

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
College of Education and Human Development
Education Policy

EDUC 886.A01
School Reform in the U.S.: Politics and Policies
Summer 2018
3 Credits

Monday/ Wednesday: 7:20p-9:25p
Thompson Hall L004
Tuesday/Thursday: Online

Professor: Dr. Diana D'Amico
Office Hours: By Appointment

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Prerequisites/Corequisites

Admission to PhD in education program, or permission of instructor.

Catalog Course Description

Explores a broad range of reform initiatives shaping public education and examines the ways politics infuses education policy. Investigates the disciplinary and methodological frameworks scholars have used to study school reform.

Expanded Course Description

The nation's public schools exist within and are shaped by a complex nexus of political forces. In various ways, administrators, teachers, parents and even students behave as political actors at the local, state and federal levels in concert with elected officials. Public schools socialize the nation's youth, affirming and imparting lessons about citizenship and power. In today's political milieu, education debates surrounding school choice, curricula, teachers, standards and equity assume center stage. The goal of this course is to expose students to critical themes and debates in American education and position them to consider how stakeholders and forces beyond the school shape policy and resulting reforms.

Learner Outcomes

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate a detailed and sophisticated understanding of major reform issues in U.S. education.
2. Analyze and describe the political and social forces that influence decision making on these issues.
3. Understand and explain the intersection of school reform and educational policy at various levels (local, state, federal).

4. Analyze existing scholarship around school reform initiatives and develop a new research agenda.

Relationship to Program Goals and Professional Organizations

There are no specialized standards specific to education policy studies. However, most, if not all standards for educators expect professionals to be aware of the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context of public education in the United States. This course provides students with that background and understanding.

Nature of Course Delivery

This hybrid course is taught in a seminar style through discussion, brief lectures, and online units.

Required Texts, Readings and Resources

All readings are available through the course blackboard page.

- Achbald, D., Hurwitz, A., & Hurwitz, F. (2017). Charter schools, parent choice, and segregation: A longitudinal study of the growth of charters and changing enrollment patterns in five school districts over 26 years. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 26(22).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.26.2921>
- Anderson, K.P., & Ritter, G.W. (2017). Disparate use of exclusionary discipline: Evidence on inequities in school discipline from a U.S. state. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 25(49). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.25.2787>
- Buckley, J., & Schneider, M. (2006). Are charter school parents more satisfied with schools?: Evidence from Washington, DC. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 81(1), 57–78.
- Clapp, J. M., Nanda, A., & Ross, S. L. (2008). Which school attributes matter? The influence of school district performance and demographic composition on property values. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 63(2), 451–466. doi:[10.1016/j.jue.2007.03.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2007.03.004)
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Fries, M. K. (2001). Sticks, stones, and ideology: The discourse of reform in Teacher education. *Educational Researcher*, 30(8), 3–15.
doi:[10.3102/0013189X030008003](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X030008003)
- Cohen, D.K., & Mehta, J.D. (2017). Why reform sometimes succeeds: Understanding the conditions that produce reforms that last. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(4), 644–690. doi: [10.3102/0002831217700078](https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217700078)
- Cuban, L. (1990). Reforming again, again, and again. *Educational Researcher*, 19(1), 3–13.
doi:[10.3102/0013189X019001003](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019001003)
- Dhar, P., & Ross, S. L. (2012). School district quality and property values: Examining differences along school district boundaries. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 71(1), 18–25.
doi:[10.1016/j.jue.2011.08.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2011.08.003)
- Ewing, E. (2015). “We shall not be moved”: A hunger strike, education, and housing in Chicago. *The New Yorker*.
- Foster, E.M., & Jenkins, J.V. (2017). Does participation in music and performing arts influence child development? *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(3), 399–443. DOI: [10.3102/0002831217701830](https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217701830)
- Goldhaber, D., Quince, V., & Theobald, R. (2018). Has it always been this way? Tracing the evolution of teacher quality gaps in U.S. public schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 55(1), 171–201. DOI: [10.3102/0002831217733445](https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217733445)

