged alongside new federal program reporting requirements, such as those accompanying NCLB. With more work yet fewer hands on deck, support from Advance Illinois has helped the agency move along its projects and create new initiatives. For example, Advance Illinois has offered advice and help in writing grant proposals to support ISBE's ongoing reform efforts. Further, Advance Illinois's work to gather data on districts receiving federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds and to assemble that information in a publication, *Improving Our Lowest-Performing Schools: Illinois Progress Report for 2011-12*, provides an additional perspective on the agency's own oversight work for SIG grant recipients. Advance Illinois's EAC group has provided ISBE with direct input from current teachers through briefings and testimony, and through opportunities for EAC members to serve on statewide committees that solicit teacher input.

An additional relatively new development in the state agency to enhance teacher voice, which Advance Illinois has helped facilitate, is the summer Educator Leadership Institute. The institute was launched by ISBE in 2012 with support from Advance Illinois and the two state teacher union affiliates, the Illinois Education Association and the Illinois Federation of Teachers. This relatively intimate summer gathering, with roughly 70 teacher participants in each of 2012 and 2013, has provided additional opportunities for ISBE staff to hear from highly regarded Illinois teachers, who are invited to the meeting by state superintendent Chris Koch. The Common Core, one of Advance Illinois's top advocacy priorities, was the theme for the 2013 meeting.

All of these capacity building efforts help foster a concrete working relationship between Advance Illinois and ISBE leadership and staff, and the additional partners that participate. As a result, even when ISBE and Advance Illinois may disagree on certain matters, such as ISBE's displeasure at the grades that Advance Illinois publishes in its regular *The State We're In* reports, their working relationship remains strong. In part, as one respondent said, this is because Advance Illinois recognizes the essential, yet challenging, work that ISBE performs, which is evidence of Advance Illinois being a socially perceptive policy entrepreneur. One other respondent noted that Advance Illinois's work adds a new dimension and does not simply substitute for what ISBE otherwise could be doing. The person explained that is because of the flexibility, as an outside group, that Advance Illinois possesses and due to its good reputation, the respondent said.

**3.4.2 Additional perspectives on Advance Illinois's contributions to policymaking.** Advance Illinois's efforts in the legislative process and as a collaborator or resource mobilizer for traditional state institutions has helped it amass an impressive array of policy accomplishments in its relatively brief history. In fact, no respondent we interviewed, including Advance Illinois's supporters and its critics, asserted that the organization has had no impact or a

limited impact, even, on Illinois policymaking. The two main alternative perspectives that emerged regarding Advance Illinois's policy contributions focused on the speed and degree to which it has been able to wield its influence, and whether its policy work is broadly attentive to the enabling conditions required for state reforms to succeed.

*Level of influence with state institutions.* Being embedded in key institutions, either formally or informally, has helped Advance Illinois to influence policy. Yet the swiftness with which the organization has forged its tight connections with traditional state institutions, and the breadth of involvement across multiple committees and working groups, not to mention its more informal interactions, have created a potential liability, according to some interview respondents. These perspectives come from Advance Illinois's toughest critics and some of its closest friends. It seems strange to some that as a relatively new group, Advance Illinois has not yet done enough or demonstrated sufficient expertise to merit the numerous opportunities for influence it possesses. As one critic noted, "they seem to be everywhere," which creates a "point of contention."

There are cynical and more sympathetic ways to read this critique. One interpretation is that it merely is a case of sour grapes. When a new group emerges, as one respondent told us, and begins to "upset the apple cart" by offering new ideas and ways of thinking, previously empowered actors may feel resentful if their influence declines. Yet disrupting traditional modes of work is a key objective of policy entrepreneurs as they offer new perspectives on problems, solutions, and coalition building. This is true of all policy areas, not just education, where priorities are shifting and new players are entering the fray.<sup>98</sup> Jostling with traditional actors in the state education policy ecosystem has forced more seasoned players to recalibrate some of their ideas and approaches, especially because Advance Illinois's agenda generally is warmly received by ISBE.

Advance Illinois's supporters and critics also offered a more sympathetic way to read this critique of too much influence coming too quickly to the organization. Especially when Advance Illinois offers support to traditional state institutions that is more informal, or leverages the discretionary power of government officials to better position itself to influence policy or regulatory outcomes, a transparency problem, or at least a perception of one, can develop. One state actor described, for example, a view that Advance Illinois seemed to be staffing the P-20 Council and wondered if that should prompt concerns. Another suggested that Advance Illinois had become too politically connected to ISBE, a point that another person raised by saying that it sometimes can be difficult for people to discern whether various initiatives are those of ISBE or of Advance Illinois.

There are two potential negative effects of connections that seem too tight or influence that seems too behind-the-scenes. First, the formal state institutions themselves, either ISBE or the P-20 Council, for example, can lose credibility if they are or are perceived to be too in line with the preferences of Advance Illinois or any organization, for that matter. Among the most cynical observers, these state institutions would risk being tagged as a servant to the Advance Illinois board or foundations that support the group's work. A second issue is that Advance Illinois itself could encounter operational difficulties. Beyond the perception problems just noted, becoming too enveloped ISBE's or the P-20 Council's work, as one Advance Illinois

member told us, could lead Advance Illinois to become too much of a technical assistance provider for state agencies. Such a focus could pull Advance Illinois into the minutiae of specific initiatives and undermine its forward-looking and system-wide perspective. A supporter also noted how Advance Illinois could become too bureaucratic if its own agenda mapped too closely onto the agenda of the P-20 Council. By aligning its work priorities and deploying its own resources to serve the council's work, this person said, Advance Illinois itself could, in practice, begin to mimic the behavior of state agencies, and lose its advocacy edge.

*Enabling conditions for implementation.* Another major theme that emerged in our research focused on how the policies that Advance Illinois supports align with the enabling conditions required for reforms to succeed. In short, numerous respondents noted that they believe Advance Illinois gives these ground-level realities less attention than they should in developing their advocacy strategies and proposals. That view leads some people to perceive that Advance Illinois worries primarily about adopting reforms and less about how school districts will implement them. As a result, one respondent sympathetic to Advance Illinois who also has deep ties across the state noted, "You'll get a more negative view of Advance [Illinois] from the trenches." Another made the related comment that the organization needs to "get down in the weeds" to see how things really are. Distance from the ground level, another respondent noted, has resulted in some policy overreach. The claim here is that Advance Illinois and other members of the reform community have been naïve in pushing for new policies that are difficult to implement, especially amidst scarce resources and growth in the population of disadvantaged students because the reforms expand local responsibilities without offering substantial resources or regulatory relief. Just because Advance Illinois has a system-wide perspective, noted one critic, does not mean that the state should try to carry out every initiative at once. The state can be strategic in setting priorities and sequencing new initiatives to limit the possibility of muddled implementation, this person said.

Our respondents offered specific examples of ground-level challenges that they believe Advance Illinois and other groups have not seriously considered. First are resource issues. As one respondent told us, financial concerns determine how quickly things can move on the ground, and district pushback against reforms is likely to occur when financial resources to implement them are inadequate. Another, a self-described SB 7 supporter when the state's teacher evaluation law was passed, was enthusiastic because there appeared to be a path for local buy-in during the law's development and passage. The person is now worried that the connections to the ground have remained undeveloped and money to support them is absent, even as a "sea change" in policy has occurred on teacher evaluation. As a result, the respondent saw Advance Illinois as "losing credibility" because of "these rabbit chases" that lack funds for needed professional development, which, this respondent thought, could ultimately undermine the reforms.<sup>99</sup>

A second ground-level challenge our respondents identified was limited administrative and management capacity to implement new state policy. Most principals in the state require training to evaluate teachers as the PERA and SB 7 systems envision. Nor is it clear that state policies have reduced current principal responsibilities to create time for these new commitments. The Advance Illinois report *Transforming Teacher Work* acknowledged that principals are overloaded and have unique responsibilities (p. 6). But the skeptics we

interviewed believed that Advance Illinois has made optimistic assumptions about the financial support or regulatory relief that districts will receive to help principals to carry out these new reforms.

These implementation issues came up frequently in our interviews with Advance Illinois staff and board members, and the other state actors. What the discussion suggests is a more general dilemma that confronts really any new group focused on state-level advocacy to promote policy change. Before framing that dilemma, however, it is important to highlight a key point that enjoys substantial agreement. The question of whether Advance Illinois has identified policy reforms, advocated for their adoption, helped them become law, and then assisted in their lift-off at the state agency level was answered quite clearly in our earlier summary of the group's contributions. Those efforts have been numerous and well-recognized across the state even, we emphasize, among individuals that may disagree with the overall thrust of the reforms. Judging Advance Illinois by its ability to help shape policy leads one to conclude that the organization has succeeded in its treetops work and consistently accomplishes the advocacy objectives that its leadership and board have defined.

The dilemma regarding implementation is a somewhat separate, but still related issue. The ultimate success of Illinois's policy reforms will depend, among other things, on the emergence of other policy entrepreneurs with a more locally oriented focus to help ensure that implementation succeeds in districts and schools. Given Advance Illinois's comparative advantage at the state-level, and the judgments of Advance Illinois staff that Illinois is a "leadership-driven state" when it comes to education policy, it makes sense that it has prioritized treetop elite engagement and resource mobilization to help state-level institutions perform their duties. At the same time, Advance Illinois has continued to engineer strategic and targeted engagements with local actors by leveraging the contacts of its EAC members, supporting ISBE's Educator Leadership Institute, and in reflecting on the local knowledge that the Advance Illinois outreach director gains from regular field work. These efforts complement its main thrust, which is state-level advocacy. Doing comprehensive state and local advocacy and implementation work is difficult and a tall task for any one group, a point that Advance Illinois's founders recognized when it defined the group's primary mission.<sup>100</sup>

Therein lies the dilemma, which has implications for how reform agendas play out over time. On one hand, Advance Illinois has organized itself to emphasize state-level policy advocacy and outreach, while its ground-level capabilities are less developed. That focus has helped it to amass an impressive record of policy accomplishments. On the other hand, as multiple respondents inside and outside of Advance Illinois recognized, if the organization's favored policies are to improve student outcomes—the ultimate bar to judge whether reforms are successful, something that members of Advance Illinois and others affirmed—then the agenda must alter for the better the practices that exist in schools and classrooms across the state. A voluminous literature on education policy change supports this point.<sup>101</sup> If policies fail or are perceived to fail during local implementation it could reflect badly on Advance Illinois and other groups that have supported the reforms.<sup>102</sup> Our interviews with Advance Illinois staff and board members indicated that the organization is sensitive to these issues. The challenge is that it finds itself playing catch-up as it contemplates how best to leverage its capabilities to continue focusing on state-level policy adoption and implementation, its core mission, while forging

bonds with local policy entrepreneurs who can help districts implement reforms. This will be a challenging needle to thread, as one Advance Illinois member noted, because although the team is not “oblivious to the trenches,” it is treetop level policy work that gets the Advance Illinois staff “excited,” so that is “where the energy goes.”

