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Beyond Mutual Adaptation, into the Bully Pulpit: Recent Research on the Federal Role in Education¹

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The federal government has always been a junior partner to state and local agencies in financing and operating American schools. The impacts of federal policies on the nation's classrooms, however, continue to fascinate researchers, policymakers, and the public. Interest and concern about this role intensified during the 1960s and 1970s, motivated in part by expanding expenditures as well as by the increasing directiveness of most new federal policies. Through the 1970s, the federal role emphasized securing extra services for traditionally underserved students, promoting innovation, and supporting research.

In the 1980s, the federal government's spending for elementary and secondary education has not kept pace with inflation. Nor has it kept pace with state and local support of schools. Relative to state and local levels, the U.S. Department of Education's share of elementary/secondary school expenditures dipped to 6.1% by the 1984-1985 school

year, its lowest share in almost 20 years.² Also, the regulatory pressures from the federal government in education during the 1980s have subsided. Nonetheless, this decade has witnessed an unparalleled outpouring of research and commentary on a federal role that has exerted a substantial influence on elementary and secondary education.

This present article takes stock of the rapidly expanding literature on federal involvement in elementary and secondary education with three central purposes in mind: (1) to introduce several research resources to a broader audience; (2) to summarize the major findings, commonalities, and discrepancies in the pre-1980 literature; and (3) to present and assess literature on the federal role in elementary/secondary education subsequent to the publication of the most recent research anthologies. Accordingly, this review identifies trends and themes that surface from a rapidly expanding but dispersed literature on precollegiate education in the 1980s, encompassing both empirical research and normative commentaries.

The scope of this article was determined after reviewing abstracts from two literature searches: (1) an automated search of ERIC and (2) a manual review of a bibliography file on federalism in elementary and secondary education prepared and maintained for the conduct of a national study of Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA), which became law in 1981.

The ERIC literature review encompassed the years 1981 through 1985, and used the following major descriptors: (1) federal government, or (2) federal programs, or (3) federal legislation, and (4) education policy, or (5) government role. The search also automatically filtered out articles that pertained to countries other than the United States. The search yielded 187 entries. A preliminary review of these abstracts revealed serious limitations in using generic bibliographic searches such as ERIC for the purposes of this review. The most limiting aspect of the research reported in these abstracts was that it only included empirical work completed *prior* to implementation of ECIA. This legislation enacted important changes in federal education programs for school-aged children including streamlining the legal requirements of the largest federal education program for local school districts, the consolidation of 28 smaller elementary and secondary programs into a single block grant, and the curtailment of federal regulatory and monitoring authority. The limitations of this search procedure stem largely from the extended lag time between the fielding of empirical investigations in this

area and the reporting of findings from these studies in professional publications.

For coverage of more recent developments, the review relied on a collection of reports and articles accumulated for a study of Chapter 1, ECIA, conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Included in this collection are over 350 entries contributed by individual researchers and scholars, as well as by professional associations, advocacy groups, government agencies, and other research organizations. Among these holdings were three bibliographic resources of particular utility for studying the modern federal role: (1) *The Directory of Researchers in Educational Finance and Governance*,³ published annually since 1982 by Stanford University's Institute for Finance and Governance; (2) the past four editions of the U.S. Department of Education's *Annual Evaluation Report*,⁴ and (3) *Data Bases Related to Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Programs*,⁵ a compendium of descriptive summaries for approximately 50 data bases on federal education programs contained on machine-readable tapes.

This review will focus primarily on a broad and largely uncharted literature that has evolved since the completion of the most recent research syntheses published in the early 1980s. It should be noted that federal policies established by the judicial system (e.g., desegregation and sex discrimination cases) were judged to deserve a full, separate study and, therefore, were not included in this review.

In the next section of this article, the stage is set for mapping this disparate body of research and commentary by first identifying the primary strategies available to federal education policymakers and then by summarizing a number of theoretical approaches that have been used to examine the most frequently employed of these policy levers. Next reviewed will be four interpretive research syntheses that summarized most of the significant empirical research on federal elementary/secondary policy through the late 1970s.⁶ The remainder of this work picks up where these anthologies left off. A number of national studies conducted in the early 1980s are reviewed to characterize the advanced stage of intergovernmental relations in federally sponsored programs prior to ECIA, and the major early empirical research on state and local responses to ECIA is examined. The ascendancy of the federal leadership or bully pulpit role, especially under the Reagan administration, is documented, and the implications of this shift in policy

strategies for educational researchers is assessed. After this review of recent empirical research and the gaps in this literature, perspective pieces on the proper and probable federal role in the 1980s are analyzed. The concluding section of the article suggests directions for research in this area during the remainder of this decade.

STRATEGY OPTIONS AND THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Catalogs of possible policy strategies are the most basic contributions theory can make to an improved understanding of the federal role in elementary and secondary education. Kirst,⁷ for example, identified six strategies the federal government has used to address national education concerns: (1) general aid; (2) stimulation through differential funding; (3) regulation; (4) discovery and dissemination of knowledge; (5) provision of services; and (6) exertion of moral suasion.

Prior to the 1980s, the most highly visible forms of federal involvement in education were general aid-type programs; differential funding through an array of categorical programs and programs to stimulate educational innovation; and regulations that accompanied these two types of grants-in-aid programs or cut across such programs (e.g., civil rights mandates). Accordingly, theoretical advances have been most pronounced for these three federal policy strategies.