- Gormley, W. T., & Phillips, D. (2005). The effects of universal pre-k in Oklahoma: Research highlights and policy implications. *Policy Studies Journal*, 33(1), 65–82. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2005.00092.x>
- Green, T. (2017). “We felt they took the heart out of the community”: Examining a community-based response to urban school closure. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 25(21). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.25.2549>
- Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2016). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 26(4), 325-353. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2014.929950>
- Grissom, J.A., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. (2017). Strategic staffing? How performance pressures affect the distribution of teachers within schools and resulting student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(6), 1079-1116. DOI: 10.3102/0002831217716301
- Keenan, H.B. (2017). Unscripting curriculum: Toward a critical trans pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 87(4), 538-556.
- Kemple, J. (2016). School closures in NYC. *Education Next*, 66-75.
- Ladner, M. (2018). In Defense of Education’s Wild West. *Education Next*, 16-23.
- Link, H., Gallo, S., & Wortham, S.E.F. (2017). The production of schoolchildren as enlightenment subjects. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(5), 834-867. DOI: 10.3102/0002831217706926
- Logan, J.R., Zhang, W., Oakley, D. (2017). Court orders, white flight, and school district segregation, 1970-2010. *Social Forces*, 95(3), 1049-1075. doi: 10.1093/sf/sow104
- Losen, D., & Gillespie, J. (2012). *Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School*. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at The Civil Rights Project.
- Lovenheim, M.F., & Walsh, P. (2018). (Re)searching for a school: How choice drives parents to become more informed. *Education Next*, 72-77.
- Matias, C.E., Montoya, R., & Nishi, N.W.M. (2016). Blocking CRT: How the emotionality of whiteness blocks CRT in urban teacher education. *Educational Studies*, 52(1), 1-19. DOI: 10.1080/00131946.2015.1120205
- McGrew, K. (2016). The dangers of pipeline thinking: How the school-to-prison pipeline metaphor squeezes out complexity. *Educational Theory*, 66(3), 341-367.
- Payne, C., & Kaba, M. (2007). So much reform, so little change: Building-level obstacles to school reform. *Social Policy*, (Spring/Summer), 30–37.
- Rhodes, A., & Warkentien, S. (2017). Unwrapping the suburban “package deal”: Race, class, and school access. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1S), 168S-189S. DOI: 10.3102/0002831216634456
- Richards, M.P. (2017). Gerrymandering educational opportunity. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(3), 65-70.
- Roseboro, D.L., & Thompson, C. M. (2014). “To Virgo or not to Virgo”: Examining the closure and reopening of a neighborhood school in a predominantly African American community. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 47(2), 187-207. DOI: 10.1080/10665684.2014.900400
- Thompson, K.D. (2017). What blocks the gate? Exploring current and former learners’ math course-taking in secondary school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(4), 757-798. DOI: 10.3102/0002831217706687

- Tyack, D. (1991). Public School Reform: Policy Talk and Institutional Practice. *American Journal of Education*, 100(1), 1–19. doi:10.2307/1085650
- Valentino, R. (2018). Will public pre-k really close achievement gaps? Gaps in prekindergarten quality between students and across states. *American Educational Research Journal*, 55(1), 79-116. DOI: 10.3102/0002831217732000
- Waitoller, F.R. & Super, G. (2017). School choice or the politics of desperation? Black and Latinx parents of students with dis/abilities selecting charter schools in Chicago. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 25(55). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.25.2636>
- Woodward, J.R. (2011). How busing burdened blacks: Critical race theory and busing for desegregation in Nashville-Davidson County. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 80(1), 22-32.
- Wong, K. K., & Shen, F. X. (2003). Big city mayors and school governance reform: The case of school district takeover. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 78(1), 5–32. doi:10.1207/S15327930PJE7801_2
- Yarnell, L.M., & Bohrnstedt, G.W. (2018). Student-teacher racial match and its association with black student achievement: An exploration using multilevel structural equation modeling. *American Educational Research Journal*, 55(2), 287-324. DOI: 10.3102/0002831217734804

Course Requirements and Performance Evaluation

Expectations; students will:

- Attend all classes. Please provide advance notice, when possible, if you must miss a class. On these occasions, please get notes and any handouts from a colleague.
- Read all assignments prior to class and bring copies (either hard or electronic copy) to class.
- Actively participate in class discussions and activities and to treat one another with respect.
- Submit all assignments on time.
 - **Note:** all assignments must be emailed to me at ddamico2@gmu.edu.
 - **Note:** Unless prior arrangements are made, late work will be penalized by 2 points for each day late.