**3.4.3. The illustrative case of Senate Bill 7.** The development, passage, and subsequent reactions in Illinois to Senate Bill 7, a topic that we discussed with essentially all of our interview respondents, provides a valuable window into understanding how Advance Illinois has influenced state policy. Governor Pat Quinn signed the bill into law on June 13, 2011 after essentially a half-year of legislative debate. The bill dramatically changed teacher hiring and dismissal processes, focusing on performance rather than seniority. It also constrained the ability of teachers to strike, a topic that stoked particular controversy in Chicago. The bill aligns with the current national focus on reforming teacher evaluation, consistent with positions that new education advocacy organizations across the country have supported. Our focus in this section is on the parts of the story that reveal insights about Advance Illinois’s role in the process as a policy entrepreneur. Readers interested in a more detailed legislative case study of SB 7 can consult other sources.<sup>103</sup>

Among Advance Illinois’s numerous efforts, SB 7 is valuable to consider for a few reasons. First, essentially everyone in the state we interviewed recognized the important potential consequences of the law. Second, unlike similar legislative proposals in other states, the SB 7 legislative debate had an unusual outcome: all but a single state legislator voted to pass it. We call that result unusual given the polarization in American politics and in state debates over such issues. In 2011, for example, Illinois’s neighbor, Indiana, passed a related measure on basically a party line vote.<sup>104</sup> Third, the law’s passage and current transition to the implementation stage reveal the challenges and opportunities that policy entrepreneurs face as they craft their positions and mobilize their advocacy.

The initial stages of the debate to alter teacher hiring and dismissal policies began in Illinois with a proposal known as Performance Counts. That initial process, unfolding during December 2010 and early January 2011, was much more confrontational than the eventual work that produced SB 7. Power politics were on display as Advance Illinois and another advocacy group mentioned earlier, Stand for Children (including leaders and staff from its national and Illinois affiliate), tried to quickly pass Performance Counts, a more aggressive bill than SB 7, during the legislature’s lame duck session. Camps were highly polarized at this time, in contrast to the more engaging style that Advance Illinois typically embraces. One factor that contributed to that polarization was the assertive effort by Stand for Children’s national PAC and its leadership to win over state legislators by offering unprecedented campaign contributions and by hiring elite lobbyists to press their case in Springfield. Our interview respondents with knowledge of the legislative process that December indicated that Stand for Children was not interested in working toward a more broadly endorsed compromise measure and instead believed it was possible to push through Performance Counts. At that stage of the process, Advance Illinois endorsed that approach.

Union leaders in the state opposed Performance Counts. They argued that it was assembled without considering their perspective and that the fast-track efforts in December

contradicted the more consensual processes that had produced earlier education reform laws in Illinois. Advance Illinois's reputation as a facilitator and bridge-builder was damaged during this period, in part because it became identified with the more aggressive political style of Stand for Children. One state actor we interviewed recalled talking with Advance Illinois staff at the time and lamenting that the process was unfolding in a way that undercut consensus-building.

During the winter holiday union leaders developed their own proposals that they offered in January 2011. The union proposal convinced legislators that a new process should guide subsequent discussions. Negotiations then shifted and became more inclusive with additional actors involved. Our interview respondents who addressed this point believed it was a more comfortable role for Advance Illinois<sup>105</sup> because the process became less confrontational. The key participants in this new stage were legislative leaders, members of the management alliance (e.g., representatives of the state's school boards, principals, and superintendents), union leaders, and Advance Illinois and Stand for Children, identified in the process as reform groups. Many meetings between these actors and the attorneys representing them produced the eventual bill that became SB 7 and that ultimately passed by a near unanimous vote in the legislature.

What can one conclude about Advance Illinois's ultimate impact on the process that produced SB 7? The story is complicated, and goes beyond the brief summary we have offered here, in part because it is so over-determined with many factors likely playing some important role. Three competing narratives emerged in our discussions with interview respondents, yet all agree that Advance Illinois's presence did contribute to the outcome in some way, a point that our discussion of Table 8 illustrated. How much influence is subject to interpretation, something that other published work has explored.<sup>106</sup> Three particular narratives emerged from our research and interviews.

First was an inevitability narrative. This view holds that strong contextual factors were driving the state toward passing a bill. Across the country, other states had adopted similar laws, and SB 7 seemed like the logical extension of PERA, the state's pre-RTTT law that incorporated measures of student growth into teacher and principal evaluations. Whereas PERA defined what these evaluations should include, SB 7 articulated the potential consequences. Some of our interview respondents believed that SB 7 or something like it would have passed in Illinois, too, regardless of whether Advance Illinois had been involved, although they agreed that Advance Illinois's absence could have produced a different process and eventual bill.

A second view suggests a power politics narrative. It maintains that Stand for Children's assertive tactics and large campaign contributions, and subsequent union muscle to redirect the Performance Counts debate were the key factors involved. In short, it was a clash of the political titans. Stand for Children's money jumpstarted the process and generated momentum and legislative pressure. Subsequent pushback from the unions reset the equilibrium and produced the process that eventually produced SB 7. In this view, Advance Illinois's involvement is acknowledged, yet it is portrayed as a more marginal player compared to the others.

Finally, a third view sees Advance Illinois as absolutely essential for SB 7's passage. This perspective holds that the potential for no bill passing was real, despite the inevitability narrative and the power politics narrative just described. Interview respondents with this view

explained that Stand for Children’s aggressive approach only could work if legislators had a bill to consider. Getting that proposal assembled and satisfying the various constituencies involved was a key contribution of Advance Illinois, especially after the legislature abandoned the Performance Counts proposal. Without Advance Illinois’s presence in that process, these respondents argued, it is unlikely that a consensus bill would have emerged.

Regardless of the narrative or combination of narratives that one prefers, the development and passage of SB 7 suggests a few main conclusions about Advance Illinois’s role and effectiveness as a policy entrepreneur. First, it reveals that Advance Illinois is taken seriously in the state’s policy debates. Participating at the negotiating table in a substantive way to help craft such a potentially impactful law truly is a compelling achievement, especially when one remembers that Advance Illinois only began its work a couple of years before the Performance Counts debate began.

Second, the legislative process reveals how Advance Illinois’s initial outreach efforts during its launch helped it to recover and retain credibility with other stakeholders in the wake of the Performance Counts debate. That bridge-building, and Advance Illinois’s in-state roots, given the backgrounds of its board and staff, provided it with opportunities to reengage during the process in 2011. Further, the organization’s efforts to be socially perceptive and mix in a variety of settings during its launch, two traits of successful policy entrepreneurs, contributed to its recovery and good relations with other state stakeholders after the SB 7 debate concluded. Put another way, the ability of Advance Illinois to leverage its strengths and reputation to be a strategic team builder, another of Mintrom’s dimensions of policy entrepreneurship, was constrained in the Performance Counts debate but became more possible once the process was reset at the beginning of 2011.

Third, and more broadly, the contrasting advocacy styles of Advance Illinois and Stand for Children likely helped Advance Illinois to emerge from the process with an even stronger reputation. Still, the work of both groups likely helped move the bill toward passage. Some respondents noted a sort of “good cop and bad cop” dynamic with Advance Illinois playing the good cop role as a facilitator and consensus seeker and Stand for Children playing the bad cop role given its willingness to confront or challenge the skeptics and persuade reluctant legislators by offering large campaign contributions. Our analysis of media coverage of the issue provides additional evidence. For instance, in statistical analyses that control for other factors, links between Advance Illinois and SB 7 appear to be systematically associated with positive media coverage. Articles, letters and op-eds that mention Advance Illinois are 3.5 times more likely to take a positive tone toward SB 7 than articles that did not include reference to Advance Illinois. In contrast, articles, letters and op-eds that mention Stand for Children are 4 times more likely to take a negative tone toward SB 7 than articles that did not include the Stand for Children reference. Both of these results are statistically significant at conventional levels.<sup>107</sup>

Fourth, the virtues of Advance Illinois’s approach to policy entrepreneurship revealed themselves even more clearly after SB 7’s passage. An additional development occurred after Stand for Children’s national leader, Jonah Edelman, made an ill-advised speech, which was recorded and posted to YouTube, about the legislative process that produced the ultimate bill. In trying to recover, Edelman reached out and apologized to key Illinois stakeholders, including the

Advance Illinois executive director.<sup>108</sup> When combined with its large campaign contributions from 2010, this fiasco tarnished the Stand for Children image in the state, while creating additional daylight between the organization and Advance Illinois, according to many of our interview respondents. Seen through the lens of policy entrepreneurship, these events imply that social perceptiveness and a willingness to engage in multiple social and political settings can foster relationships that allow policy entrepreneurs to rebound from controversy when it erupts. Advance Illinois appears to have recovered well from the Performance Counts debate, while Stand for Children has experienced greater challenges. That speaks to Mintrom's point that policy entrepreneurs must be strategic team builders and lead by example.

### **3.5. Overall observations about Advance Illinois**

An overall assessment of Advance Illinois should begin by evaluating the organization based on its self-defined goals and objectives and by the promises it has made to its supporters. Using those criteria, which we described earlier and which are independent of whether one agrees with the organization's advocacy agenda, Advance Illinois deserves high marks. It has promised to promote discussions that advance comprehensive policy reforms that it believes will improve education. It also has promised to participate in state legislative and regulatory debates to help leaders produce policies consistent with that comprehensive policy agenda. In a remarkably short period of time, the Advance Illinois staff and board members have succeeded in weaving the organization into the fabric of the state's education policy quilt and pushing forward many of its priorities. Based on the overall body of evidence we have examined, the foundations supporting the Advance Illinois agenda and supporters who have endorsed its work should conclude, without question, that Advance Illinois has delivered on its promises.

The six dimensions of Mintrom's policy entrepreneur framework provide an additional way to evaluate Advance Illinois. In this section we conclude by considering Advance Illinois's efforts through the lens of each dimension.

The framework's first dimension noted that effective policy entrepreneurs are *creative and insightful*, which means they offer novel ways of discussing policy challenges that help others see potential problems with current practices and possible future solutions. This is an interesting dimension to consider in Advance Illinois's case because the overall menu of ideas that it supports is not necessarily novel. Instead, the ideas generally represent a very straightforward embrace of priorities advanced in the federal RTTT competition and in the Common Core. Nevertheless, Advance Illinois appears to have made at least two new contributions to policy discourse. According to our interview respondents and other evidence we examined, Advance Illinois is unique in the state for being a group advancing a comprehensive approach to education policy development. Additionally, Advance Illinois's powerful board has brought a novel, bipartisan coalition of voices to education issues. Picking up the banner of RTTT and Common Core is not necessarily creative or insightful, as Mintrom uses those words. But still, Advance Illinois deserves credit on this dimension in a different way as its leaders have helped to bring these issues to the top of the Illinois agenda, and for being a state-level translator, so to speak, of larger national trends. In short, they have been creative in seeing an opening for these discussions in the state and then mobilizing their advocacy to leverage that opportunity.<sup>109</sup>

Second, effective policy entrepreneurs are *socially perceptive*, which allows them to see issues from multiple perspectives, even as they develop and carve out their own preferred policy agendas. Advance Illinois's work reflects this dimension in at least a couple of ways. First, by proposing a comprehensive approach Advance Illinois has promoted policy changes across the spectrum from pre-K, K-12, and even higher education, especially regarding teacher preparation. Articulating needs and issues across these areas has enabled Advance Illinois to engage education policy from many angles. Second, the organization recognizes the role that state institutions play in the development and implementation of policy. Rather than simply criticizing the state education agency, ISBE, as state legislators or other critics of the K-12 system might do, Advance Illinois has affirmed the role that the agency plays, and indeed that it must play, in improving the state's schools.

