



Data: A By-Product of Reform

A WEALTH of unbiased and accurate information about education has been a valuable, if unintended, consequence of the education reform movement. Assuring policy makers and taxpayers that reforms are working and are worth the price is one reason such data are produced, but the research community is also motivated to collect data for its own reasons.

In South Carolina, the Education Improvement Act recognized that both the legislature and the department of education should put a high priority on reporting to the public the progress of implementing reforms. This priority was evident in the creation of the public accountability division within the state department of education and in the establishment of several special committees to monitor and approve information released to the public about the reform law.

Indiana's A+ program for educational excellence, enacted in 1987, expanded student testing to additional grades in order to gather information on the impact of Project Prime Time, which was intended to lower class sizes in grades K-3. In other states, the need for better education data has started to change the focus of state departments of education and university education departments, as they move to help answer the short-term political question, Has reform made a difference?

Critics, skeptics, and advocates of reform all agree that we need to collect better data, and this rare consensus may help add lasting impact to the top-down re-

form mandates. Blue-ribbon task forces and gubernatorial advisory committees may have worked well in the early stages of reform, but both politicians and researchers are starting to see the need to base decisions on sound data.

IN CALIFORNIA: PACE

Following the enactment of S.B. 813, the omnibus reform law of 1983, Michael Kirst of Stanford University and James Guthrie of the University of California, Berkeley, started the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) Project.* One of the goals of PACE was to provide policy makers with a "nonpartisan, objective, independent body" of information on public education. PACE also operates centers at the University of Southern California, headed by Allan Odden, and in Sacramento, headed by Gerald Hayward. Since it was established, PACE has published more than 20 papers and reports that cover a range of topics, including teacher supply and demand, vocational education, high school curricular changes, school counseling, administrator preparation, teacher credentialing, and the use of lottery funds by local school districts.

One of the most useful PACE publications is *Conditions of Education in California*. This document gives a yearly overview of California's education programs in a 200-page compendium of charts, graphs, and interpretation compiled from various government and quasi-government databases, as well as from PACE's own research. It has been published in 1984, 1985, and 1986. Increasingly, state policy makers are using the

information provided in this document as a benchmark and relying on it to assist them in making future policy decisions.

In addition to the 200-page report, PACE also releases a 16-page newsprint summary that is given wide distribution among citizens and education groups in California. In the 1986-87 *Conditions of Education in California*, additional topics were added, including expanded information on private school enrollment, on minority enrollment, on state actions that affect education, on costs of professionalizing teaching, on the Gann spending limit (Proposition 4 of 1979), on year-round schooling, on teacher supply and demand, on class size, on teacher salaries, on credentials, and on the changing balance of power between state and local governments.

In 1987 PACE took on two additional projects that add a new layer of in-depth information about California education. The first, known as PACE-ACE, is a study financed by the California legislature to focus on 12 high schools and six middle schools that have been active in carrying out some of the initiatives of S.B. 813. For this study, a team of researchers went into school districts to gather data from "beneath the surface" on the impact of legislative reform mandates. The report, "The Impact of S.B. 813 on California Secondary Schools," is due to be released in mid-October. It will look at local factors that are associated with successful implementation of reform.

The report will also include information on the impact of the law on the school curriculum, on the knowledge and instructional skills of teachers, and on the performance of students. In commenting on the study prior to its release, Odden said, "We found lots of attention being

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*For more information on PACE, see "PEER: An Interview with Michael Kirst," p. 161, this *Kappan*.

paid to strengthening and upgrading the curriculum. This included attention to curriculum alignment with the new California model curriculum standards, alignment with the new state tests that emphasize higher-order thinking skills, and attempts to get better textbooks and instructional materials."

A second finding that Odden felt was significant was the emphasis on staff development at the building and district levels. Odden said that this was bringing schools to "a uniform base of new teaching techniques and a new level of agreement on supervision and management in effective school skills." Although some may criticize this endeavor, according to Odden, school districts in California are poised to begin a new emphasis on curriculum development and are already restoring traditional notions of academic excellence.

On the outcome side, Odden said that student test scores were up in all districts studied, but, more important, the study found a significant improvement in the school climate for learning and a sizable increase (30%) in the efficacy of teachers. Odden emphasized that some of these outcomes were the opposite of what the critics of top-down reform predicted would happen.

A second PACE report, which began in 1987, deals with the condition of children in the state of California. This report grew out of *Conditions of Education* and will focus on the complexities of poverty, illiteracy, teen pregnancy, and children's health, along with child care, prenatal care, and housing and neighborhood services. It will also include a section that identifies major themes and problems and points out gaps in the data. The PACE staff expects this report to be released in the winter of 1988.

Some observers feel that PACE is one of the leaders in state-level data gathering. Others see PACE as a model of cooperative effort between the universities, the school districts, and state policy makers. Kirst has remarked that PACE-type centers are on the increase, but he has also pointed out that it is important for them to have seed money for start-up and to have a base of operations in the state capital.

PACE was started with an initial grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which continues to support the project's \$1 million budget with a yearly \$300,000 unspecified grant. Ac-

cording to Kirst, PACE-type centers have been started at Ohio State University, at Indiana University, and at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. Similar centers are in the planning stages at the University of Utah, at Florida State University, and at Louisiana State University.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Since 1980 the Chapman Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago

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go has published two reports on the condition of children in Illinois. Titled *The State of the Child*, volumes I and II were issued in 1980 and in 1985 respectively. Their aim was to provide neutral and authoritative information on health, education, family life, poverty, and the environment as these issues impinge on children's lives.

The 1985 report placed special emphasis on the problems of minority children. Poverty, unemployment, at-risk youth, teenage pregnancy, and the precarious economic position of minority youth in Illinois were all stressed in this report. The goal of the Chapman Hall reports is to forge links between civic leaders and

state policy makers and to assist state officials in obtaining the kinds of information that can influence state policy. A third volume of the Chapman Hall reports on children, due to be issued in 1990, will add useful benchmark data to those already provided in the first two volumes.

TEXAS TEACHER TEST

The testing of practicing teachers in Texas has generated considerable attention both within the state and among educational researchers around the nation. Lorrie Shepard, a professor at the University of Colorado who is working on a U.S. Department of Education grant to the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing at the University of California at Los Angeles, used the Texas teacher test for case-study research.

Shepard used a structured research format to interview the people who were central to getting the legislation passed and implemented. The goal of Shepard's study was to determine what could be learned from the Texas experience that could inform education policy makers in other states. The study focused on the educational problems and the political context surrounding the enactment of the legislation and reviewed the anticipated effects of the test with both the advocates and the opponents of the law. After the test was given, the researchers focused on the impact of the testing, exploring such areas as who failed and why and what impact the test itself might have on the quality of education in Texas and on public confidence in the schools.

Shepard's study gave special attention to the period before the test was administered and to the events surrounding teacher preparation courses and other inservice activities. Considerable attention was also paid to charges that the test lowered morale among teachers and disrupted the Texas schools. Also included was an analysis of the costs: \$4,833,000 for developing the test; \$232,500 for state department supervision; and the equivalent of \$26 million for released time for teachers to take the test.

Shepard thinks that the study of the Texas test was needed because in this case a test was the instrument of reform rather than simply a measurement tool to plot the effects of change or of program reform. A summary of this study was printed in the September 1987 issue of *Educational Researcher*. □