Assignments:

1. **Topic Proposal and Bibliography:** In a brief essay (3-4 pages, not including bibliography), identify a reform initiative or program that will form the foundation of your final paper. Offer a detailed description of the reform. Where does it play out? Who is affected by it? What problem is it attempting to solve or treat? What does it do? Where does this reform come from? What are the relevant policies? As you close your essay, propose questions for further inquiry: what do you want to know more about? Include a list of at least 10 relevant scholarly, peer-reviewed sources that will inform your future inquiry. **(15pts)**
2. **Reading Response Essay:** Select one group of readings from the syllabus and write a brief essay (5-6 pages) that explores the ways this literature fits together. While some summary may be important, you should devote your attention to an analysis of the texts. Craft an argument about how the articles fit together, why

they matter and what can be learned. Essays are due on the date the readings will be discussed. **(15pts)**

3. **Final Paper:** In an 18-20 page essay, examine the state of knowledge pertaining to an educational reform of your choice and propose a research project. Begin by offering an examination of a particular educational reform and the problem it is intended to solve. Next, offer a detailed review of the relevant literature considering key themes, debates, and methodological approaches. Your task is not to summarize existing research but to analyze it. Finally, design a research project that simultaneously builds off of and contributes to the relevant research. Discuss the significance of your proposed research. Please refer to the final page of this syllabus for a grading rubric. **(40pts)**
4. **Online Presentation:** In this online presentation posted to the course's Blackboard page, students will share their developing work as it pertains to the final paper. Students will begin by offering evidence of a particular educational issue or problem (who does it impact; why does it matter?). Next students will introduce peers to some of the reform initiatives intended to solve or at least mitigate the core problem (created by whom; why; debates?). Then students will offer an overview of some of the pertinent scholarly literature highlighting key findings, points of agreement and divergence, and methodological approaches. Students will close their presentations by raising at least two discussion questions for peers to engage. We will discuss various options for the format of these presentations in class. **(20pts)**
5. **In-Class and On-Line Contributions:** The success of any doctoral course depends on the active, engaged, and persistent engagement of all members of the class. In addition to contributing to in-class gatherings by participating in large and small group discussions, asking questions, and taking intellectual risks, students must devote the same sort of effort to online work by responding to discussion prompts and peer comments. **(10pts)**

Evaluation

All papers must be typed, double spaced, in adherence to space guidelines and formatted according to the *APA Manual of Style, 6th Ed.*

Grading Scale:

A = 96-100	B = 80-88
A- = 92-95	C = 75-79
B+ = 89-91	F = 74 and below

Professional Dispositions

See <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/polices-procedures/>

Core Values Commitment

The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>.

GMU Policies and Resources for Students

Policies

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students **solely** through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <http://ods.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to tk20help@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/>.

Course Calendar

M. May 21 – Course Introduction

W. May 23 – School Reform: New Experiments or More of the Same?

- Cuban, “Reforming Again, Again and Again”
- Payne and Kaba, “So Much Reform, So Little Change: Building-Level Obstacles to School Reform”
- Tyack, “Public School Reform: Policy Talk and Institutional Practice”
- Cohen and Mehta, “Why Reform Sometimes Succeeds: Understanding the Conditions that Produce Reforms that Last”

Week 1 Online Engagement –

- **Student-Led Discussion**
 - The landscape of reform and burgeoning research interests
- **The Expansion of Pre-K Schooling: Is More Education the Answer?**
 - Gormley and Phillips, “The Effects of Universal Pre-K in Oklahoma”
 - “Who Goes to Pre-School and Why Does it Matter?”
[<http://www.nieer.org/resources/factsheets/18.pdf>]
 - Brown, “The Rush Toward Universal Public Pre-K”
 - Valentino, “Will Public Pre-K Really Close Achievement Gaps?”

M. May 28 – No Class; Memorial Day

W. May 30 – Starting from Scratch: School Takeovers and Closures

- Wong and Shen, “Big City Mayors and School Governance Reform: The Case of School District Takeover”
- Ewing, “We Shall Not Be Moved”
- Green, “We Felt They Took the Heart Out of the Community”
- Roseboro & Thompson, “To Virgo or not to Virgo”
- Kemple, “School Closures in NYC”

Week 2 Online Engagement –

- **Student Learning and Curriculum Debates**
 - Link, “The Production of School Children”
 - Keenan, “Unscripting Curriculum”
 - Thompson, “What Blocks the Gate”
 - Foster and Jenkins, “Does Participation in Music and Performing Arts Influence Child Development?”
- **Student-Led Discussion/Critical Feedback on Developing Projects**

M. 6/4 – Zoning: Who Goes to School Where?

- Dhar and Ross, “School District Quality and Property Values: Examining Differences along School District Boundaries”
- Logan, Zhang and Oakley, “Court Orders, White Flight, and School District Segregation”