In other areas, our interview respondents and additional evidence suggest that Advance Illinois has room to grow on this second dimension. With nearly all of the organization's board members, foundation supporters, and its main office based in Chicago, some observers continue to assert that Advance Illinois is trying to push Chicago-focused ideas on rural and suburban communities. Advance Illinois's board and staff members recognize this and, as we noted earlier, have tried to counteract this perception, which admittedly is difficult given the state's "Chicago versus down-state" political culture. The organization's efforts to better engage local practitioners, which our earlier discussion of the implementation dilemma explored, is one example, as is its work with the EAC and the ISBE Educator Leadership Institute. Connecting more directly and frequently to school principals and superintendents would provide an additional perspective, albeit a difficult task to execute given the vastness of the state and the already huge demands on these local officials' time.

Third, effective policy entrepreneurs act nimbly by *mixing in a variety of social and political settings* to identify and connect to potential allies, while also reaching out to critics to better understand their perspectives and possibly persuade them to adjust their views. Engaging diverse state-level stakeholder groups both inside and outside government represents one of Advance Illinois's primary accomplishments. Given the polarization that characterizes our nation's politics, and the heated disagreements that accompany the issues that Advance Illinois has pursued, the organization has done much work to cultivate conditions where even some of its critics on certain issues still are willing to work collaboratively on agenda items where their priorities align. It certainly helps that ISBE and the P-20 Council are warm towards the overall Advance Illinois agenda. Still, the fact that Advance Illinois's relationships with some groups appeared to rebound so quickly after the more confrontational start in the SB 7 debate is evidence of its efforts on this third dimension.

An area where Advance Illinois could make additional progress would be with what our interview respondents refer to as the Illinois "management alliance," involving the state's school board officials, district leaders, and principals. Although some cooperation between Advance Illinois and these groups has occurred, their overall relationship is somewhat frosty when compared to other groups. One of our respondents mentioned the value of rekindling open-ended local discussions, which occurred during Advance Illinois's launch, as a way to better connect to and remain connected to management, especially given the relatively frequent turnover that commonly occurs in district leadership positions. These gatherings could be

organized with very few specific items other than simply to exchange views on current issues and concerns. That approach could align well with Advance Illinois's emerging advocacy regarding school funding and equity, a message that poor or relatively under-resourced districts may very well support. Further discussions with suburban districts on this topic also could help Advance Illinois to anticipate and understand potential criticisms of its funding proposals, which more affluent communities might see as a threat.

Fourth, effective policy entrepreneurs are *persuasive advocates* that offer an overall general message that is consistent and compelling, while also crafting their arguments to connect to the more specific needs of particular groups or individuals. The consistency and energy with which Advance Illinois delivers its message is impressive. Whether others find the message compelling appears to depend on their perspective. Actors who work primarily at the state level with government officials seem the most amenable. Generally speaking, that support wanes as one moves toward groups that work in state venues but also have deeper ties to localities, and as one gets closer to the ground level itself. Certainly, local allies of Advance Illinois do promote the group's message, such as EAC members and community leaders where the Advance Illinois outreach director has cultivated relationships. Still, the distance from state-level work tends to be a good variable that would predict whether a listener would be more or less persuaded. This finding appears to be a logical consequence of the organization focusing on state-level advocacy.

Fifth, effective policy entrepreneurs work as *strategic team builders* that understand how to help foster successful coalitions that can lead to adoption of the policy entrepreneur's policy priorities. Based on our evidence, this is perhaps the dimension where Advance Illinois has excelled the most. In fact, the evidence strongly suggests it is a main comparative advantage that the organization possesses. Advance Illinois does not financially support politicians because it does not participate in partisan electoral politics. It does not mobilize thousands of concerned citizens or teachers via action alerts or other methods because it is not a grassroots organization. It does not produce original research because it is not a think tank or a university research center. What Advance Illinois possesses are powerful networks, which its staff have artfully constructed and expanded through their own tenacity, leveraging of contacts, and heft of their accomplished board members. Further, they have bolstered their allies both inside and outside government through their work as a resource mobilizer and a facilitator, mustering support for their partners' initiatives that are consistent with their own advocacy agenda.

Sixth, and finally, effective policy entrepreneurs are *prepared to lead by example* by signaling their strong commitment to the arguments, proposals, and to the coalitions that they attempt to help build. Advance Illinois has demonstrated its commitment to its proposals through its willingness to work with or in traditional state institutions, including ISBE and the P-20 Council, to move forward policies that it worked to shape and pass in the legislative process. Put differently, it has not exited the stage after the opening act of legislating, but has remained involved to help see proposals through. An emerging issue that will test Advance Illinois's commitments to its initiatives and its partners will be whether it agitates to ensure that the state provides funding and regulatory relief required for local school districts to succeed in implementing the reforms that Advance Illinois has supported. Addressing the funding issue, which Advance Illinois has begun already with its advocacy regarding finance equity, will offer an important signal to others that it wants its proposals to succeed during implementation.

Overall, during the last five years Illinois and other states have experienced an intense period of education policy change, prompted by the chase for RTTT funds and other state developments. One of our interview respondents noted that many people in Illinois see the world in “pre-RTTT” and “post-RTTT” terms. Moving ahead, as Advance Illinois continues to develop and refine its advocacy agenda it will confront new issues and challenges. Some of these shifts are easy to predict, such as the changing demographic trends in Illinois that will increase the numbers of traditionally disadvantaged students in the state’s schools, while others, much like the announcement of the RTTT competition during the earliest years of Advance Illinois’s existence, will be harder to anticipate.

One of the main conditions creating potential opportunities and challenges, already a reality in Illinois and other states, will emerge as the policy system turns attention to implementing the blizzard of recent policy changes that have become law. The dynamics surrounding these debates also will change once Advance Illinois shifts to defending policy victories it has helped to secure. On several issues, such as teacher evaluation and Common Core, Advance Illinois will be defending the current system rather than advocating for policy change that shifts from the status quo. The move from “offense” to “defense” likely will be challenging because policy changes have been so broad and sweeping, future costs of implementing them are still uncertain, and some of the practical details of the initiatives themselves, as with Common Core and the Common Core assessments, are still taking shape. Already, for example, as a few of our interview respondents noted, even before implementation has begun in earnest, there have been calls to re-open discussions and potentially revise certain provisions of SB 7. A backdrop for all this future work will be the likely continued dysfunction in the U.S. Congress, which will make future injections of federal funding, as with RTTT, more limited, if available at all, in the coming years.<sup>110</sup> As a result, Illinois and other states will be relying on the generosity of their own taxpayers and the judgments of their state legislators to supply adequate funding and flexibility to move their initiatives forward.

## **Chapter 4. Implications and Conclusions**

Our analysis of the new education advocacy, through our national snap shot and in-depth case study of Advance Illinois, suggests two sets of conclusions. The first is directed towards new education advocacy organizations themselves. The second addresses their potential supporters, especially foundation leaders. In addition to considering our closing points, members of both groups would benefit from considering (or reconsidering, perhaps) additional perspectives from practitioners who have worked with new education advocacy organizations across the country.<sup>111</sup>

### ***4.1. Implications for new education advocacy organizations***

We offer five issues for new education advocacy organizations to consider as they develop their future agendas.

A first topic focuses on the distinction between policy development and policy implementation, and the need to be attentive to both. New education advocacy organizations have prioritized moving policy in their preferred reform directions. Still, if their initiatives are to succeed then local actors must take ownership of them. This creates a potential tension because

new education advocacy groups with a state-level focus may lack capabilities to affect ground-level implementation in the nation's fragmented system of K-12 education. Yet if they are inattentive to those ground-level realities and policy eventually stumbles, the results could reflect poorly on their advocacy agendas. They promised great things from these policies, after all. New education advocacy organizations could try to develop their ground-level capacity, which, admittedly, would be a heavy lift, but not impossible given the example of Mass Insight Education, an influential advocate for state leaders and an assistance provider to local school districts across Massachusetts and other districts in the nation.<sup>112</sup> Another alternative is to cultivate local network partners who can help sustain reform efforts as they move beyond state capitals and into districts and local classrooms.

Second, even as they bring new ideas to state education debates, new education advocacy organizations could benefit by being open to working with traditional groups and institutions. These include state agencies and groups such as teacher unions and the various management associations comprised of principals, superintendents, and school boards. Advance Illinois's work with ISBE and with state teacher unions in ISBE's Educator Leadership Institute is one example. Well into the future such traditional groups and institutions will continue to operate and likely have the closest connections to implementers on the ground. Engagement with these groups is needed, even if new education advocacy organizations believe that these groups should take some blame for prior troubles. Striking this balance will not be easy. On one hand, if new education advocacy organizations are too warm toward the traditional players, it could undercut their "rabble rousing" role of challenging prevailing policies and practices when the evidence calls for those challenges. On the other hand, when new education advocacy organizations enter the policy arena with strong assumptions that traditional actors are mere roadblocks and their own views will provide a roadmap to future success, they may undermine their ability to form productive coalitions that simultaneously can produce better state policies and better local implementation.

Third, new education advocacy organizations could consider whether to pursue strategies that are more elite-driven or more mass-driven. An elite-level treetops strategy can benefit new education advocates when elites generally endorse their agendas, but it also leaves them exposed if new leaders emerge who are less supportive. That suggests some potential advantages of also cultivating reliable mass-level strategies, which could provide backup if the political winds change. Building that capacity takes time and effort. If it remains a bridge too far, it would be helpful to contemplate forging coalitions with local-level policy entrepreneurs, what we have described in this report as grassstops leaders, who can mobilize mass support for favored initiatives.

Fourth is the important issue of timing. As one of our interview respondents suggested, a good idea in theory advanced at the wrong time is likely to be a bad idea in practice. Scholars of agenda setting and policy entrepreneurship would agree.<sup>113</sup> Because timing matters greatly for securing policy victories and implementation successes, the zeal of new education advocates to sometimes push numerous proposals simultaneously can produce overreaching if the timing is off. Or similarly, assertive efforts can foster reform fatigue on the ground, which, especially when coupled with shrinking resources, ultimately can undercut the energy that teachers, principals, and district leaders must supply for new policies to succeed. "This, too, shall pass," is

a common and not always unreasonable response from local educators and leaders who have witnessed numerous reform fads come and go. How feasible will it be for new education advocacy organizations to ease up on the accelerator when doing so could help build enthusiasm for initiatives and enhance the prospects of longer-term success? Will their foundation partners allow a go-slow strategy when windows of opportunity remain closed? Knowing when going slow reflects steady patience rather than a flat-lining agenda may be difficult to discern. Still, if remaining patient means that short-term victories are elusive, but during that time new education advocacy organizations are softening up key stakeholders with their ideas, then future progress may be more attainable.