Peterson and Wong⁸ have identified two stages of theory development across these federal strategies in the federal domestic arenas of education and housing. The so-called "marble-cake" theory of federalism (e.g., Grodzins and Elazar)⁹ dominated conceptualizations of the federal role during the enactment stage of modern federal involvement in education. Similar to most Great Society initiatives, most federal education programs were "marbled," that is, formulated and financed at the federal level, but primarily administered and executed by state and local governments. Policymakers generally construed this theory of federalism to mean that reform could be accomplished rather simply through substantive infusions of federal dollars.¹⁰ When early evaluations of federal domestic policy generally discredited the self-executing assumptions of the marble-cake conceptualization of federalism, a second theoretical framework evolved. These implementation theorists (e.g., Derthick; Pressman and Wildavsky)¹¹ argued that three

factors led almost inextricably to programmatic dysfunctions: bureaucratic isolation, organizational complexity, and constituency influence.

Peterson and Wong found a number of deficiencies in the application of implementation theory to current federal involvement in education and housing.¹² Proponents of implementation theory, for instance, typically failed to take into account that federal programs sometimes generate a group of professionals who internalize and act to protect the objectives of the program. For example, Chubb¹³ documented the ascendancy of advocacy groups for federally sponsored vocational and compensatory education programs in later years at the federal level; and Orland and Goettel traced the evolution of how state bureaucracies reacted to federal program goals during the later years of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).¹⁴ However, most earlier implementation theorists, who typically studied only the early years of program operations, often assumed that solutions to intergovernmental resistance and conflict did not exist. These implementation theorists also tended not to differentiate between the various types of federal strategies.

To remedy the deficiencies of earlier conceptualizations, Peterson and Wong have proposed a differentiated theory of federalism that hypothesizes that successful local implementation of federal education policy is a function of the nature of the policy and the administrative units through which the program is operated. Using this framework, most federal categorical programs are more redistributive than developmental.¹⁵ One can, therefore, expect high levels of conflict and less than complete compliance until autonomous government agencies develop to protect and promote the goals of the program during later stages of implementation. Most of the empirical research, summarized in even the most recently published reviews, however, focuses on the early and middle years of federal program implementation. Therefore, this review will first characterize the early and middle phases of federal program implementation through a review of existing research syntheses and then examine the later operation of these programs through a presentation of findings from a dispersed and largely unpublished set of government reports.

Recent Research Syntheses

Among recent writings on the federal role in elementary and secondary education are several research reviews that synthesize a broad

body of empirical findings on the evolution and implementation of federal policy for precollegiate education. Four of these syntheses, as a corpus, form an anthology of the most significant research on elementary and secondary education federal policy through the mid- to late 1970s. Each was published in the 1980s. The earliest (ACIR, 1981) was written prior to the Republican presidential victory in 1980. The second (Birman and Ginsburg, 1982) was completed after the initial formulation of the Reagan administration's education policy but prior to the passage of the landmark ECIA legislation. The latter two (Kaestle and Smith, 1982; Peterson, 1983) were written after enactment of ECIA but prior to its first year of implementation.

There was broad-based agreement among these and other recent research reviews¹⁶ that passage of ESEA marked the beginning of the modern era for an activist federal role in precollegiate education. All four also treated in some detail the expansion of the federal role in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, including proliferation of federal categorical programs and the overlay of enforcement obligations or cross-cutting regulations such as those to eliminate sex discrimination (Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments) and to ensure the rights of the handicapped (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 1973).

Each assessed modern federal involvement in American education in light of broad social and political patterns. Kaestle and Smith viewed the federal role since 1940 as an extension of the same historical process that led to the creation of state school systems and argued that such involvement "is continuous with general trends in American history."¹⁷ Peterson saw the modern expansion of federal categorical programs and mandates as contributing toward, but also emblematic of, "a broad social trend toward increasing functional specialization in American education."¹⁸ ACIR's major premise was that fundamental issues at the center of the federal role debate have "remained remarkably the same"—race, religion, and federal control.¹⁹ Birman and Ginsburg wrote at a time when the Reagan administration's policies on education were still neither widely known nor understood. In examining these nascent policies, they demonstrated that the administration's education policies were a reflection of Reagan's overall economic and domestic policy goals.²⁰

A persistent theme of these research syntheses is that by the 1970s, the "patchwork quilt" of federal programs and regulations had resulted in an ever-more directive yet fragmented federal role.²¹ ACIR, for example, concluded that the early and mid-1970s were "marked by the

extension of the federal aid rationale to . . . [a number of] classes of educationally disadvantaged students, and the subsequent proliferation and fragmentation of interest groups, responding to the growth of new programs."²² Birman and Ginsburg were critical of the multiplicity of federal programs and enforcement requirements, which "often pull[ed] state and local officials in different directions" and "sent conflicting signals to those who must deliver services from multiple sources."²³

Kaestle and Smith also emphasized the proliferation and fragmentation of federal programs and enforcement obligations during the 1970s. They further noted that except in the area of court-mandated desegregation, federal programs were basically peripheral to the main business of schools, and "were often seen as interfering with the real business of the schools."²⁴

Peterson, on the one hand, concurred that by the late 1970s, "the federal government may have gone too far in seeking detailed compliance with its numerous regulations." On the other hand, he cautioned that it was incorrect to blame the federal government for broad-based trends toward specialization, which had resulted in fragmentation of the self-contained classroom concept and erosion of the school administrators' authority.²⁵