- Richards, “Gerrymandering Educational Opportunity”
- Woodward, “How Busing Burdened Blacks
- Rhodes and Warkentein, “Unwrapping the Suburban ‘Package Deal’”

W. 6/6 – Teacher Policy: The Problem or the Solution?

- Cochran-Smith and Fries, “Sticks, Stones, and Ideology: The Discourse of Reform in Teacher Education”
- Goldhaber, Quince, and Theobald, “Has it Always been this way? Tracing the Evolution of Teacher Quality Gaps in U.S. Public Schools”
- Grissom, Kalogrides, and Loeb, “Strategic Staffing? How Performance Pressures Affect the Distribution of Teachers within Schools and Resulting Student Achievement”
- Yarnell and Bohrnstedt, “Student-Teacher Racial Match and Its Association with Black Student Achievement”
- Matias, Montoya, and Nishi, “Blocking CRT: How the Emotionality of Whiteness Blocks CRT in Urban Teacher Education”

Week 3 Online Engagement –

- **Student Presentations**

M. 6/11 – The Market for Schools

- Buckley and Schneider, “Are Charter School Parents More Satisfied with Schools? Evidence from Washington, DC”
- Lovenheim, “(Re)Searching for a School”
- Archbald, Hurwitz, and Hurwitz, “Charter Schools, Parent Choice, and Segregation”
- Waitoller and super, ‘School Choice or the Politics of Desperation’
- Ladner, “In Defense of Education’s Wild West”

W. 6/13 – School Discipline

- Losen and Gillespie, “Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School”
- Anderson and Ritter, “Disparate use of Exclusionary Discipline”
- Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz, “The Promise of Restorative Practices”
- McGrew, “The Dangers of Pipeline Thinking”

Week 4 Online Engagement –

- **Student Presentations**

M. 6/18 – Individual Meetings

W. 6/20 – Course Wrap-Up & Writing Workshop

Th. 6/21 – No in person session

- **Final Papers Due by Midnight**

Rubric: Final Essay

Criteria	Outstanding (A)	Competent (B)	Minimal (C)	Unsatisfactory (F)
Introduction	Author provides a clear overview of what the essay will accomplish and the themes to be examined. The author offers a specific thesis statement.	Author provides an overview of what the essay will examine. However, it is unclear why the author wishes to examine this topic or what he/she hopes to learn. The author offers a general thesis statement.	The author provides a general overview of the essay; however, the introduction lacks logic and clarity. The thesis statement is vague.	The author does not provide an overview of the essay. The thesis statement is absent.
Presentation of Reform Initiative	The author provides a clear and thorough examination of a specific educational reform. The author calls attention to where the reform plays out, who is involved, implementation issue in addition to other factors. The author clearly identifies the relevant issues or debates that surround this reform and related policies.	The author provides an examination of an educational reform, but offers little specific detail.	The author offers a vague exploration of a reform issue.	The author does not offer an exploration of an educational reform.
Examination and Analysis of Existing Scholarship	The author provides a logical and specific exploration of the relevant research highlighting methodologies and the state of knowledge. Beyond summarizing articles, the author offers an analysis of this body of literature. The author makes use of at least 10 scholarly, peer-reviewed sources (original research).	The author provides a summary of existing scholarship, but offers little analysis. The author offers a general examination of the state of knowledge. The author references at least 10 sources.	The author offers a general overview of the existing scholarship but speaks in vague terms.	The author offers an inaccurate overview of the existing scholarship, or an overview of the existing scholarship is absent.
Research Agenda: Rationale and Design	The author provides a clear rationale for a research agenda that emerges from the examination of existing scholarship. The author proposes a clear research study and highlights site selection, evidence, methodology and framing questions. The research study design is a logical outgrowth of the preceding sections of the paper.	The author calls for a research agenda, but precisely how it stems from existing scholarship is unclear. The author offers clear and specific details of the proposed project.	The author offers a general call for more research, but it is unclear how it pertains to relevant scholarship. The details of the proposed research are vague.	The author does not offer a specific call for more research that stems from existing scholarship. The author does not propose a research design.
Conclusions and Implications	The author offers a clear and compelling statement of what this proposed research study would reveal that current scholars do not yet know or have yet to consider.	The author offers a general statement of how the proposed research project would engage and contribute to existing scholarship.	The author offers a vague statement of the proposed study's contributions to existing scholarship.	The author does not discuss the ways the proposed research project would contribute to existing scholarship.
Writing	The writing is clear, error-free, and adheres to proper APA guidelines.			The writing is sloppy and/or grammatically incorrect. The author does not adhere to APA guidelines.