Fifth, new education advocacy organizations should carefully consider how to build their identities amidst the increasingly crowded education advocacy environment across the states, which invites potential networking but also could challenge a new group trying to establish itself. These groups can benefit from partnering with each other, especially as they increase in number and develop different comparative advantages. Still, while seeking to leverage such closer collaborations, doing so could undermine group identities, especially for newer groups. They may also become vulnerable to stronger network partners who attempt to single-handedly dominate or drive a network agenda. As past research has shown, there is a potential “dark side” to working in policy networks that new education advocacy organizations should recognize.<sup>114</sup> Consider, for example, the two categories of groups we described earlier: home-grown new education advocacy organizations and others that emerge as state affiliates of larger national groups or networks. The latter may find it harder to develop support across a wide spectrum of state leaders and so may seek out unaffiliated new education advocates, already operating on the ground or in state capitals, as partners. The home-grown new education advocates may feel buoyed by the resources that the groups with out-of-state connections can provide, yet relying on them (or being perceived to be relying on them) could undermine a group’s in-state credibility.

#### ***4.2. Implications for potential supporters of new education advocacy organizations***

Foundations can and have played crucial roles in incubating new education advocacy organizations across the country. And those organizations have worked to advance agendas that support their foundation partners’ larger objectives. Our national snapshot and our examination of Advance Illinois reveal those results quite clearly. When we asked our interview respondents whether foundations should continue to fund new education advocacy organizations, the most common answer was that it depends on the goals that foundations embrace. For foundations that see new education advocacy organizations as potentially promising outlets for their giving, we conclude with five issues for foundation leaders to consider.

First, although foundations are increasingly interested in funding work that produces tangible outcomes, assessing the performance of new education advocacy organizations is challenging because the policy process is complex, subject to myriad forces. How to know, then, whether a new education advocacy organization is providing foundations with a good return on their investment? Designing metrics to evaluate performance seems to be an important effort for foundation leaders to pursue, but establishing causal relationships between advocacy work and outcomes is difficult. That challenge of measurement suggests an irony when considered against the backdrop of education policy developments during the last decade, especially. New education advocates and their foundation supporters may resist reducing advocacy work to

simple metrics that do not completely capture advocates' performance, or they may prefer to monitor inputs, such as the amount of advocacy activity. Ironically, schools themselves are increasingly judged through simple and often incomplete outcome measures instead of input-oriented lenses (e.g., test-based accountability focusing on reading and math, rather than how much money was spent per student), although they, too operate within complex political, social, and cultural contexts.

A second issue centers on the parameters of the grants that foundations offer to new education advocacy organizations and whether those gifts should support broad or narrow objectives. Foundations' priorities drive their giving, obviously. For practical and political reasons, our evidence suggests that foundations offering funds that support very broad purposes can help new education advocacy organizations in two ways. Such giving provides the advocates with operational flexibility that can help them seize new opportunities, as Advance Illinois did with the unexpected emergence of RTTT, which occurred after its initial launch and before its agenda priorities had crystallized. Perhaps even more important for new groups, relatively unconstrained grant awards help inoculate them from claims that they are mere tools of distant foundations, which critics might see conflicting with state needs. It is hard to overstate how vital it is for new education advocacy organizations to demonstrate that their advocacy is designed first, and foremost, to serve the internal needs of their states rather than their distant foundation supporters.

Third, as foundations debate whether to focus on giving to support school and school district activities versus influencing higher state-level policy, they must wrestle with the dilemma of bringing work to scale. Giving at the ground level initially may influence fewer students and take longer to reveal workable models. Yet the models that emerge may be more nuanced and carefully conceived, which can help implementers to determine how to scale them up, adapt them to other locales, or keep them out of places where they are a bad fit. In contrast, funding new education advocacy organizations working primarily to influence state policy, such as Advance Illinois, may produce more rapid changes, potentially influencing more students. But without important follow-through from numerous other actors, implementation may lack coherence, and thus have limited impact at scale due to local adaptations or the failure of policymakers to provide valuable resources and regulatory relief. It is worth contemplating how foundation giving might unfold with both levels of activity in mind. One could imagine how simultaneous support for state-level advocacy and additional support focused on local levels could create useful leverage points for both sorts of actors. Foundations themselves could form coalitions of givers to support state and local efforts with some coordination.

Fourth, new education advocacy organizations in states with supportive enabling conditions, including a welcoming political environment and agency leaders who are amenable to comprehensive agendas for change, may be attractive to foundations from a short-term return-on-investment perspective. Yet states lacking those enabling conditions may benefit greatly from the kind of work that new education advocates can provide: namely, revealing new ways of thinking, identifying new resources that can bolster the work of traditional institutions, or upending current institutional environments that are in equilibrium but provide limited support for implementation and produce lackluster results. Foundations that study state enabling conditions to determine how to award their grants may wish to consider whether such a strategy

creates an advocacy divide akin to the other such divides that frequently appear in discussions about educational equity. A related challenge is that enabling conditions may emerge quickly as windows of opportunity open. A risk-averse foundation that eschewed early investments in a state could miss that opportunity to advance its priorities. Similarly, a state with seemingly promising conditions also could shift as the political winds change. In short, although it seems reasonable to develop rubrics for giving that consider the presence of key enabling conditions, those conditions may be more difficult to assess or may be somewhat elusive as circumstances unfold. Foundations may benefit from flexible rubrics as they assess potential grant recipients.

Fifth, in addition to policy work, new education advocacy organizations may prove valuable in states when they bring added capacity to state education agencies. We saw numerous examples of Advance Illinois playing this role with ISBE and the state's P-20 Council. When these efforts occur, foundation grants to new education advocacy organizations indirectly are helping to bolster the capacity for traditional government agencies to do their work. This can be a good thing for advancing potentially valuable initiatives. In the process, though, foundation giving may relieve pressure from state legislatures that, in seeing foundation support for agency work, may redirect state resources to other activities. When foundation awards run their course and if new money is not forthcoming, that could severely limit state agency officials' future efforts. Although we did not observe this specific situation in Illinois, it has been apparent in other contexts.<sup>115</sup> Is this a potential moral hazard associated with this sort of foundation giving? Does it enable state legislative behavior that during the last two decades, at least, has tended to add responsibilities to state education agencies while simultaneously cutting their resources and staff? A key conclusion of studies of high performing education systems around the world is that system-level institutions, such as education ministries and the like, are revered, highly resourced, and staffed with talented people.<sup>116</sup> The United States requires much work to create those conditions across the states. Future studies that probed the relationship between foundation giving and public investments in building institutional capabilities in state and local agencies could be interesting to consider. Such investigations could provide foundation leaders with better insights about whether their giving helps to leverage additional state resources or allows state legislatures to sidestep supporting their own institutions.

### **4.3. Conclusion**

Our national snapshot of new education advocacy organizations and case study of Advance Illinois offer many windows into state education policy debates. Our charge in conducting this analysis was multi-dimensional. We were to describe the basic features of these organizations; examine their contributions to state policy discussions and agendas; attempt to discern the factors that explain their track records; and then draw conclusions for new education advocacy organizations themselves and their potential foundation supporters.

An issue beyond the scope of our analysis is the degree to which new education advocacy organizations have advanced policy agendas that are likely to address the challenges confronting the nation's schools, which broadly focus on concerns over promoting educational equity and excellence. This larger issue is vital for education observers, policymakers, parents, foundation leaders, and others to consider. New education advocacy organizations ultimately will demonstrate their value not simply by offering something new or accumulating policy victories,

but rather by showing that their preferred policies produce more sustained success than the alternatives.<sup>117</sup>

Amidst the flurry of education policy changes in motion across the country, considering policies and their effects on practice is vital, especially because enthusiastic advocates across all fields, not just education, often propose new ideas without carefully considering the successes and failures of past advocates, who themselves claimed to be the new voices with surefire solutions in earlier eras. Developing a sense of that history, which researchers have shown is replete with policy advocates articulating lofty ambitions and making impassioned promises about improvements that unfortunately never came, will enable today's new and traditional policy advocates alike to consider their own proposals in a sober, analytical way.<sup>118</sup> Doing so will help advocates to avoid repeating past failures while they seek to improve academic opportunities and outcomes for children, ensuring that the nation's youngsters will grow into adulthood and thrive in the nation's economy and democracy.

## **Appendix on Methods and Data**

In this appendix we describe our research methods and data. Overall, the study relies upon multiple approaches and sources, including evidence derived from quantitative and qualitative techniques.

### ***A.1. Analysis of new education advocacy organizations across the country***

Work on the descriptive analysis of new education advocacy organizations across the country was led by Paul Manna, who reviewed all data and also coded the data on leader biographies that appear in Table 3. We begin by noting that there is no national database of new education advocacy organizations. To construct one we identified potential groups by drawing on several sources including the following: prior published work that had built informal lists of these groups; members of the PIE Network, including the organization's advocacy partners; and groups identified in documents provided by Advance Illinois, which were potential models considered as the organization was being created. Table 10 lists the 62 groups we considered.

We relied on several different sources to gather data information about the groups that appear in Table 10. For founding year, information on board members, and leader biographical sketches we relied primarily on the organizations' websites, websites of other organizations, and in a few instances email exchanges with group leaders or information we found in other published sources. Organizational revenues and expenditures and information on leader salaries came from IRS 990 forms, which are publically available from a few sources. We relied on the Foundation Center at <http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/990finder/>. We also used the Foundation Center website to identify the top 15 foundation givers to K-12 education, which appear here: [http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/statistics/gs\\_subject.html](http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/statistics/gs_subject.html).

We analyzed board members' political contributions using the database OpenSecrets.org, and focused on political contributions for the federal election cycle in 2012. To compile these contributions, we first collected the names of education advocacy groups' board members from group websites. To ensure the correctness of the information gathered, our team checked each group's website three separate times and confirmed the correct spelling of each board member's name. In collecting the names, our research team omitted titles (Mr., Mrs., Dr., Esq., Committee

Chair, Senator, for example) yet we did retain other modifiers (Jr., Sr., III, for example) in order to differentiate between possible generations of political donors. Our team conducted the final check during September and October of 2013.

In gathering the political contributions data, we used the OpenSecrets.org donor lookup tool at <http://www.opensecrets.org/indivs/index.php?q13>. For each board member, we searched using the last name and first name as listed on the website. Furthermore, we also selected the state in which the advocacy group is located in the Donor Lookup tool. Finally, we selected the 2012 election cycle, which includes political contributions from both 2011 and 2012. After selecting “Submit your Donor Query” the search output is summoned. We saved each donor output as a PDF file, which we then converted into machine-readable data. From each donor contribution search, we collected the name, city, state, zip code, occupation, date, amount, and recipient of the political contribution.