Peterson's analysis, as well as Kaestle and Smith's, indicated that policy contradictions documented during the early years of categorical programs had, to some degree, been ameliorated. Nonetheless, complaints and conflict about paperwork, lack of trust, and burdensome regulations persisted. Peterson credited the somewhat improved consistency of federal policy signals to "incremental modifications of federal law and regulations,"²⁶ while Kaestle and Smith cited accommodations on the part of school officials as contributing to "adequately implemented" federal programs.²⁷ Both sets of analyses portrayed persistent conflict.²⁸

McLaughlin and others have characterized this stage of federal policy implementation as a period of "mutual adaptation."²⁹ During the mutual adaptation stage of implementation, the federal "project and institutional setting adapted to each other."³⁰ Through an extended examination of four federal change agent programs between 1973 and 1977, a number of changes were observed for those innovations that followed the mutual adaptation process. Changes in the projects included goal and expectation modification (usually reduction) and attempts to simplify administrative requirements. Changes observed in the institutional setting included both behavioral and attitudinal

adjustments needed for integration of the project strategies into the classroom. The change-agent researchers noted that the mutual adaptation stage “seldom meant smooth or trouble-free implementation.”³¹

Despite the contributions made by these recent syntheses of theoretical empirical research on the federal role in education, they have at least four important limitations. First, these research reviews predated the availability of several significant bodies of literature on the implementation of federal education policy prior to passage of ECIA. Second, these syntheses were published prior to the first wave of empirical studies examining early state and district implementation of the New Federalism program reforms, such as ECIA Chapter 1’s regulatory streamlining and the first major federally funded block grant, ECIA Chapter 2. Third, these collections antedated a notable shift in the relative emphasis on the federal strategy, which had earlier been labeled a leadership role or exertion of moral suasion,³² but that more recently has been dubbed the federal bully pulpit strategy. Finally, these research reviews preceded the more recent outpouring of perspective pieces containing proposed prescriptions for remedying what many commentators diagnose to be a misaligned (e.g., Levin)³³ and, at worst, divisive (e.g., Walberg)³ set of federal education policies and programs for school-aged children.

Beyond Mutual Adaptation

The findings from several national assessments of federal elementary and secondary policies published since the aforementioned research reviews suggest that implementation of the more mature federal categorical programs had progressed to an advanced stage, beyond that of mutual adaptation. This later stage of implementation is characterized by more limited or circumscribed intergovernmental conflict, highly customized applications of federal requirements and options to local circumstances, and broadly based, although not autonomous, support of the equity goals of federal programs.

A congressionally mandated School Finance Project commissioned two field-based studies to examine how school officials responded to and were affected by the combination of federal education programs operating during the 1981-1982 school year. This was a transition year. It was the first year of the funding cuts authorized by the Reagan-sponsored Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. It also marked the last

year of operating federal compensatory education programs under the elaborate legal requirements of the 1978 ESEA Amendments. One of these studies examined federal policy implementation at the state level; the other at the local level.

The state-level study, conducted by the Education Policy Research Institute, examined the state administration of most major federal education programs and requirements for school-aged children as well as the federal and state relationships involved in serving special need students. Characteristic of advanced stages of mutual adaptation, the study found that "state forces actively shaped federal programs and policies [and] . . . federal program and policy signals heavily influence[d] the course followed by the state."³⁵ The researchers also concluded that administrative problems frequently associated with federal programs—including lack of coordination, excessive paperwork burden, and federal intrusiveness—varied across states and programs, but observed that these administrative problems were overstated and inaccurately ascribed to federal programs as their singular source. Regarding intergovernmental relations, the researchers observed that "state conflicts with federal programs did not exhibit the intensity we had expected from popular accounts."³⁶ Areas of remaining conflict were largely related to newer requirements. For example, state officials generally resented the more recent planning, data collection, and special set-asides of the vocational education program as well as the due process procedures and related services requirements of the special education program.

The study also found that states tailored federal programs to suit state environments. The states' political traditions, educational priorities, and differential technical capacities especially affected the translation of federal education policies. Even though the study found that many states had developed sophisticated implementation capacities, it cautioned that "policymakers have little reason to expect that most states at this point will assume the equity agenda that defines much of the current federal role in education."³⁷

The companion field study conducted by SRI International at the school district level also characterized local implementation as having moved beyond the mutual adaptation stage in many districts. The investigation examined the cumulative effects of a number of federal categorical programs and related civil rights mandates on schools and districts.

The three general findings of the study were:

- Collectively, federal and state policies for special populations have substantively improved and expanded the array of educational services for the intended target students.
- The policies have increased the structural complexity of schools and districts, which appears to represent a necessary consequence of providing targeted services.
- Over time, local problem solving, federal and state adjustments, and gradual local accommodation have generally reduced to a manageable level the cost associated with special services.³⁸

In expanding upon these major findings, the study emphasized that federal funds, requirements, and signals were probably needed for these special services to reach needy students.

