What's it all about, Arne?
An analysis of the Obama administration's education reform agenda

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What should we want of the federal role?

• Coherence
  The degree to which a related series of transactions leads logically to a desired outcome

• Effectiveness
  The degree to which objectives are achieved as a result of a course of action

• Complementarity
  The degree to which a course of action provides what is lacking and needed to support other actions and actors
The Obama administration’s K-12 program priorities (as identified by Whitehurst)

- Common standards
  - 21st Century skills
  - College and Career Readiness
- Consequential accountability (but only at the extremes)
- Turning around lowest performing schools
- Charter schools (but not vouchers or transfer or supp. services)
- Teacher and principal effectiveness
- Longitudinal data systems
- Extended learning time
- Neighborhood-based school reform
- STEM interest and performance
- Innovation
- Resource equalization

*Competitive rather than formula*
The Obama administration’s K-12 priorities (in their words)

A Blueprint for Reform

Coherence is lacking

- Any number of additional variables could be added, e.g., small schools, great curriculum, accountability for students, great superintendents, mayoral control
- There is no connection or flow between the existing variables, e.g., how do equitable resources or innovation lead to great teachers?
- Some of the variables conflict, e.g., rewarding excellence sends more resources to winners and thus reduces resource equity
- Little recognition of the roles of other actors in education: states, LEAs, school boards, parents, students
Effectiveness

- Common Standards
  No statistical relationship between student achievement and
  1) respected ratings of the quality of state standards
  2) rigor of state criterion for “proficiency”
  3) presence of national standards and performance on
     international tests
  4) alignment of national content standards with
     international tests

- Charter Schools
  Three large multi-state or national correlational descriptive
  studies and one multi-state randomized trial find little or no
  difference between charter and regular public schools on
  student achievement (but subgroup effects)

Note: Test scores shown here are based on students’ performance on state assessments across multiple states. To make scores comparable across states, they were standardized into *effect size* or z-score units, in which a one unit change represents one standard deviation among all of the students in a state.
Impacts on Year 2 Test Scores, by Characteristics of Charter Schools’ Student Populations:
Mean Baseline Test Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.12†</td>
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<tr>
<td>-0.15††</td>
<td>-0.21††</td>
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†Impact estimate is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.
††Impact estimate is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.
#Difference between estimates in two sets of sites is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.
###Difference between estimates in two sets of sites is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.
Effectiveness

• HCZ and Promise Neighborhoods
  Dobbie & Fryer (2009)
Effectiveness

• HCZ and Promise Neighborhoods
  Whitehurst and Croft (2010)

![Bar chart showing the effectiveness comparison between HCZ and Manhattan and Bronx Charters in Math, Grade 8, 2009. The HCZ group has a significantly higher score than the other charter schools.]
Effectiveness

• Turning around lowest performing schools

**Turnaround model**: Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50% of the staff

**Restart model**: Convert a school or close and reopen it as a charter school

**School closure**: Close a school and enroll the students elsewhere

**Transformation model**: Replace the principal and institute comprehensive reforms

• IES Practice Guide on Turning Around Persistently Low Performing Schools: “The panel feels compelled to emphasize that the level of evidence [for the recommendations in this Guide] is *low* because none of the studies examined for this practice guide is based on a research methodology that yields valid causal inference.”

• CCSR report on Chicago’s policy, When Schools Close: “Once students left schools slated for closing, on average the additional effects on their learning were neither negative nor positive.”
Effectiveness

- School turnarounds

2009 Brown Center Report on American Education: “Of the 115 schools scoring at the 10th percentile or below in 1989, only four of them (or 3.5 percent) scored at the state average or above in 2009.”
Effectiveness

• Great teachers and principals

Past Performance Predicts Future Performance

Teacher Impacts on Math Performance in Third Year By Ranking after First Two Years

- Proportion of classrooms vs. Change in percentile rank of average student

Note: Classroom-level impacts on average student performance, controlling for baseline scores, student demographics, and program participation. LAUSD elementary teachers, < 4 years’ experience.

Gordon, Kane, Stajger (2006)

• BUT

BROOKINGS QUALITY. INDEPENDENCE. IMPACT.
Effectiveness (teachers)

• Demonstrations of natural variability in the effectiveness of teachers do not demonstrate the effect of any identified intervention or policy to improve teacher effectiveness
• Teach for America (MPR study): 0.15 effect size for math achievement and no effect on reading achievement
• Merit pay (Vanderbilt study): "simply did not do much of anything"
• DC teacher evaluations and dismissals: new mayor
Effectiveness: Things left out

Curriculum vs. Other Policy Levers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of Effect Sizes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charters</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Charter schools in general</td>
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<td>Oversubscribed NYC charter schools</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reconstituting the teacher workforce</strong></td>
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<td>Merit pay for teachers in India</td>
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<td>Teach for America</td>
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<td><strong>Preschool programs</strong></td>
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<td>Head Start</td>
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<td>Head Start</td>
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<td>Even Start</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most effective dropout preventions</td>
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<td>Most effective early reading programs</td>
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Complementarity

- State and local share of educational costs ~ 90%
- Public education is enshrined in state constitutions and absent in the federal constitution
- School boards and mayors operate schools through 14,000 quasi-independent school districts

What is the appropriate federal role vis-a-vis other parties?
A coherent and complementary federal role

• **Knowledge**
  - Research
  - Technical assistance

• **Civil Rights**
  - Non-discrimination based race, sex, national origin …

• **Funding**
  - Subsidization of extra costs of educating students with disabilities and disadvantages

• **Market forces**
  - Enhancing quality and usability of information on performance of education providers
  - Promoting opportunities for choice
  - Funding follows child
The Federal Role

Better Schools
Smarter Students

Market Forces
How-to Knowledge
Equal Protection
Equitable Funding

The Federal Role