**Table 10.** New education advocacy organizations analyzed in this report

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**Stand-alone state organizations:** A+ Education Partnership; Advance Illinois; California Business for Education Excellence; Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession; Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning; Chalkboard Project; Colorado Succeeds; DC School Reform Now; EdSource; Educate Texas; EdVoice; Foundation for Florida’s Future; Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education; KidsOhio; League of Education Voters; Mass Insight Education; Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education; Mississippi First; Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition; Partnership for Learning; Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence; Public Advocates; Public School Forum of North Carolina; Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy; Rodel Foundation of Delaware; State Collaborative on Reforming Education; Texas Institute for Education Reform

**Democrats for Education Reform network affiliates in:** Arizona; California; Colorado; Illinois; Indiana; Massachusetts; Michigan; New Jersey; New York; Rhode Island; Tennessee; Washington; Wisconsin

**Stand for Children network affiliates in:** Arizona; Colorado; Illinois; Indiana; Louisiana; Massachusetts; Oklahoma; Oregon; Tennessee; Texas; Washington

**Campaign for Achievement Now (50CAN) network affiliates in:** Connecticut; Maryland; Minnesota; New Jersey; New York; North Carolina; Pennsylvania; Rhode Island

**The Education Trust affiliates:** The Education Trust Midwest [Michigan]; The Education Trust West [California]

**Thomas B. Fordham Institute affiliate:** Thomas B. Fordham Institute [Ohio]

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We acknowledge the limitations of our technique given the inconsistency with which donors report their personal information when they make their contributions. In some cases, we may have failed to capture all contributions or captured too many contributions for each board member. We may have missed political contributions of board members whose names appeared

to be nicknames. We also assumed that board members live in the same state as their education advocacy group, yet there was no way for us to verify this assumption for all members. Our technique also would not have captured political contributions made by board members' spouses, which could have been coordinated with the board members themselves. Still, for each potential contribution we identified, we did cross check the contributor's name, city, state, zip code, and occupation against information we had available in the board member's biography. That allowed us to screen out erroneous contribution records from our analysis. In all, the process that we followed to ensure accuracy was consistent with the advice that OpenSecrets.org offers to users of its data.

Given our interest in accurately reporting board member contributions, we chose not to use another campaign contributions data source, FollowTheMoney.org, which tracks money in state electoral politics. The reason was because FollowTheMoney.org does not provide enough personal information about individual contributors, unlike OpenSecrets.org, required to eliminate erroneous contributions from our analysis. FollowTheMoney.org is better for understanding campaign finance from the perspective of the recipients of campaign funds (e.g., candidates) but it is less reliable as a tool to analyze donor behavior.

## ***A.2. Interviews***

We conducted 27 interviews with members of the Advance Illinois staff, board members, and other state actors who work on education policy, as well as one other respondent who works with new education advocacy organizations across the country. The list of interview respondents and their affiliations appears in Table 11. The interviews took place in May, June, and August 2013, with 25 occurring in person. We interviewed 3 individuals with other respondents present, while the remaining interviews had just 1 respondent. Each interview lasted from between 45 to 75 minutes.

The principal investigator for this study, Paul Manna, conducted all interviews. Two note takers, in addition to the principal investigator, took notes in all of the in-person interviews, and the principal investigator took notes alone during the phone discussions. None of the interviews were recorded in order to encourage respondents to speak as freely as possible. Typically, the note takers collaborated to type up their notes immediately after the interviews or shortly thereafter on the same day. All respondents were promised that their replies would be kept confidential and that they were free to skip answering any question that they preferred not to discuss.

It is fair to characterize the interviews as structured discussions that also included opportunities for deeper explorations of relevant issues that came up in the course of the conversation. The principal investigator and note takers entered each interview with a standard battery of questions. One battery was developed for the Advance Illinois staff and board members and another for the other state actors. There were some overlapping questions in both batteries. Each interview was organized around a series of key questions, yet the discussions were allowed to veer from that protocol at times, either when respondents had limited knowledge of certain topics or when they offered deeper insights within particular lines of questioning.

**Table 11.** Interview respondents

<b>Advance Illinois Staff</b>	<b>Position</b>
Amy Ballinger-Cole	Director of Governmental Relations
Ben Boer	Policy Director
Elizabeth Dierksheide	Special Projects
Tara Malone	Senior Associate
Teresa Ramos	Outreach Director
Robin Steans	Executive Director
Megan Vidis	Communications Director
<b>Advance Illinois Board</b>	
Lew Collens	President (retired) Illinois Institute of Technology
Marin Gjaja	Partner and Managing Director, Boston Consulting Group
Miguel del Valle	Chair of the Illinois P-20 Council
<b>Illinois and Other Actors</b>	
Nicki Bazer	General Counsel, ISBE
Linda Chapa LaVia	Representative, Illinois State Assembly
Gretchen Crosby Sims	Vice President of Programs, Joyce Foundation
Roger Eddy	Executive Director, Illinois Association of School Boards
Jon Furr	Director, Office of Education System Innovation, Northern Illinois Univ.
Jessica Handy	Government Affairs Director, Illinois Stand for Children
Erika Hunt	Senior Policy Analyst and Researcher, Center for the Study of Education Policy, Illinois State Univ.
Chris Koch	Illinois State Superintendent, ISBE
Jason Leahy	Executive Director, Illinois Principals Association
Bob Pritchard	Representative, Illinois State Assembly
Darren Reisberg	Executive Director, Institute of Politics, University of Chicago and former General Counsel, ISBE
Mimi Rodman	Executive Director, Illinois Stand for Children
Diane Rutledge	Executive Director, Illinois Large Unit District Association
Julie Smith	Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of Illinois Governor Pat Quinn
Audrey Soglin	Executive Director, Illinois Education Association
Suzanne Tacheny Kubach	Executive Director, PIE Network
Rich Voltz	Associate Director, Illinois Association of School Administrators

Note: We also had valuable conversations, but not formal interviews, with Advance Illinois staff Barb Engelskirchen (Digital Manager), Jim O'Connor (Project Director), and Elaine Pipikios (Executive Assistant and Office Manager).

In general, each interview attempted to explore these issues: (1) the respondent's background and daily work, especially as it intersects with the work of Advance Illinois; (2) perceptions about Advance Illinois's goals and its degree of effectiveness in accomplishing those goals; (3) the nature of the interactions that Advance Illinois has had with other groups in the state; and (4) advice for the future that could be offered to Advance Illinois or to foundations that are contemplating funding new education advocacy work.

### **A.3. Documents**

We read approximately 250 primary source documents that were provided to us from Advance Illinois staff members. These included material distributed publically, such as Advance Illinois’s publications and handouts offered at public meetings. We also reviewed numerous confidential documents including internal briefing papers shared between staff members, materials prepared for board meetings, grant applications and grant reports to funders, and documents and studies assembled that informed the launch of Advance Illinois. Team members assisted in organizing and cataloguing these documents. Paul Manna read them and took notes on their content.

### **A.4. Media coding**

The media research team was led by Susan Moffitt who systematically reviewed the coding work completed for this part of the project. Analysis of media sources included two types of media: traditional media coverage that focused on newspaper reports from across Illinois, and new media sources comprised of Facebook posts and page view data provided to us from Advance Illinois. We discuss each of those sources and our coding procedures in turn.

**A.4.1. Traditional media coding.** The team relied on two databases to retrieve articles for this portion of the study: (1) Access World News for all local newspapers in Illinois, with the exception of the *Chicago Tribune*, which is not included in the Access World News database; and (2) Proquest for the *Chicago Tribune*. These publications were searched for the date range 2008 to 2013 using the following search terms:

- Advance Illinois;
- Performance Evaluation Reform Act;
- Senate Bill 7 OR Illinois Senate Bill 7 OR SB 7;
- Stand for Children;
- Proration (restricted to Illinois).

All articles that the database searches produced were saved. The team read each article and created a file of articles that would not be coded because they either were irrelevant, such as articles on sports teams that contained the words “advance Illinois”; were duplicates (on-line and print versions of the same articles were counted and coded only once); or were articles published in languages other than English. A total of 92 articles containing the words “Advance Illinois” were excluded from coding based on these exclusion criteria. The search using the term “Advance Illinois” resulted in 850 valid articles from 3 July 2008 to 28 April 2013. The rest of this section will discuss the “Advance Illinois” article coding process. We used the same process to code articles retrieved for the other search terms.

To begin the coding process, each member of the research team read the same 50 articles from the “Advance Illinois” search list, and together developed a coding protocol to use for all articles. For each article, the portion of the article that referred to Advance Illinois (in any way) was identified as the section to code. The information that coders retrieved from the Advance Illinois portion of the article included:

- article date;
- newspaper source;
- article title;

- whether the article was a letter OR Op-Ed;
- article topic(s);
- reference to another group or organization (such as Stand for Children or a foundation);
- reference to an Advance Illinois report;
- reference to an Advance Illinois board member;
- description of Advance Illinois (“reform group,” “nonpartisan,” “advocacy” etc.);
- whether the description of Advance Illinois contained any negative reference (this includes negative references in letters and op-eds OR articles discussing negative portrayals of Advance Illinois by other groups);
- whether the description of Advance Illinois contained any positive reference (including positive references in letters and op-eds OR articles discussing positive portrayals of Advance Illinois by other groups);
- whether the same article appeared in different and multiple local newspaper articles.

**A.4.2. New media coding.** The media research team used Facebook data from 2011-2013 obtained from Advance Illinois. From those data, a member of the media research team compiled a new data set that included the 100 posts that reached the most users from 2011 to 2013. The media research team also accessed Advance Illinois’s Facebook site to review posts from 2008, 2009 and 2010.

One member of the media research team read each post from the 100 posts that reached the most users and the posts from 2008, 2009 and 2010. If the post involved another link to an article, a picture or another website, the media research team member followed the link for further information. If there was no further link on the post, the media research team member recorded the information that was available. Information obtained from the Advance Illinois dataset included:

- post link;
- post message;
- post type (photo, link, status update);
- date posted;
- total users reached.