The follow-up examination to the Rand Change Agent Study, known as the Study of Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement, also found that during the later years of implementing federal and state supported dissemination strategies, some states and districts had graduated from the conflictual negotiations characteristic of the mutual adaptation stage.³⁹ In summarizing the findings of this multiyear examination of school improvement efforts, study director Crandall pointed out that the “most powerful and successful strategy that we saw was one that coupled high quality practices, conveyed by creditable facilitators external to the local schools, with strong central office leadership and follow through.” The main message from the study, according to Crandall, was that regardless of the source of external assistance—state or federal programs, foundation initiatives, or private sector partnerships—it must “be around over the long haul.”⁴⁰

Thus, local implementation of categorical programs as well as externally supported school improvement efforts have moved beyond the stage portrayed in earlier research reviews—that is, beyond mutual adaptation. School officials, nonetheless, are not typically equipped to support, by themselves, the equity objectives of federal categorical grants or initiate, on their own, comprehensive school improvement without sustained external assistance. Overall, then, implementation of the more mature federal program and mandates stands somewhere between the stages of mutual adaptation and institutionalization posited in the Rand Change Agent Study.

At least two related features characterize this advanced stage of implementation in mature federal education programs. First, over time and often through iterative negotiations, school officials have become accustomed to the overall purposes and specific requirements of the program. During this stage, conflict is reduced or is relegated to certain requirements under certain circumstances. Second, over time, state and district officials have actively customized more mature federal programs to fit the specialized contexts and cultures of the institutions in which they operate. This customization was often made possible as federal policymakers adjusted expectations and shifted strategies, typically through extended negotiations with state/local implementers. These strategy shifts permitted local adjustments while also attempting to ensure realization of basic categorical policy objectives. The combined process of *accustomed* relationships and the *customization* of program requirements to fit the contours of local context have led to a characterization of this stage as a period of "accustomization." Compared to the stage of mutual adaptation, the accustomization stage is a time of reduced or more circumscribed conflict, of accustomed rather than new and adjusting relations, and of programs that are even more highly tailored to state/local contours as well as generally responsive to refined policy objectives.

The accustomization stage in mature federal education programs is more closely examined in two other national studies. Similar to the field examinations of the School Finance Study, these two studies were conducted during the 1981-1982 school year, and thus present companion state/local perspectives on federal policy implementation during the later years of the Title I, ESEA program.

The State Management Practices Study concluded that by the early 1980s, states had matured in their operation of the Title I program so that the elaborate legal structure of the program contained in the 1978 ESEA Amendments might not be necessary for some states. The researchers at the American Institutes for Research assessed that while "strict compliance measures were undoubtedly correct for a 'young' program in which states simply carried out federal policy, it was not clear that such prescriptive measures were appropriate for a 'mature' program, such as Title I in its later years."⁴¹ The study found that some states were still primarily motivated in their administrative actions to minimize audit citations from federal oversight teams. Other states had moved beyond this compliance orientation. In what the study identified

as “quality-oriented states,” program administrators had moved beyond mere adherence to federal program regulations. During this accustomization stage, the study noted that “quality-oriented states often break new ground, and they extend themselves by making rules to further program goals—all of which can lead to problems and uncertainties as to whether their actions are in compliance with the law.”⁴²

Results from the Title I District Practices Study, a national study of the program just prior to Chapter 1’s implementation, also documented the highly customized and diversified projects developed by districts over the years.⁴³ One example of districts’ sophistication in customizing the program to fit their particular circumstances is in the area of selecting schools to receive program services. The rules for selecting schools to receive Title I services in the 1965 legislation were ambiguous and brief. They required that Title I projects be located only in schools or attendance areas with “high concentrations of children from low-income families” (Sec. 205(a)(1), P.L. 89-10). By 1978, federal direction was much more prescriptive, but it also permitted a number of exceptions. For instance, districts could decide which grade spans would be served and rank only those schools with these grade spans. Or, in districts where there was “no-wide variance” in poverty, all schools in a district could be served, including those with below-average poverty. Over time, more than a handful of other exceptions or options to the general school selection rules for the program evolved. By the 1980s, districts were making extensive use of these options. Almost half the districts, for instance, used the grade span grouping option and almost 30% employed the “no-wide variance” option when it applied.⁴⁴

Overall, the program had become immensely popular with local school officials by the 1980s, even though its effectiveness in improving students’ achievement in school continues to be debated.⁴⁵ By the late 1970s, complaints about the program were largely relegated to one or two aspects of its requirements, particularly, those pertaining to parent advisory councils and comparability.⁴⁶ Both of these areas were simplified by Chapter 1, ECIA.

THE UNFOLDING STORY: STATE AND LOCAL RESPONSE TO ECIA

Federal policy for elementary and secondary education under the Reagan administration has four notable features: (1) generally stable

expenditures, with reduced purchasing power due to inflation; (2) programmatic reforms resulting primarily from enactment and implementation of ECIA; (3) less activist posture in enforcing civil rights regulations; and (4) expansion of the leadership or bully pulpit function.

While the U.S. Department of Education's budget for education increased by about 10% from approximately \$14 billion to \$15.4 billion between FY 1980 and FY 1984, the funding level in FY 1984 for elementary and secondary education of \$6.9 billion was identical to the budget authority four years earlier. In the intervening years, the Education Department's budget for federal elementary and secondary programs had actually dropped to \$6.1 billion in FY 1982. Another recent change in the Department of Education's budget has been the shift in support between elementary/secondary and postsecondary education, with expenditures for federal student aid and other college programs outpacing precollegiate federal funding beginning in 1981.⁴⁷

The first substantive funding cuts for elementary and secondary education under the Reagan administration were contained in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, which reduced funding across most domestic functional areas. This budget act also made structural changes in a number of social programs. For elementary and secondary education, these structural changes were achieved through the component of the 1981 Reconciliation Act entitled the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA).

