

EDUCATIONAL STUDIES 250
Fixing Schools: Policy and Politics in American Education

Winter 2012
Tuesday/Thursday 10:10-11:55am
Weitz 133

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Office hours Wed 11:00-12:30pm, Thurs 3:00-4pm and by appointment

Course Description

How can we fix American public schools? It's a question that plagues reformers in government, private foundations, non-profit organizations, and school districts, whether they work at the national, state, or local level.

Embedded in that question, of course, are a number of smaller questions. To what imagined condition are we trying to repair schools? What, in other words, is our vision of schools that have been "fixed"? What is broken about our schools, and how can we tell which schools need fixing? Who should lead the fix? What should the means of repair be? What cost are we willing to pay?

This course will survey current approaches to educational change. As such, you will explore the current systems and structures that constitute the policy framework, scrutinize the assumptions and ideological underpinnings of different political camps, and examine the dynamic interactions between and among the actors shaping American education. Additionally, you will look at various reform efforts and models, considering their use in the effort to transform schools

Course Expectations

1. Readings. Do the assigned readings prior to class discussions and be prepared to ask and answer questions in class. We will be reading a wide range of pieces over the course of the quarter, some more detailed than others. As a rule of thumb, shorter readings should be read more slowly and more carefully than longer ones.

2. Participation. Participation in class and online is important in this class as a way of deepening your understanding of the main ideas of the course and practicing key skills. Useful contributions take a number of forms—building on the comments of others, bringing new points to light, raising questions, carefully listening—but are common in that they foster an

environment of discovery. In short, your participation is not merely as an *individual*, but as a *member of a whole*; bear that in mind. Attendance is a requirement; missing more than two classes will require instructor consent and will otherwise adversely affect your grade.

3. Writing. We will focus a great deal on writing in this class, and you will be asked to complete several different kinds of assignments over the course of the quarter. For each assignment, you may share ideas with classmates, but your final writing should be entirely your own. You are welcome to do outside research, but you are not required or expected to do so at any point during this course. Be sure to cite your sources; any standard format is fine (Chicago, MLA, APA, etc.). And finally, you should take care in crafting not only the ideas in your writing, but also the way you present those ideas (see Guidelines for Analytical Writing for more).

Grading and Assignments

Your course grade will be broken down into the following categories:

1. Class participation: 10%
2. Op-ed: 15%
3. Weekly blog posts: 25%
4. Integrated essay: 20%
5. Final project: 30%

All assignments, unless otherwise noted, should be uploaded to Moodle. Late work for all assignments will be graded down one-third of a grade (i.e. A→A-) for each day it is past due.

1. See Course Expectations for a description of participation norms.

2. Op-ed assignment

Due: January 10 by class time

For this assignment, write a double-spaced 700-800 word op-ed (check out the op-ed page of the *New York Times* or the “Commentary” section of *Education Week* if you aren’t familiar with the genre) about how to improve American schools.

In this, lay out clearly what kinds of schools you are addressing (urban, rural, elementary, high schools, etc.), where you see those schools falling short, what it would take to turn that school or district into a “successful” one, and, what signs or indicators would convince parents, taxpayers, and policymakers that your school or district is “successful.”

Please **DO NOT** read any assigned texts for this first assignment. Just sit down and meditate on what you think; then apply your knowledge, beliefs, and values to this piece of writing. There is a reason we are doing this assignment at the beginning of the course.

This op-ed will receive a letter grade for the quality of writing, the internal consistency of the argument, and the degree to which you met the requirements of the assignment. The grade does not evaluate your interpretation of how to improve schools. All papers must be submitted by email as an MS Word attachment.

You may rewrite this paper at any time for a revised grade, or simply because you want to.

3. Weekly blog post

Due: Each Monday and Wednesday by 11:59pm CST (Jan. 11-Feb. 23)

The purpose of these blog posts is twofold. First, it is designed to keep you thinking about the course readings and discussions. Education reform is complex business and the more you think about it, the more your views will evolve. Second, it is designed to stimulate thought for others. That means that you should be reading other people's postings, considering, and commenting.