Additional information retrieved from the posts included the following topics to examine their substantive content:

- whether the post referred to an event (Advance Illinois or another sponsor’s event);
- whether the post referred to a report (Advance Illinois report or another sponsor’s report);
- whether the post included a picture (from Advance Illinois or another organization);
- whether the post referred to news;
- whether the post referred to an Advance Illinois board member;
- whether the post referred to an Advance Illinois employee;
- the topic(s) of the post.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Accounts of these concerns are easy to find. Examples include: W. Steven Barrett and Cynthia E. Lamy, “Achievement Gaps Start Early: Preschool Can Help,” in *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child and Even Chance* edited by Prudence L. Carter and Kevin G. Welner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Andrew Karch, *Early Start: Preschool Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013); Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarski, “Inequality in Postsecondary Education” in *Whither Opportunity: Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children’s Life Chances* edited by Greg J. Duncan and Richard J. Murnane (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Michael W. Kirst and Frederick M. Wirt, *The Political Dynamics of Education* 4<sup>th</sup> edition (San Pablo, CA: McCutchan Pub. Corp., 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Prior research on these groups is scant. Anecdotal and journalistic accounts are available, and consultants hoping to assist these groups have examined them. Examples include Patrick McGuinn, “Fight Club: Are Advocacy Organizations Changing the Politics of Education?” *Education Next*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2012): 25-31. Prior consultant’s reports are Suzanne Tacheny and Christopher T. Cross, *Rabble Rousers! Best Practices & Lessons Learned by Civic Organizations Working to Impact Education Reform* (Cross & Joftus, LLC, 2006); *Rabble Rousers Revisited: A Guide for Launching State-Based Education Reform Advocacy Organizations* (Re-issued by the PIE Network with permission from the Joyce Foundation, 2010); and *Who’s Who in a Growing Education Reform Movement* (PIE Network, n.d.). Rhodes examines a related topic, that of civil rights advocates interested in education, but that work focuses on advocacy to influence federal policy, not state policy; see Jesse Rhodes, *An Education in Politics: The Origins and Evolution of No Child Left Behind* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Manna, *Collision Course: Federal Education Policy Meets State and Local Realities* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010); David K. Cohen and Susan L. Moffitt, *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Manna, *School’s In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006); Frederick M. Hess and Michael Q. McShane (eds.), *Common Core Meets Education Reform: What It All Means for Politics, Policy, and the Future of Schooling* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2002); Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Policy entrepreneurship is not limited to what some authors have referred to as “educational entrepreneurship.” When that term is used it usually involves leveraging competitive markets in an attempt to improve outcomes. Examples from this literature include Frederick M. Hess (ed.), *Educational Entrepreneurship: Realities, Challenges, Possibilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2006); and Frederick M. Hess (ed.), *The Future of Educational Entrepreneurship: Possibilities for School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Mintrom, *Policy Entrepreneurs and School Choice* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000). See pp. 152-155 for a summary of the policy entrepreneur framework.

<sup>9</sup> Frank R. Baumgartner and Beth L. Leech, *Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Patrick McGuinn, “Fight Club: Are Advocacy Organizations Changing the Politics of Education?” *Education Next*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2012): 25-31.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, the nation’s two largest teacher unions, both support Common Core, as do the new education advocacy groups in our study. See <http://www.nea.org/commoncore> and <http://www.aft.org/issues/standards/nationalstandards/>.

<sup>12</sup> Although the analogy is not perfect, the adjective “new” is used in other contexts to distinguish between traditional and more recent activities, even though what is new in one era will not necessarily be new in another. For example, consider the moniker “new media,” used to describe the expansive array of electronic communications and the Internet, technologies that in a future era will not seem so new. Similarly, in the field of public policy, authors still frequently discuss a global movement known as the “New Public Management,” which collectively refers to modes of administering government that attempt to leverage markets to improve government performance. Those changes have persisted for at least three decades now.

<sup>13</sup> Michael J. Petrilli, “The scoop on the PIE Network,” <http://www.edexcellence.net/ohio-policy/gadfly/2007/october-4/the-scoop-on-the-pie-network.html>.

<sup>14</sup> PIE Network, *Who's Who in a Growing Education Reform Movement* (Minneapolis, MN: Author, not dated).

<sup>15</sup> The organization's members, policy partners, and advocacy partners are listed here: <http://www.pie-network.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> Two other small networks are in our database as well. They are led by The Education Trust (one affiliate in California and one in Michigan) and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (one affiliate in Ohio).

<sup>17</sup> Patrick McGuinn, "Fight Club: Are Advocacy Organizations Changing the Politics of Education?" *Education Next*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2012): 25-31; Suzanne Tacheny and Christopher T. Cross. *Rabble Rousers! Best Practices & Lessons Learned by Civic Organizations Working to Impact Education Reform* (Cross & Joftus, LLC, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> The top 15 foundation givers to K-12 education is reported by the Foundation Center at:

[http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/statistics/gs\\_subject.html](http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/statistics/gs_subject.html).

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth J. Meier and Laurence J. O'Toole, Jr., *Bureaucracy in a Democratic State: A Governance Perspective* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press).

<sup>20</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotations in this portion of the text and the accompanying footnotes come from information posted on these organization's websites.

<sup>21</sup> Alabama's A-Plus Education Partnership states that it "works for great schools for every child," Colorado Succeeds says that it is "committed to improving the state's education system," and the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education wishes to "impact education policies and practices for the improvement of student achievement."

<sup>22</sup> DC School Reform Now supports strategies that "prepare kids to become college and career ready," the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education aims to advocate for schools that "will prepare all students to engage successfully in a global economy and society," and the Texas Institute for Education Reform wants all Texas students to "graduate from high school fully prepared for higher education and the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace as well as responsible citizenship."

<sup>23</sup> Mass Insight Education, California Business for Education Excellence, Rhode Island-CAN, and both branches of the Education Trust (West and Midwest) mention the achievement gap, while several other groups list a particular focus on low-income or disadvantaged students (Public Advocates, Partnership for Learning, KidsOhio, and the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning).

<sup>24</sup> The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession states that it is "dedicated to building a strong, supported, and effective teaching force for Washington's students," while the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning says that its purpose is to "strengthen California's teacher workforce."

<sup>25</sup> The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education lists "measurable standards of achievement, accountability for performance, and equitable educational opportunities for all students" as the principles on which it bases its work, revealing that the group aims for more specific policy goals. The League of Education Voters is the only group to refer specifically to school funding as an issue in its mission, listing "protect[ing] public school funding" in its statement. 50CAN's national mission statement lays out more specific policy goals as well, stating that it supports reform programs that focus on "greater choices, transparency, accountability and flexibility in public education."

<sup>26</sup> DFER lists "mechanisms that allow parents to select excellent schools for their children" as a key component of what the group stands for; 50CAN lists "Greater Choices" as one of three key policy principles that guide its state groups' operations and the Fordham Institute cites "Quality Choices" as one of three policy priorities.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.gpee.org/>.

<sup>28</sup> The "Top 10 Issues to Watch in 2013" were: (1) Race to the Top: Looking Back...Looking forward; (2) Elevating Low-Performing Schools: Keys to a Successful Turnaround; (3) Funding: How do We Pay for K-12 Education; (4) Help Wanted: Hiring 250,000 New Graduates; (5) Early Learning: Ensuring High-Quality for our Youngest Learners; (6) STEM: Promoting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math; (7) The NCLB Waiver: What Grade did Your School Get?; (8) Technology: The Next Generation of Learning; (9) Flexibility and Choice: The Issues; and (10) Our Demographics: The Changing Face of Georgia's Schools. See [http://www.gpee.org/fileadmin/files/PDFs/Top\\_Ten\\_2013\\_Final.pdf](http://www.gpee.org/fileadmin/files/PDFs/Top_Ten_2013_Final.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> The Partnership has supported reforms such as "a lottery-funded statewide pre-kindergarten program; a constitutional amendment calling for appointed school superintendents and elected school boards; and an amendment allowing school systems to hold local referendums to establish sales tax funding for school construction purposes." See <http://www.gpee.org/History.71.0.html>.

<sup>30</sup> See the full list and details at <http://anniversary.gpee.org/accomplishments/>.

<sup>31</sup> Accomplishments related to information provision included: publishing the annual Top Ten Issues to Watch report; holding Partnership Forums, holding annual Media Symposium, Economics of Education presentations to

business leaders, Education Policy Forums for future superintendents and legislators; producing Education Policy Toolbox with information for stakeholders; publishing research and reports.

<sup>32</sup> Staff, “Top ten stories from the week of January 14,” *Henry Daily Herald* [McDonough, GA], 25 January 2013; Michelle Floyd, “New Report focuses on key education issues facing Georgia in 2013,” *The Newton Citizen*, 19 January 2013; Rachel Shirey and Johnny Jackson, “Top education issues to watch in ’13,” *Clayton News Daily* [Jonesboro, GA], 15 January 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis O. Powell, “Chamber of Commerce hears education expert,” *LaGrange Daily News*, 12 June 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Niese, “Top metro schools on path to success – Leader shares the Lambert model.” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 13 May 2013; Tracey McManus, “Richmond county grad rate higher - Columbia County sees drop,” *Augusta Chronicle* 22 May 2013; Nancy Badertscheder and Jeff Emsthausen, “Grading Changes; results don’t: Experts say state’s new school-rating system will spotlight problems,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 12 May 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Walter C. Jones, “Legislator wants state to back out of Common Core Curriculum,” *Athens Banner-Herald*, 20 February 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Smith, “Dalton’s ‘comeback’? – State leaders to tour community ‘doing it right,’” *The Daily Citizen* [Dalton, GA], 8 July 2013.

<sup>37</sup> The Partnership advocated for “a lottery-funded statewide pre-kindergarten program; a constitutional amendment calling for appointed school superintendents and elected school boards; and an amendment allowing school systems to hold local referendums to establish sales tax funding for school construction purposes.” See <http://anniversary.gpee.org/accomplishments/esplostappointed-superintendentslottery-funded-pre-k/>.

<sup>38</sup> Athens Banner-Herald, “Abhorrence for ‘T-Word,’” *Waycross Journal Herald*, 26 January 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Maureen Downey, “Poison seeds: Bitter harvest of APS cheating scandal,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 1 April 2013.

<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.rodelfoundationde.org>.

<sup>41</sup> The Foundation states four main policy goals on its website: “Great Teachers and Leaders in Every School,” “Personalized Learning,” “Supporting Common Core,” and “Early Learning.” See <http://www.rodelfoundationde.org/what-we-do/policy/>.

<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.rodelfoundationde.org/what-we-do/seed-funding/>.

<sup>43</sup> Magee wrote in an Education Week blog that the Rodel Foundation and Tennessee Score “both have succeeded in creating precision in their goals while driving forward with ambitious long-term plans. What’s more, they not only take responsibility for pushing hard for policy change, but also for seeing it through to successful implementation. They don’t declare victory until their efforts are actually securing big improvements for kids.” See [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick\\_hess\\_straight\\_up/2013/04/three\\_principles\\_for\\_being\\_a\\_cage-busting\\_advocate.html?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+RickHessStraightUp+%28Rick+Hess+Straight+Up%29](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2013/04/three_principles_for_being_a_cage-busting_advocate.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+RickHessStraightUp+%28Rick+Hess+Straight+Up%29).

<sup>44</sup> “DCAS: What is it?,” *Wilmington Examiner*, 3 April 2013.

<sup>45</sup> See <http://texaseducationreform.org/>.

<sup>46</sup> See “Academic Standards for the Schools We Need,” 2007; TIER’s Written Testimony to the State Board of Education, 2008; “Accountability for the Schools We Need,” 2008; and “Assessments for the Schools We Need,” 2007. All are available at <http://texaseducationreform.org/policy/archives/>.