The Act contained three sections or chapters. Chapter 1 was a major rewrite and streamlining of provisions for the largest federally sponsored program that was and still is targeted to low-achieving students in poverty areas, the former ESEA Title I program. Chapter 2 of ECIA consolidated 28 federally funded categorical grants into a single block grant. Along with promises to reduce paperwork, the block grant reduced funding by approximately 12% in its first year. Chapter 3, ECIA, placed new restrictions on the U.S. Department of Education and state agencies to regulate the use of federal funds by local schools.

Most currently available research on these programmatic and funding changes are based on only the first or second transition years of ECIA's implementation. In fact, a number of researchers jumped the gun by asking school officials about the *expected* effects of ECIA.⁴⁸ Past research on federal program implementation consistently has demonstrated that such early assessments typically relied too extensively on the inflated stated intent of legislative language as evaluation standards and overstated temporary start-up problems.⁴⁹

The first wave of studies examining Chapter 1's initial implementation tended to be either (1) exploratory case studies in a limited number of districts or states examining select issues⁵⁰ or (2) larger scale investigations undertaken by interest groups that over the years had fought for many of the provisions excised or streamlined by the Chapter 1 legislation (e.g., parent advisory councils and quantitative indicators of supplemental use of federal funds). The two organizations, for instance, with the most activist posture for an expanded federal oversight role during the Title I years, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, produced the first two major reports of Chapter 1's operation. Representative Hawkins (Democrat-California), Chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, also sponsored a study of administrative changes under Chapter 1. These three reports concurred that (1) reduced funding, more than regulatory changes, affected local implementation of the program; (2) the U.S. Department of Education provided insufficient guidance to state and local officials about their new roles under Chapter 1; (3) federal and state monitoring had notably decreased; and (4) the number of parent councils, previously mandated under Title I, had significantly declined.⁵¹

A more theoretically oriented assessment of Chapter 1's early implementation documented continuation of the accustomization phase after the streamlining of the Title I requirements. The study, directed by Milbrey McLaughlin, found that "Title I, without a question, stimulated local activities that have persisted under Chapter 1." However, in such areas as state oversight and parent councils, where most of Title I's detailed requirements had been removed, state and local officials evidenced diminished attention to these activities.⁵² The study concluded that despite more than 20 years of building the commitment and expertise of state and local staff, the categorical structures established under Title I could not be expected to remain if there were a substantial retreat in federal funds or direction.

Chapter 1's evaluation is complicated by the fact that Congress passed technical amendments to ECIA in December of 1983 that restored, in modified form, some of Title I's previous reporting and targeting requirements. These technical amendments also required the Secretary of Education to conduct a national assessment of compensatory education programs under Chapter 1 through the National Institute of Education (now the Office of Educational Research and Improvement). The study will examine issues of effectiveness, targeting,

program design, services, and administration through national surveys and case studies and report findings to Congress in time for the 1987 reauthorization of the program.⁵³

The Chapter 2, ECIA block grant is the only major new programmatic initiative of the Reagan administration for elementary/secondary schools. Examination of its initial implementation, therefore, has been even more intensive. After less than two years of operation, at least 21 major empirical studies had been initiated or completed.⁵⁴ More than half of these were also designed or conducted by advocacy groups that were directly affected by the reduced funding or more redistributive nature of the block grant formula, including the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS), the National Citizens Committee for Education, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the Education Commission of the States, and the U.S. Catholic Conference.

Despite the fragmentary nature of these recent or ongoing studies of Chapter 2, they offer intriguing glimpses into early responses to this reform. In the first years, many districts tended to use Chapter 2 funds for computer purchases,⁵⁵ although there was no clear indication that these purchases were part of an articulated school improvement effort.⁵⁶ Preliminary indications were that the block grant had been successful in reducing administrative burden,⁵⁷ however, yet to be known is "if snipping the strings works for or against the development of well-planned and innovative solutions to local education problems."⁵⁸ Evidence regarding local participation was also mixed. While private school officials appeared more involved, local parents seemed to have less say in how Chapter 2 funds were spent than they did under the antecedent programs.⁵⁹

It is also apparent that large, urban districts lost considerable funding not only as a result of the redistributive nature of the Chapter 2 allocation formula, but also due to the erosion of political support for the antecedent programs in the years prior to the block grant.⁶⁰ Also, while no exact figures are available for private school student participation under the antecedent programs, it appears that private school students are receiving proportionally more services under the block grant than they did under the earlier configuration of categorical programs.⁶¹ Less, however, is known about how intradistrict resource allocations have been affected by Chapter 2 or how or whether the more than 85% of the districts that gained modest funding increments under Chapter 2 use these funds with long-range goals in mind. A national study being conducted by SRI International is currently examining

these and other issues based on three years of data on state and local implementation experiences.⁶²

CENTRALITY OF THE BULLY PULPIT ROLE

Previous administrations have used moral suasion or the bully pulpit to reinforce more direct regulatory, funding, and service efforts. For example, Commissioner of Education Sidney Marland's 1970 advocacy of career education was backed by a new grant program. However, the Reagan administration has featured this tactic of speeches, commissions, and advocacy by the secretary and president as a primary mode of action. Although a relatively inexpensive strategy, significant personnel and financial resources have been targeted toward influencing public opinion and thereby affecting policy.⁶³ In a self-assessment of his first term, President Reagan wrote:

