



Lessons from School Finance: Creating Conditions for Innovative Policy Making

JACOB ADAMS

Claremont Graduate University

Chair, National Working Group on Funding Student Success

Founder, School Finance Redesign Project



Why Innovate?

#1 Schools falling short of learning goals.

Twenty-six years after *A Nation at Risk* called for better student performance:

- Incremental gains
- Isolated big leaps forward
- By and large, still far short of expectations



Why Innovate?

#2 School “systems” not designed to accomplish ambitious learning goals; in fact, systems impede better results.

For example, how finance systems fall short:

- Don't know how much investment is “enough.”
- Don't deliver resources to the students who need them.
- Don't use resources productively.
- Don't account for resources meaningfully.



Why Innovate?

#3 No technology for reaching high standards.

In its place:

- legislatures, governors, courts, unions, universities, foundations
- policy talk v. changes at core of schooling

#4 Different learning challenges across schools and districts.

#5 Private interests of adults trump public interest in learning.



The Basic Conditions of Innovation

- Agreement on meaningful goals
 - simple, credible, important
- Technology that achieves goals
 - “continuous improvement”
- System design that supports goals
 - is intentional, clears impediments, builds capacity, allows coherent operations
- Opportunities to experiment, adapt, achieve goals
 - new charters, lab schools, teaching “hospitals,” other



Toward a Learning Technology

The middle-ground “technology” of continuous improvement—

- Set goals and align resources
- Engage students with good curriculum and teaching
- Gather performance information
- Assess strengths and weaknesses
- Development action plans that address strengths/weaknesses
- Repeat . . .



The Role of Policy

Create system conditions that support continuous improvement.

For example, in finance systems:

- Deliver resources transparently and flexibly
- Focus and enable educators' work
- Expand resource knowledge and experiment with new methods
- Redesign resource accounting and accountability



The Politics of Policy Innovation

- A big jump start (crisis)
- Legislative focus
- An external coalition
- Attention to the Realpolitik of legislative change



Local Response to Innovation

Because innovation means change:

- Engage local stakeholders honestly and continuously.
- Align policy initiatives with local improvement efforts.
- Expand administrator and teacher knowledge and skills.
- Create new monitoring & evaluation tools aligned with goals.



Creating Communities of Innovation

- Agree on goals.
- Build knowledge infrastructure to cull and disseminate lessons.
- Invest in the R & D work on promising innovations.
- Sequence innovation's parts.
- Have innovations ready when policy opportunities arise.



Remember, It's a "System"

- Key assumption: all parts present and working.
- Parts working together give the system its practical effect.
- This isn't your father's school system ...



This Work Is Hard but Necessary

Why it's hard:

- System-wide change
- Redefined responsibilities
- New “winners” and “losers”

Why it's necessary:

- Students left behind
- Resources wasted



Jacob Adams, Ph.D.

*Professor of Education at Claremont Graduate University and
Founding Director of the School Finance Redesign Project*

Jacob Adams is a professor in the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University. His work focuses on the policy context of K-12 education, with particular attention to ways in which governance and finance policies and implementation practices influence school capacity. He directed the *School Finance Redesign Project* (schoolfinanceredesign.org), which explored ways to redesign education finance to better support today's higher ambitions for student performance.

Prior to his academic career, Professor Adams served in government positions at federal, state, and local levels, including the Committee on Ways & Means in the U.S. House of Representatives and the campaign and administrative staffs of California's former state superintendent, Bill Honig. He was the first associate director of Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), a research center at UC Berkeley and Stanford, and he served on national advisory boards for Standard & Poor's and the National Governors Association. Jacob chaired the boards of directors of the Kentucky Institute for Education Research and Abintra Montessori School (Nashville), and he served as consultant to the National Commission on Governing America's Schools and the National Forum on Accountability. Professor Adams holds degrees from Pitzer College (B.A., Political Studies), Claremont Graduate School (M.A., Public Policy Studies), and Stanford University (Ph.D., Education, Administration and Policy Analysis).