<sup>47</sup> Kate Alexander, “Fewer tests for STAAR proposed,” *Austin American-Statesman*, 13 December 2013; Ericka Mellon, “EDUCATION – Students need less high-stakes testing, business groups say,” *Houston Chronicle*, 13 December 2013; Andrew Erben, “Be patient, stay the course on STAAR,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 16 August 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Will Weissert, “Top state senator says no testing retreat in Texas,” *Associated Press State Wire: Texas*, 16 April 2013; Kate Alexander, “Fewer tests for STAAR proposed,” *Austin American-Statesman*, 13 December 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Will Weissert, “Senate debates offering vouchers for private school,” *Texarkana Gazette*, 25 August 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Will Weissert, “State school choice debate heats up,” *Abilene Reporter-News*, 24 August 2012.

<sup>51</sup> TIER identifies seven key policy goals as part of its mission: (1) “Accelerate Deregulation and Innovation”; (2) “Higher Standards for Teaching and Learning”; (3) “New and Better Assessments”; (4) “Higher Standards for Academic Accountability”; (5) “Higher Standards for Financial Accountability”; (6) “Attack the Reading Crisis”; and (7) “Increase Educator Effectiveness.” See <http://texaseducationreform.org/about/>.

<sup>52</sup> Maria Luisa Cesar, “STAAR EXAM: Coalition urges no retreat from requirements,” *San Antonio Express-News*, 31 October 2012; Lindsay Kastner, “Revisions touted for school policy,” *San Antonio Express-News*, 26 January

2013; Meredith Moriak, “Business groups propose changing high school graduation plans,” *Midland Reporter-Telegram*, 12 December 2012; Andrew F. Messamore, “Pro-business group opposes increase in school funding,” *San Antonio Express-News*, 28 June 2012.

<sup>53</sup> See <http://www.massinsight.org>.

<sup>54</sup> According to the group, this included multiple phases: (1) 1990-1993: supporting reform policies; (2) 1994-1996: early planning for state standards and testing; and (3) 1997-2003: creation of spin-off nonprofit Mass Insight Education and Research Institute to build a coalition of public support for high standards and standards-based reform in general. See [http://www.massinsight.org/cms\\_page\\_media/58/MERI\\_Timeline.pdf](http://www.massinsight.org/cms_page_media/58/MERI_Timeline.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> Ed Hayward, “‘High-stakes’ MCAS sparks showdown,” *Boston Herald*, 31 October 2000. Roselyn Tantraphol, “Opposition to state tests gains backing,” *Union-News* [Springfield, MA], 6 January 2000. Ed Hayward, “Business groups rally to defend MCAS exam in court,” *Boston Herald*, 13 November 2002. Roselyn Tantraphol, “Holyhoke joins campaign seeking end of state test,” *Union-News* [Springfield, MA], 9 November 2000; “Opinion: Enough time is spent on math and English,” *The Enterprise* [Brockton, MA], 25 September 2001.

<sup>56</sup> “Super district a dud,” *North Adams Transcript*, 21 September 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Jim Therrien, “Advanced classes get boost from state – Taconic High gets \$368K for incentives and training,” *Berkshire Eagle* [Pittsfield MA], 29 July 2013; “Schools get 3-year, \$172,323 grant award - Money targeted to boost AP scores,” *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, 12 July 2013; Douglas Moser, “Enrollment in Advanced Placement courses soars,” *The Eagle-Tribune* [Lawrence, MA], 24 March 2013.

<sup>58</sup> See <http://dcschoolreform.org>.

<sup>59</sup> The group’s “Theory of Change” suggests that *informing* and *engaging* parents and education stakeholders will lead to *empowerment*, mobilizing community members to take *action* to pursue effective policies and strategies, which will lead to *change*, ultimately resulting in “a quality seat for every child” in DC schools. See <http://dcschoolreform.org/content/theory-change>.

<sup>60</sup> See <http://dcschoolreform.org/hqsc>.

<sup>61</sup> These include “Virtual School Tours” to give parents information about different schools, a “Virtual Education Hub” linking parents to information about education policy, and links to external sites that help parents compare among schools. See <http://dcschoolreform.org/content/what-we-do>.

<sup>62</sup> These policy beliefs are listed as part of the group’s mission: “Excellent Teachers,” “Excellent Leaders,” “Parent Engagement,” “Resource Allocation,” and “Accountability.” See <http://dcschoolreform.org/what-we-believe>.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Vinson Brannum, “An Engaged Chancellor Rhee,” *Washington Examiner*, 8 November 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Although in Illinois the governor appoints the state board of education, and the board appoints the state superintendent to run the state education agency, in our interviews and the documents we consulted, “ISBE” or the “State Board” commonly refers to what people in other states would consider to be the state education agency. In other words, even though the state board and state education agency technically are different institutions, people in Illinois elide that distinction when discussing ISBE. We do the same in subsequent pages so readers should not be surprised when we refer to “ISBE staff” to mean staff of the state education agency.

<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Tacheny and Christopher T. Cross. *Rabble Rousers! Best Practices & Lessons Learned by Civic Organizations Working to Impact Education Reform* (Cross & Joftus, LLC, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> In our interviews with Advance Illinois staff, we learned that most of them either have worked in schools themselves or are parents of children who attend public schools.

<sup>67</sup> Information about the foundation is here: <http://www.steansfamilyfoundation.org/>.

<sup>68</sup> In December 2013, Advance Illinois advertised to hire for the position of Senior Outreach Associate in order to expand its outreach efforts. That new associate has been hired and joined the team in April 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Another new education advocate we studied, the Rodel Foundation, recently has launched a related teacher council of approximately 15 members to begin in Fall 2013. It invites all public school teachers in the state to apply. See: <http://www.rodefoundationde.org/who-we-are/teachercouncil/>. An Advance Illinois staff member told us that Rodel Foundation officials contacted them for advice as they were figuring out how to develop such a group.

<sup>70</sup> Diane Ravitch. *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Diane Ravitch, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools* (New York: Random House, 2013). In 2012, the Chicago Teacher’s Union and MoveChicagoSchoolsForward.com produced a video for children that made this argument about corporate reform, in which it portrayed some education advocates in Illinois, including the Advance

Illinois executive director, as sinister “fat cats” seeking to undermine Chicago’s schools. See: “Stand Up to the Fat Cats” at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1eV8EHII5Q>.

<sup>71</sup> See “Who Best Represents School Reform in Chicago?” *Chicago Examiner*, 10 December 2010.

<sup>72</sup> See <http://commoncoreil.org/about/>.

<sup>73</sup> No media articles out of the 850 reviewed link Advance Illinois to elections or campaigns. In contrast, 172 of the 460 articles discussing the group Stand for Children referred to that group’s campaign contributions or electoral activity. Of those 172 articles, 84—nearly half—took a negative tone toward Stand for Children.

<sup>74</sup> Elliot Regenstein, “Illinois: The New Leader in Education Reform?” (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> As one example, on the “About” section of its home page, Stand for Children Illinois makes extensive references to Advance Illinois’s 2012 *The State We’re In* report. See: <http://stand.org/illinois/about>.

<sup>76</sup> A biographical sketch of Robin Steans is here: [http://www.steansfamilyfoundation.org/bio\\_robin.shtml](http://www.steansfamilyfoundation.org/bio_robin.shtml).

<sup>77</sup> Research on decision-making and bounded rationality, including that of Nobel Prize winners Daniel Kahneman and Herbert Simon, support that view. See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011). For a great overview of Simon’s contributions see Bryan D. Jones, *Politics and the Architecture of Choice: Bounded Rationality and Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) and Bryan D. Jones, *Reconceiving Decision-Making in Democratic Politics: Attention, Choice, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>78</sup> Not all respondents agreed with the timing of Advance Illinois’s advocacy on this issue, even as they did give the organization credit for jumpstarting the discussion.

<sup>79</sup> The senate resolution creating the task force is here:

<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/98/SJR/PDF/09800SJR0032lv.pdf>. The funding reform bill introduced in 2014 is here: <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/98/SB/09800SB0016sam001.htm>.

<sup>80</sup> “Student gains a major role in principal ratings,” *Chicago Tribune*, 18 January 2013.

<sup>81</sup> Articles include, “Longer school day, more ‘teacher time,’” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 27 May 2011.

<sup>82</sup> For an illustration of a positive portrayal, see the opinion piece “Advancing Education,” *Chicago Tribune*, 28 June 2009, which states: “And the state is also about to embark on an ambitious longitudinal data collection system to track student progress (or lack of it). But lawmakers and schools have to be pushed to do much more. We’re glad to see a relatively new group, Advance Illinois, take up this cause. We were glad to see Advance Illinois is led by a couple of heavy-hitters, former Gov. Jim Edgar and former U.S. Commerce Secretary Bill Daley. And it’s supported by the Joyce Foundation. That should help the group get some attention and have staying power . . . It’s good to see Advance Illinois join the fight. This state has a budget crisis to fix. But it has an education crisis too.”

<sup>83</sup> As a point of comparison, 40 percent of articles referring to the organization Stand For Children contained a negative portrayal of that organization: 180 articles out of 460 total articles.

<sup>84</sup> The analysis reported here and additional regressions discussed later were run in Stata. Full results from those models are available from the authors.

<sup>85</sup> These are important reactions to consider given that Advance Illinois has described these reports in a grant application as “a focal point in outreach efforts” and “the centerpiece of a series of community conversations, conference calls, webinars, presentations, and other venues.”

<sup>86</sup> Leaving aside whether one agrees that Advance Illinois’s grades are useful or problematic contributions to dialogue, we note that the grades themselves do not send an entirely clear signal to readers. This is because Advance Illinois calculates them based on where Illinois ranks among the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Put differently, the state is graded on a curve. A high grade could be misleading if all states were performing poorly on an indicator, whereas a very low grade could be quite good if overall performance across all states is high and contains little variation. Further, Illinois could remain stable on all measures across multiple years but have grades change due to changes in other states. In short, grades that are high or low could mean either good or bad news. In any given year it would be difficult to interpret what each grade means, a challenge that would become even more unwieldy in comparing results over time.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, this op-ed written by state teacher union and school management groups in response to the 2012 release of *The State We’re In*: <http://media.ieanea.net/media/2012/12/Press-Release-121012-Illinois-public-schools-achieve-despite-challenges.....pdf>.

<sup>88</sup> There is a deep literature addressing how money matters for school performance. Gary T. Burtless (ed.), *Does Money Matter? The Effect of School Resources on Student Achievement and Adult Success* (Washington, DC:

Brookings, 1996); Eric A. Hanushek and Alfred A. Lindseth, *Schoolhouses, Courthouses, and Statehouses: Solving the Funding-Achievement Puzzle in America's Public Schools* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Helen F. Ladd, "Education and Poverty: Confronting the Evidence, Presidential Address to the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2012): 203-227.

<sup>89</sup> One example included claims that staff members doing policy work at Advance Illinois tend to surround themselves with progressive districts that embrace the organization's preferences, which would give them a more limited perspective. A related comment emerged from two respondents who mentioned the EAC. One person, again someone generally enthusiastic about Advance Illinois's work, encouraged the organization to put more openly tough critics on the EAC to produce more robust conversations that are more representative of teacher views across the state. Transcripts of EAC meetings are not available, and we did not interview any EAC members during the course of our research. Still, Advance Illinois staff members did note that some EAC members, for example, are active members of the Chicago Teachers Union, a group that frequently disagrees with Advance Illinois according to our interview respondents. According to Advance Illinois staff members, their inclusion illustrates a good-faith effort to incorporate diverse views onto the EAC.