One half of the class will post on Monday. The other half will post on Wednesday. When you are not a poster, you will be a commenter. Posts should be between 400 and 600 words in length. Comments should be roughly 100 words in length. None of this needs to be carefully polished, but your writing should substantively use readings from the week—as evidence, as a springboard for a new idea, as a punching bag, etc. Each post should be focused on the theme of fixing schools. What, in short, are your thoughts about fixing schools this week?

You will be evaluated on a 1-6 scale on the following:

- Your post/comment meets the word requirement
- Your post substantively uses at least *one* reading from the set due for the next day's class
- Your post offers a new take on fixing schools that does not rehash your previous work
- Your post/comment offers a distinct take from the postings of your classmates (some overlap is acceptable, but this means you need to keep an eye on what others write)
- Your post/comment relies on evidence to support claims; in other words, provide an example of whatever it is that you're talking about (but do not conduct outside research)
- Your post/comment reflects the clarity and quality of prose outlined in points 3 and 12 of the "Guidelines" section at end of syllabus
- Your comment is respectful

3. Integrated essay

Due: February 23 by class time

This paper, which should be roughly 2000 words in length, is designed to assess what you have learned this term about fixing schools. Before taking the course you had some thoughts about fixing schools (reflected in your op-ed), and the aim of this assignment is to reveal how your views have been challenged, modified, or reinforced by what you have learned in this course. Your essay should offer a coherent perspective on school improvement.

In writing this essay, you should address the following questions (though you do not need to answer each one separately):

1. Why is school reform so hard?
2. Why is school reform so abundant?
3. What role does/should common sense play in reform?
4. What role does/should research play?
5. What are the things that can and can't be accomplished in education reform?

After considering these questions, spend some time figuring out what you could say in 30 seconds that would encapsulate all of your answers collectively. Once you have a sense of what your main idea is, it's time to write...

You will be evaluated on the criteria laid out in the "Guidelines" section at the end of the syllabus.

4. Final project

Presentations March 6, 8

Projects due March 8 by class time

In this project, you will be working in teams to "fix" an urban school district. It will be hard work, but it should also be a fun way to learn quite a bit about educational improvement.

A. Find a group to work with. This project is a large-scale endeavor, and will require a team of 3-5 individuals working in coordination with each other. We will form groups in class.

B. Choose an urban school district. Pick one where access to people and sources is relatively easy to obtain. Districts like Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Boston, Denver, and Philadelphia are frequently in the news. And there's always Minneapolis or Saint Paul.

Note: By week three I need to know what district you will study. If you need help in deciding or figuring out how to get access to the district that you wish to study or similar issues, talk with me. I will be available to discuss the project beginning today.

C. You will be consulting for this district. That means that you will have to determine the district's needs. In considering needs, consider it in all of its facets—facilities, curriculum, personnel, etc. You will need to conduct outside research in order to do an adequate "needs assessment." Much of this material will be available online, in newspaper accounts, news releases, etc. Other materials can be obtained by interviewing key people in the organization, asking for supporting documents, or recruiting district employees to fill out short surveys or questionnaires.

D. After you have determined their needs, you will be asking one central question: how can we improve this district? In answering that question, you will want to consider a number of constraints. First, you must work with the current district budget (unless you are going to propose something like a new funding formula); you cannot simply suggest that they magically

find more money. Second, you must work with the current population of students. You can recommend new teaching hiring practices, reorganization of district front office, etc. But you cannot turn students away if you are a public school. Third, your plan must be realistic. Imagine actually presenting this to district officials (in some cases, you may find that district officials are actually interested in seeing a final draft of your plan).

E. Write a report that includes (at the minimum) the following items:

- District needs. Use evidence that supports your claims about the primacy of those needs.
- District history with reform. What has the district already tried? Why has it not “fixed” the district?
- District capacity. What, in other words, *can* be accomplished in the district?
- Your suggestions for how the district might address its needs. Give district officials some options here, whether that means a menu of choices, different levels of commitment, etc.
- Robust evidence supporting those suggestions. Such evidence may consist of interviews with district personnel, research by scholars, work done in other districts, etc.
- An Appendix. Include a description of the methodology and tools that you used to conduct this study. Analyze the strengths and limitations of the methods and tools you used. Include a sample of instruments used to secure information.
- Work distribution. Indicate what work each member did in organizing the work, collecting data, analyzing the data, and writing the report.