If I were asked to single out the proudest achievement of my administration's first three and one-half years in office, what we've done to define the issues and promote the great national debate in education would rank right up near the top of the list.⁶⁴

The Reagan administration's use of the bully pulpit in education is consistent with its New Federalism philosophy that the state and local authorities and citizens are the proper and most effective means of action and change. This education strategy has similarities with the Reagan economic policy. A major premise of "supply-side" economics was that bold and dramatic action and rhetoric on the part of the national administration would signal investors that a new era was coming, thereby indirectly stimulating the economy. As David Stockman stated, in his infamous *Atlantic* interviews, "The whole thing is premised on faith."⁶⁵ Mr. Reagan has deliberately rerouted much of the responsibility for governing away from Washington. In that process, his use of the bully pulpit has been integral not only to promote devolution of authority but also to advocate "excellence" including discipline, merit pay, and prayer in the classroom.

In accord with the New Federalism philosophy, a major goal of the administration has been to deregulate the myriad categorical programs that began in 1965.⁶⁶ Reagan campaigned on a promise to dismantle the Department of Education in an effort to symbolize this decentralization of power. Likewise, in an interview with *Educational Record*, former

Secretary of the Department of Education, Terrell Bell, stated that he hoped, if nothing else, to be remembered as one who reversed the relentless trend toward federal education control.⁶⁷

Ironically, it was the Democratic administration that enlarged the national education pulpit from which Secretaries Bell and Bennett have spoken. Shortly after the creation of the U.S. Department of Education, an optimistic former Commissioner Howe stated: "A Cabinet-level department lends importance to the Secretary's voice, which will influence the thinking of many persons about education's goals, practices, results, governance, and costs."⁶⁸ However, there is still no overall federal education policy spokesperson because education programs remain scattered throughout the government. For instance, there are major education initiatives in the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Health, the Veterans Administration, and the Educational Programs for Youth in the Department of Labor.

Certainly the most graphic example of this bully pulpit strategy has been the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) and subsequent follow-up activities. The commission's report, *A Nation at Risk*, sold 70,000 copies during its first year. The Department of Education estimates that approximately seven times that number, 500,000, were copied and distributed within a year of the report's release. Extensive excerpts in national and regional periodicals, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *The Oregonian* provided millions direct access to the report.⁶⁹

The NCEE findings, as well as those of similar task forces and individuals, clearly captured the attention of Americans concerned about education. Whether the administration realized the potential of the commission's work at its inception is unclear. However, once NCEE had established the tone, the president and the secretary took full advantage of this rhetorical opportunity to advance their agenda. While at an obvious level the issue was one of return to quality, the "excellence movement" also has provided a vehicle for the administration to push the onus of responsibility for education back to the state, local, and parental levels.

President Reagan had a high level of involvement with the introduction of the report and subsequent activities. Among other things, the president visited schools around the country, participated in two regional forums, and addressed a plenary session of the National Forum on Excellence in Education, with consistent themes stressing quality, discipline, merit pay, and the virtues of homework.

The Department of Education scheduled various activities to maintain the momentum fostered by the reports and to encourage action at the state and local levels. The department sponsored twelve regional forums and a National Forum on Excellence in Education. Secretary Bell designated most of his discretionary fund toward that effort and stated that a major portion of the budget was to be spent on the problems and priorities addressed by the commission report.⁷⁰

Upon the first anniversary of the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the department disseminated a follow-up, *The Nation Responds: Recent Efforts to Improve Education*. The publication was at once an assessment and another push for continued action at the state and local levels. The report cited glowing stories and statistics about the “tidal wave of school reform.”⁷¹ After only a year, researchers were aware of 275 state-level task forces on education, stimulated in part by NCEE. Of 51 states and jurisdictions, 48 had adopted or were considering new high school graduations requirements. At that point, 35 states had approved new requirements.

The prevalence of the bully pulpit strategy is evident from a review of speeches, operational statements, and budgetary considerations.⁷² Other efforts have included the very visible “Wall Chart” (comparing resources and college entrance scores across states), *Indicators of Education Status and Trends*, and *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. Secretary Bennett described the role of the bully pulpit in promoting the work of American education as follows:

*The work is principally the American people's work, not the federal government's. We, in Washington, can talk about these matters, comment on them, provide intellectual resources, and, when appropriate, limited fiscal resources, but the responsibility is the people's.*⁷³

Issuance of the Wall Chart that compared state education outcomes exemplifies the Reagan administration's use of the bully pulpit strategy. “The publication of the ‘wall chart’ brought to the forefront the issue of state-to-state comparisons,” wrote the report's authors. “On a political level, the attention given to the Secretary's wall chart makes inevitable future state-to-state comparisons on outcome measures.”⁷⁴ In a dramatic policy reversal, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) approved a plan to conduct regular comparisons of the educational performance of the states rather than permit the federal government to preempt interstate performance comparisons. While initially opposed

strongly to such techniques, the CCSSO is now determined to influence the sorts of performance measures used, including a deemphasis on SAT comparisons.