<sup>90</sup> One respondent related this criticism to the grading that appears in *The State We're In* reports. In offering grades, this person said, Advance Illinois should analyze Chicago separately given its size relative to other state districts and the unique status it often receives in state law. Such criticisms are common in states with a single large urban center many smaller communities, such as New York (New York City), Michigan (Detroit) Wisconsin (Milwaukee), and Indiana (Indianapolis).

<sup>91</sup> For example, see the Advance Illinois report, *Transforming Teacher Work for a Better Educated Tomorrow* (p. 13), described in Table 4.

<sup>92</sup> Examples include the recent adoption of the state's school climate survey, known as the "5 Essentials," or "5 E's," which is an approach developed out of research in the Chicago and Detroit public schools and being administered by Advance Illinois board member Timothy Knowles who is based at the University of Chicago's Urban Education Institute. See: Anthony S. Bryk, *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2010.) Also, expanding charter schools, although not being a cornerstone of Advance Illinois's agenda as we noted earlier, is sometimes perceived similarly given that charters are prevalent in Chicago but sparse elsewhere in the state. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics show that across 2010-2012 there were 52 charter schools in Illinois, with 38 of them operating in Chicago. See the Common Core of Data search tool at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>.

<sup>93</sup> *The State We're In* from 2008 noted that "Piles of research show that teacher effectiveness is the single most important determinant of student academic success" (p. 13). Similar language about teaching being the "single most important factor" also appears in *We Can Do Better* from 2009 (p. 9), and from *Can Illinois 'Race to the Top?' Yes, We Can!*, also from 2009 (p. 7), in which the claim is sourced to The Education Trust. "Good Teaching Matters: How Well Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gaps," 1998. The trouble with these claims is that piles of evidence do not show that teacher effectiveness is the single most important factor determining student success, although there is much evidence that it is the most or one of the most important *in school* factors. See: Sean F. Reardon, "The Widening Academic Achievement Gap Between the Rich and Poor: New Evidence and Possible Explanations" in *Whither Opportunity: Rising Inequality, Schools and Children's Life Chances* edited by Greg J. Duncan and Richard J. Murnane (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011). Additionally, sourcing this claim to The Education Trust's 1998 report is not appropriate. That report does note the importance of teacher quality, but nothing in the report compares the impact of teacher quality on student achievement to other factors. Based on that source it is impossible to say that teaching is more important than other things.

<sup>94</sup> This point appeared in the 2009 report, *We Can Do Better* (p. 9) and in a grant application for funding: "Studies show that a teacher's influence on student achievement is 20 times greater than any other variable, including class size or poverty." The source cited is Daniel Fallon, "Case Study of a Paradigm Shift (The Value of Focusing on Instruction)," Education Research Summit: Establishing Linkages, University of North Carolina, 2003. Other education advocates have cited this same claim and source as well, including Andy Rotherham, [http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/file\\_uploads/TeacherExcellence\\_B.pdf](http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/file_uploads/TeacherExcellence_B.pdf) (pp. 15-16), Kati Haycock, <http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/091007KatiHaycockTestimony.pdf>, and others, for example, <http://chalkboardproject.org/what-we-do/class-project/>.) However, no study has ever presented results showing such a massive—too good to be true, really—effect. The Fallon paper that everyone cites provides no

empirical data on the point, but rather asserts this claim while making an oblique reference to another author who it is claimed had produced it. A deeper inspection, though reveals that no work by that other author has ever shown such a result, something that our own literature search and reviews of others have confirmed. See <http://inschoolmatters.wordpress.com/2011/01/07/do-teachers-have-20-times-more-impact-on-achievement-than-any-other-factor/>.

<sup>95</sup> For example, part of the 2012 publication of *The State We're In* grades Illinois on postsecondary readiness and success (p. 24). In the presentation of data it shows that the District of Columbia is the “leading state” (p. 24) in having the highest percentage of adults 25 and older with an associate degree or higher. This is an odd comparison to make given the high rates of mobility in the District, which means that numerous residents did not attend high school there. (See: Lisa A. Sturtevant, “Modern Migrants: the Region’s 21st Century Movers Where They Come From, Where They Move To and What They Can Tell Us about Housing Choices in the Future,” Center for Regional Analysis, George Mason University, December 7, 2012, which is available at <http://www.rbintel.com/sites/default/files/Modern%20Migrants%20-%20Region%27s%2021st%20Century%20Movers.pdf>.) Readers would be mistaken if they inferred, as the grading system and internal logic in *The State We're In* suggests, that the rate of college completion is necessarily evidence of success of the K-12 public school system in the District. Another unusual result in the same table is that Mississippi is credited as being the leading state based on the percentage of high school graduates attending college. Why those results would be due to the high quality of Mississippi’s K-12 education system, the implied claim given the grading system and logic in the report, is unclear given the abysmal track record of K-12 performance in that state. Evidence of that poor track record is documented by another new education advocacy group that we studied, Mississippi First (<http://mississippifirst.org/>), and by NAEP achievement results at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>.

<sup>96</sup> The notion that teacher quality is one of the most important in-school factors contributing to achievement is better described in *The State We're In* from 2010 (p. 7) and 2012 (p. 10), for example. Further, the 2011 publication *Transforming Teacher Work for a Better Educated Tomorrow* is perhaps Advance Illinois’s most nuanced and best sourced treatment of the teacher’s role. That report was written with support from a professional research firm, the American Institutes for Research.

<sup>97</sup> Mountains of research on the psychology of information processing in complex environments have shown that result. See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011); Bryan D. Jones, *Politics and the Architecture of Choice: Bounded Rationality and Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Bryan D. Jones, *Reconceiving Decision-Making in Democratic Politics: Attention, Choice, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>98</sup> John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2002); Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>99</sup> Advance Illinois’s report *Transforming Teacher Work for a Better Educated Tomorrow* (p. 10) does note that effective professional development opportunities are required as the education reform agenda in the state begins to shift teacher expectations and how they do their jobs.

<sup>100</sup> In our own research, the one group that has seemed most able to develop an impressive array of work at the state and local levels is Mass Insight Education, which was founded in 1997.

<sup>101</sup> Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin, “Learning from Experience: Lessons from Policy Implementation,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1987): 171-178; David K. Cohen, “A Revolution in One Classroom: The Case of Mrs. Oublier,” *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1990): 311-329; David K. Cohen and Heather H. Hill, *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Meredith Honig, *New Directions in Education Policy Implementation: Confronting Complexity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006).

<sup>102</sup> Part of the backlash against NCLB reflects such a dynamic. At the extreme, among the most hardened conspiracy theorists, rapid-fire and comprehensive reform efforts, such as RTTT, that involve advancing numerous initiatives simultaneously with lingering uncertainty over how they will be financed can stoke the view that reform is a setup designed to make the traditional system look bad so as to undercut support for public schools. With extremely rare exceptions, our interview respondents themselves never voiced that view, but some of them have heard it expressed and can see why some people who are less attentive to the machinations of state-level policy development might hold it.

<sup>103</sup> See Elliot Regenstein, “Illinois: The New Leader in Education Reform?” (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2011). The two interview respondents who discussed this report with us, both with deep knowledge of the process that produced SB 7, agreed that it captured the details of the legislative process quite well.

<sup>104</sup> Paul Manna, Kennan Kelley, and Frederick M. Hess, “Implementing Indiana’s ‘Putting Students First’ Agenda: Early Lessons and Potential Futures” (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> Regenstein makes this point, too. See Elliot Regenstein, “Illinois: The New Leader in Education Reform?” (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2011), p. 14.

<sup>106</sup> Elliot Regenstein, “Illinois: The New Leader in Education Reform?” (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2011).

<sup>107</sup> Full results are available from the authors.

<sup>108</sup> The video that sparked the controversy was recorded at the Aspen Ideas Festival in 2011. See: <http://www.aspenideas.org/session/if-it-can-happen-there-it-can-happen-anywhere-transformational-education-legislation>. For Edelman’s email apology see: <http://preaprez.wordpress.com/2011/07/10/jonah-edelman-apologizes-to-my-blog-readers/>.

<sup>109</sup> John Kingdon’s classic work on agenda setting makes a related point in noting that policy ideas can come from just about anywhere, which makes it difficult to track down the origin of any given proposal. A key issue, then, is who shepherds and packages the ideas in usable form. Advance Illinois seems to have done this quite well. John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2002).

<sup>110</sup> Michele McNeil, “Ed. Sec. Duncan’s policy leverage may be put to the test,” *Education Week*, 4 October 2013, available at [http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/10/09/07leverage\\_ep.h33.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/10/09/07leverage_ep.h33.html).

<sup>111</sup> Suzanne Tacheny and Christopher T. Cross. *Rabble Rousers! Best Practices & Lessons Learned by Civic Organizations Working to Impact Education Reform* (Cross & Jofus, LLC, 2006); *Who’s Who in a Growing Education Reform Movement* (PIE Network, n.d.).

<sup>112</sup> Mass Insight Education describes its development that has enabled it to play consequential roles at the state and local level in this overview of its activities: <http://www.massinsight.org/about/>.

<sup>113</sup> John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2002); Michael Mintrom, *Policy Entrepreneurs and School Choice* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000).

<sup>114</sup> Laurence J. O’Toole, Jr. and Kenneth J. Meier, “Desperately Seeking Selznik: Cooptation and the Dark Side of Public Management in Networks,” *Public Administration Review* vol. 64, no. 6 (2004): 681-693.

<sup>115</sup> Implementation of the original Title V of ESEA revealed this dynamic. In attempting to bolster state education agency capacity, federal officials directed ESEA funds to them, which diluted interest in state legislatures to support their own agencies with state resources. See Paul Manna, *School’s In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

<sup>116</sup> Marc S. Tucker (ed.), *Surpassing Shanghai: An Agenda for American Education Built on the World’s Leading Systems* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2011).

<sup>117</sup> On the potential for how adjustments to the underlying balance of power can influence whether major reforms are sustainable, see Eric M. Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk: What Happens After Major Policy Changes Are Enacted* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>118</sup> Classic works on this topic are Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation* 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984) and James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989). See also Richard Elmore, “Backward Mapping: Implementation Research and Policy Decisions,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 94, no. 4 (1979–1980): 601–616; Ann Lin, *Reform in the Making: The Implementation of Social Policy in Prison* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Jal Mehta, *The Allure of Order: High Hopes, Dashed Expectations, and the Troubled Quest to Remake American Schooling* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Paul Manna, *Collision Course: Federal Education Policy Meets State and Local Realities* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010); David K. Cohen and Susan L. Moffitt, *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Frederick M. Hess and Chester E. Finn, Jr. (eds.), *No Remedy Left Behind: Lessons from a Half-Decade of NCLB* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2007); David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Harvard University Press, 1995).