F. Length of report. No longer than 25 pages exclusive of endnotes and appendices (12-point size type and double-spaced). Endnotes are to be included should you quote sources or other materials (including your interviews and surveys you have administered). Whatever annotation style you use (APA, University of Chicago, etc.) be consistent throughout your report.

G. You will be making final presentations to the class. Plan on 30 minutes. Be prepared for questions. All members of the group should participate in a way that reflects their contributions. Prepare your own materials and PowerPoint slides.

Classes and Readings

<p>Week 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state of education <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">Jan. 5</p>	<p><u>In class tools:</u></p> <p>U.S. Department of Education, <i>The Condition of Education 2011</i> U.S. Department of Education, <i>NAEP Report Card</i> Phi Delta Kappan and Gallup, <i>Attitudes toward Education</i></p>
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<p>Week 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where students go to school <p>Jan. 10</p> <p>Op-eds due</p> <p>Jan. 12</p> <p>First blog post due</p>	<p><u>School choice</u></p> <p>Burke, <i>School Choice in America 2009</i> CREDO, <i>Multiple Choice</i> (read only the Executive Summary) Jal Mehta, “A Case for Markets from the Left” Rotherham, “Future Shock: Markets Are Powerful But Not Enough” Biddle, “Chartered into Unions”</p> <p><u>Desegregation</u></p> <p>“Is Desegregation Dead?” <i>Education Next</i> Eaton and Chirichigno, <i>METCO Merits More</i></p> <p><u>Magnets</u></p> <p>“St. Louis Magnet School Program Breeding Success”</p> <p><u>Virtual schools</u></p> <p>“Virtual Schools,” <i>Education Next</i></p>
<p>Week 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dealing with the world outside of school <p>Jan. 17</p> <p>Jan. 19</p>	<p><u>Poverty and community</u></p> <p>Henig, et al., “Parental and Community Participation in Education Reform” <i>A Broader Bolder Approach to Education</i> Goldstein, “Hidden Human Capital: Parents”</p> <p><u>Promise neighborhoods</u></p> <p>Tough, “The Harlem Project,” <i>New York Times</i> U.S Dept. of Education, <i>Promise Neighborhoods Program Description</i> Otterman, “Lauded Harlem Schools Have Their Own Problems,” <i>New York Times</i></p>
<p>Week 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization and culture <p>Jan. 24</p>	<p><u>Organization</u></p> <p>Rumberger and Connell, <i>Strengthening School District Capacity</i> Lake and Hernandez, <i>Portfolio School Districts Project</i> Peyser, “Unlocking the Secrets of High Performing Charters,” <i>Education Next</i> “\$500 Million Question,” <i>Education Next</i> Mathews, “Looking at KIPP Coolly and Carefully,” <i>Washington Post</i></p>

<p>Jan. 26</p>	<p><u>School culture</u> Thompson, "Understanding School Culture" <i>NAIS Bulletin</i> Cohen, et al., "The Challenge of Assessing School Climate," <i>Educ. Leadership</i> Wagner, <i>The School Leader's Tool for Assessing and Improving School Culture</i> Tough, "What If the Secret to Success Is Failure," <i>New York Times</i></p>
<p>Week 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inputs and their limitations <p>Jan. 31</p> <p>Feb. 2</p>	<p><u>Money</u> Murphy and Oujidani, <i>State Capacity for School Improvement</i> Heuer and Stullich, <i>School Level Expenditures</i> (read only the Executive Summary) Baker, et al., <i>Is School Funding Fair?</i> Smith and Petersen, <i>Steering Capital</i></p> <p><u>Size</u> Chingos, <i>The False Promise of Class Size Reduction</i></p> <p><u>Time</u> Education Commission of the States, <i>Learning Time in America</i> Mathews, "Learning from the Masters," <i>Washington Post</i></p>
<p>Week 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum and testing <p>Feb. 7</p> <p>Feb. 9</p> <p>4:30-6pm – Myron Orfield in the Athenaeum</p>	<p><u>Standards</u> Center on Education Policy, <i>Common Core State Standards</i> Dede, "21st Century Education Requires Lifewide Learning" Perkins, "The Elephant in the Room of 21st Century Learning" Richtel, "In Classroom of the Future Stagnant Scores," <i>New York Times</i> Elmore, "What Would Happen If We Let Them Go?"</p> <p><u>Testing and accountability</u> Gamoran, "Assessment for Learning" Henig, "On Time Horizons and Outcomes" Obama on NCLB Obama on accountability</p>