The initial statements of Secretary Bennett signaled the administration's continued emphasis on the bully pulpit. Upon his appointment, Bennett cited ten major issues he would address.⁷⁵ Later that month, President Reagan enumerated five broader, more easily digestible themes he and the new education secretary had agreed upon for the education agenda: choice, teachers, curriculum, setting, and parents.⁷⁶ One month after his appointment, Secretary Bennett delivered a more refined, yet still more memorable set of themes, his "three Cs": content, character, and choice.⁷⁷ This evolution indicates a growing sensitivity to the strategy of carefully articulating one's message in a format that can more easily be conveyed to the public. Each message contained similar content; Bennett's ten issues were subsumed within the elaborations of the president's five concerns and the three Cs.

Assessing the Impact of the Bully Pulpit

Although the administration's use of the bully pulpit has been its centerpiece of education policy, almost no research was found on the topic. An ERIC search revealed one piece that focused on the impact of task forces during previous administrations.⁷⁸ Weiss demonstrates that a bully pulpit strategy can have substantial impact on changing policymakers' assumptions or viewpoint about policy priorities.⁷⁹ She contends that such activities are effective in agenda setting and percolate indirectly into the policy process.

The Department of Education's assessment of the bully pulpit's impact has been handled more in a public relations vein than a scholarly one. The department published *The Nation Responds*, but its primary purpose was to reinforce the administration's message of optimism and to encourage continued state and local effort. The following quotation is indicative of the report's tone: "deep public concern about the Nation's future created a tidal wave of school reform which promises to renew American education."⁸⁰ Research on the impact of symbolism like "excellence" for guiding the policy agenda suggests the bully pulpit could be quite effective.⁸¹

Not only does the bully pulpit strategy seem to have impact upon the early stages of policymaking, but also it has an impact upon education research priorities and trends through indirect means.⁸² More federally

funded research has been directed at curricular content, academic standards, parent choice, and the excellence agenda as exemplified by the federal regulations on the NIE Center competition.

Another unresearched question concerns the origins of the themes for the bully pulpit. Certainly, the underlying message of returning influence to the state and local levels derives from the administration's New Federalism stance.⁸³ More directly, however, researchers and analysts from the conservative think tanks have played a very influential role as members and leaders of task forces. The Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institution at Stanford, and American Enterprise Institute are three primary providers of the ideology, data, and strategies that form the administration's bully pulpit content.⁸⁴

Also largely unnoticed is the administration's extensive use of political appointments within the Department of Education to disseminate its bully pulpit themes. For the first time, political appointees head the department's ten regional offices. Many education specialists have been replaced by "public information" specialists. According to Hanrahan and Kosterlitz, many research review panels have been completely released and former panelists replaced with "individuals less notable for their expertise in education than for their conservative views."⁸⁵ More effort should be expended to address these and related questions. The apparent success of bully pulpit strategies under this administration ensures their continued viability in the future.

RECENT NORMATIVE COMMENTARIES ON THE FEDERAL ROLE

The election of President Reagan caused a considerable increase in perspective pieces on the proper and probable federal role. Many of these federal role publications were normative arguments or attempts to extrapolate the future from the past. Ironically, none of the commentary prior to the National Commission on Excellence in Education report predicted the huge impact the "excellence" movement would have on the reallocation of federal versus state roles as developed in the previous discussion of the bully pulpit.

Several analysts have speculated on the direction and determinants of the future of the federal role in education.⁸⁶ Thomas posits five major determinants: the president; national political and economic conditions; the key issues of race relations, religion, and federal control; the

Washington policy process; and administrative structure.⁸⁷ Thomas, Clark and Amiot, and Doyle all stress the crucial importance of President Reagan's leadership and ideological convictions.⁸⁸ Thomas observes that there is a shift in elite thinking to a view that too much reliance had been placed during 1965-1980 on federal education initiatives to improve national and economic problems.

Several of the writers, particularly Peterson and Rabe, stress that the education interest groups can play only a minor and marginal role in deflecting major determinants. Peterson and Rabe summarize the general consensus of the literature this way:

While interest groups help sustain programs once they are enacted, and may help shape ways in which the legislation is formulated, the overall direction of education policy is surprisingly divorced from the play of group politics.⁸⁹

Interest groups are viewed as a conservative force trying to preserve their programs in a largely fragmented and specialized way. Major education interest groups have reacted to the Reagan education ideology without being able to lead. Another force sparking interest group reaction is the Supreme Court decision in *Aguilar v. Felton*, banning the provision of federally funded remedial services in religiously affiliated schools. This decision could potentially upset the fragile coalition of public and private school organizations supporting existing delivery systems for federal categorical programs.

Given the Reagan administration's shifts in policy, several researchers have explored the desirability and impact of a revamped federal role. Clark and Amiot, and Clark, Astuto, and Rooney summarized the Reagan approach as diminution, deregulation, decentralization, disestablishment of bureaucratic structure, and deemphasis.⁹⁰ They contended that the Reagan administration's impact will be fairly drastic. Prior to joining the U.S. Department of Education, Finn took the opposite view about probable impact because:

a sorry blend of lackluster individuals, internal rivalries, failure of imagination, political timidity, blind spots, and yieldings to various federal pressures has prevented any coherent vision of a new federal role from forming. Far from resulting in the purposeful disassembly of the old role that Clark and Amiot think they see, these failings have led mostly to a kind of dull, depressing decrementalism.⁹¹

The kind of rhetoric employed in this debate is not buttressed by large-scale empirical surveys. The discussion thus far has pointed out

that changes in Chapter 1 and 2 of ECIA are significant, but congressional momentum has shifted away from Reagan's federal education priorities ever since 1981.