<p>Week 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The personnel question <p>Feb. 14</p> <p>Feb. 16</p>	<p><u>Principals</u></p> <p>Fullan, “The Role of the Principal in School Reform” Winerip, “The Secrets of a Principal Who Makes Things Work,” <i>New York Times</i> U.S. Department of Education, <i>Great Teachers and Great Leaders</i> New Leaders for New Schools, “Program Overview” DuFour, “The Learning Centered Principal,” <i>Educational Leadership</i></p> <p><u>Teachers (recruitment and training)</u></p> <p>National Council on Teacher Quality, <i>Student Teaching in the U.S.</i> National Council on Teacher Quality, <i>Teacher Quality Roadmap</i> Hanushek, “Recognizing the Value of Good Teachers,” <i>Education Week</i> Hess, et al., “Maybe the Square Peg Will Do,” <i>Education Week</i></p>
<p>Week 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The personnel question <p>Feb. 21</p> <p>Feb. 23</p> <p>Integrative essays due</p>	<p><u>Teachers (retention and development)</u></p> <p>Ohio Department of Education, <i>Proposal for a Career Ladder Program</i> Ahn and Vigdor, <i>Making Teacher Incentives Work</i> ECS, <i>Teacher Tenure or Continuing Contract Laws</i> Goldhaber and Walch, <i>Strategic Pay Reform</i> Loeb, “Seat Time” Massachusetts Office of Education, <i>Readiness Centers</i></p> <p><u>Teachers (evaluation)</u></p> <p>The New Teacher Project, <i>Teacher Evaluation 2.0</i> Glazerman, et al., <i>Evaluating Teachers</i> Strauss, “Study Blasts Popular Teacher Evaluation Method,” <i>Washington Post</i> Cuban, “Bias toward Numbers in Judging Teaching”</p>
<p>Week 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The whole picture <p>Feb. 28</p> <p>Mar. 1</p>	<p><u>A multi-pronged approach</u></p> <p>Bryk, et al., <i>Organizing Schools for Improvement</i>, chapters 2 + 4</p> <p><u>A teacher’s perspective</u></p> <p>Janet Grossbach Mayer, “Deception, Dismantling, and Demise of Public Education,” <i>As Bad as They Say?</i></p>

Week 10 • Final project presentations Mar. 6 Mar. 8	Due March 8: Final projects
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Guidelines

Guidelines for Critical Reading

As a critical reader of a particular text, you should use the following questions as a framework to guide you as you read:

1. What’s the point? This is the analysis issue: what is the author’s angle?
2. Who says? This is the validity issue: on what are the claims based?
3. What’s new? This is the value-added issue: what does the author contribute that we don’t already know?
4. Who cares? This is the significance issue, the most important issue of all, the one that subsumes all the others: is the text worth reading? Does it contribute something important?

If this is the way critical readers are going to approach a text, then as an analytical writer you need to guide readers toward the desired answers to each of these questions.

Guidelines for Analytical Writing

In writing papers for this (or any) course, keep in mind the following points.