No issue has been more symbolic of a new federal role than Reagan's repeated legislative requests for tuition tax credits to private school parents. James and Levin provided a rather complete overview of the numerous ramifications of this proposal, including legal, federal costs, potential beneficiaries, and the arguments in favor and against.⁹² Tuition tax credits were defeated in the Senate and appear dead given Reagan's overall tax reform proposal of 1985. But it is the provision in this tax reform bill to end the deductibility of state and local taxes from federal income taxes that could have the biggest Reagan education impact. Ending state/local tax deductibility raises the price of increased state/local taxes to support education, and could dampen public willingness to support future tax increases.

Alternatives to the Reagan administration's conceptualization of the federal role have been proposed. For example, the Twentieth Century Fund advocated major federal initiatives to improve the attraction and retention of high quality teachers. The federal role in this area was quite strong from 1964 to 1972, but ended with the demise of the Education Professions Development Act. The only major federal initiative for teachers shifted to the National Science Foundation (NSF) after a 1983 statute. The involvement of NSF highlights a generic problem with all these federal role pieces—inattention to the numerous federal agencies involved in education. There are dozens of federal education and training programs, but the Department of Education administers only a handful of them. No one is analyzing the wholistic impact or desirability of this fragmented nonsystem for delivering federal programs.

It is noteworthy that the highly visible school prayer issue has not been analyzed by academics who specialize in the federal education role. Pierard and Clouse provide some descriptions of the "New Right," but their main objective is to warn against the dangers of these groups.⁹³ Moreover, such major congressional issues as asbestos removal and cuts in federal child nutrition are not treated in any depth beyond normative argumentation. The research remains concentrated on the major federal grant programs that were once a part of ESEA.

Overall, the 1980 Reagan election has not been the critical turning point that Iannaccone or Clark and Amiot⁹⁴ foresaw if one looks only at federal education program structures and expenditures. But if one looks more closely at the federal bully pulpit and the high level of state initiatives for excellence, many of the Reagan goals have been accom-

plished. The federal level is no longer viewed as the prime engine of educational innovation.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The federal role in education has always been uncertain and subject to political controversy as well as the influence of broader social movements. At the very time the approaches to implementing the elementary/secondary education programs emanating from the Great Society initiatives seemed to realize a growing national consensus, the federal government, under the leadership of a conservative political coalition, attempted to turn federal policy in a new direction, using a set of bully pulpit strategies instead of regulations to achieve its objectives. This examination has reviewed some of the analytic tools available for researching the federal role in elementary and secondary education. It has also assessed a disparate, and often fugitive, literature on this federal role since the most recent research anthologies were published in the early 1980s.

This review of previously uncharted literature highlights several important developments. First, state and local implementation of the more mature federally sponsored categorical programs had by the early 1980s in many instances moved beyond the mutual adaptation stage generally portrayed in the research anthologies. The most recent national studies of these longer-standing programs portray reduced or more circumscribed intergovernmental conflicts compared to earlier assessments, accustomed rather than new or adjusting relationships, more emphasis on program improvement rather than on a strict compliance orientation, and highly tailored programs customized to fit the contours of local circumstances and capacities.

Second, it is still too early to assess fully state and local impacts of the streamlining of compensatory education requirements, the effects of the block grant, and the consequences of the easing of federal oversight across programmatic and regulatory strategies. The first wave of investigations were often undertaken by constituency groups and typically used exploratory case studies to examine the major programmatic reforms in ECIA. This initial surge of evaluations is soon to be followed by a wave of large-scale national assessments on state and local responses to the new or revised federal programmatic strategies.

Third, the Reagan administration's qualitatively different use of the bully pulpit as a major, independent policy strategy has been inade-

quately examined. There is broad recognition of the widespread public and professional reactions to the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the issuance of the Wall Chart comparing state resources and college entrance scores, and other moral suasion devices. Nonetheless, to date, most of the commentary on these bully pulpit strategies has little if any empirical base and has been more public relations hype than systematic assessment.

Overall, subsequent research of the federal role in the 1980s can benefit a growing body of theoretical literature on differential federal strategies. Program evaluations will have to be designed to assess broad ranges of state and local responses to the New Federalism reforms. These evaluations will also have to be designed to examine programs that in many instances have become part of the fabric of state and local contexts and that, therefore, are likely to require careful specification of the conditions and contexts that affect state and local implementation.

Probably the greatest challenge for researchers of the federal role in elementary and secondary education will be to design and conduct systematic assessments of the origins and impacts of the modern use of the bully pulpit strategy. Only through such scholarship, and with the benefit of time's perspective, will the impacts of the Reagan administration's education policy be fully understood.

NOTES

1. The authors wish to thank Mary Moore and Paul Peterson for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this article. The views and conclusions expressed here, however, are those of the authors. No official support or endorsement of the U.S. Department of Education is intended or should be inferred.

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14. M. E. Orland and R. J. Goettel, "States and the Implementation of Federal Categorical Programs in Education: A Heuristic Framework," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 4, 2 (1982): 141-154.

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23. Birman and Ginsburg, "The Federal Role," pp. 473, 484.
24. Kaestle and Smith, "The Federal Role," p. 405.
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