1. Pick an important issue: make sure that your analysis meets the “so what” test. Why should anyone care about this topic, anyway? Pick an issue or issues that matters and that you really care about.
2. Keep focused: don’t lose track of the point you are trying to make and make sure the reader knows where you are heading and why.
3. Aim for clarity: don’t assume that the reader knows what you’re talking about; it’s your job to make your points clearly. In part this means keeping focused and avoiding distracting clutter. But in part it means that you need to make more than elliptical references to concepts and sources or to professional experience. When referring to readings, explain who said what and why this point is pertinent to the issue at hand. Proceed as though you were writing for an educated person who is neither a member of this class nor a professional colleague, someone who has not read the material you are referring to.
4. Provide analysis: a good paper is more than a catalogue of facts, concepts, experiences, or references; it is more than a description of the content of a set of readings; it is more than an

expression of your educational values or an announcement of your prescription for what ails education. A good paper is a logical and coherent analysis of the issues raised within your chosen area of focus. This means that your paper should aim to explain rather than describe. If you give examples, be sure to tell the reader what they mean in the context of your analysis. Make sure the reader understands the connection between the various points in your paper.

5. Provide depth, insight, and connections: the best papers are ones that go beyond making obvious points, superficial comparisons, and simplistic assertions. They dig below the surface of the issue at hand, demonstrating a deeper level of understanding and an ability to make interesting connections.

6. Support your analysis with evidence: you need to do more than simply state your ideas, however informed and useful these may be. You also need to provide evidence that reassures the reader that you know what you are talking about, thus providing a foundation for your argument. Remember that you are trying to accomplish two things with the use of evidence. First, you are saying that it is not just you making this assertion but that authoritative sources and solid evidence back you up. Second, you are supplying a degree of specificity and detail, which helps to flesh out an otherwise skeletal argument.

7. Draw on course materials. Your papers should give evidence that you are taking this course. You do not need to agree with any of the readings or presentations, but your paper should show you have considered the course materials thoughtfully.

8. Recognize complexity and acknowledge multiple viewpoints. The issues in the history of American education are not simple, and your paper should not propose simple solutions to complex problems. You should not reduce issues to either/or, black/white, good/bad. Papers should give evidence that you understand and appreciate more than one perspective on an issue. This does not mean you should be wishy-washy. Instead, you should aim to make a clear point by showing that you have considered alternate views.

9. Challenge assumptions. Papers should show that you have learned something. There should be evidence that you have been open to changing your mind.

10. Do not overuse quotation: in a short paper, long quotations (more than a sentence or two in length) are generally not appropriate. Even in longer papers, quotations should be used sparingly unless they constitute a primary form of data for your analysis. In general, your papers are more effective if written primarily in your own words, using ideas from the literature but framing them in your own way in order to serve your own analytical purposes. However, selective use of quotations can be very useful as a way of capturing the author's tone or conveying a particularly aptly phrased point.

11. Cite your sources: You need to identify for the reader where particular ideas or examples come from. This can be done through in-text citation: give the author's last name, publication year, and (in the case of quotations) page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence or paragraph where the idea is presented—e.g., (Ravitch, 2000, p. 22); provide the full citations in a list of references at the end of the paper. You can also identify sources with footnotes or

endnotes: give the full citation for the first reference to a text and a short citation for subsequent citations to the same text. (For critical reaction papers, you only need to give the short cite for items from the course reading; other sources require full citations.) Note that citing a source is not sufficient to fulfill the requirement to provide evidence for your argument. As spelled out in #6 above, you need to transmit to the reader some of the substance of what appears in the source cited, so the reader can understand the connection with the point you are making and can have some meat to chew on. The best analytical writing provides a real feel for the material and not just a list of assertions and citations. Depth, insight, and connections count for more than a superficial collection of glancing references.

12. Take care in the quality of your prose: a paper that is written in a clear and effective style makes a more convincing argument than one written in a murky manner, even when both writers start with the same basic understanding of the issues. However, writing that is confusing usually signals confusion in a person's thinking. After all, one key purpose of writing is to put down your ideas in a way that permits you and others to reflect on them critically, to see if they stand up to analysis. So you should take the time to reflect on your own ideas on paper and revise them as needed. You may want to take advantage of the opportunity in this course to submit a draft of the final paper, revise it in light of comments, and then resubmit the revised version. Remember, outside of the artificial world of the classroom, writers never turn in their first draft as their final statement on a subject.