

Leading Change in City Schools: Urban Education Reform in Action

Education Studies 137 / Social Studies 68UE

Spring 2024

Course Professor:

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Class Librarian:

Quetzalli Barrientos, Harvard Graduate School of Education Librarian

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Seminar Meeting Time & Location:

Meeting time: Wednesday, 12:00-2:45 [includes time for lunch from the Quincy Dining Hall]

Meeting location: Quincy House SCR

Seminar Description and Objectives

Public education has long strived to be society's "great equalizer." Yet, throughout its history, the American education system has failed to deliver on this promise. In this course, we will examine specific high-profile and popular system-level reform initiatives aimed at improving urban public schools. We will focus on two common reforms—improving teacher quality and expanding school choice—and explore why and how these reforms have taken shape across three focal cities—New York City, Boston, and New Orleans. We will meet key leaders of these reforms: district level policy makers, principals, teachers, non-profit leaders and funders who collectively developed theories of action, negotiated new policies, and implemented the reforms with students. We will dive deep into their work to understand how political, economic, and cultural systems have enabled and constrained it, and review the growing body of research on these reforms. Through course assignments, students will have opportunities to further investigate initiatives that interest them by visiting schools, interviewing education leaders, synthesizing research, and reflecting on whether and how recent reforms have influenced their own educational experiences. Through the final project, students will have the opportunity to choose both a reform effort and a context to explore in depth.

Class Format & Expectations:

The success of this class depends on the thoughtful, engaged participation of all class members. Classes, which differ in format from week to week, will include lectures, group discussions, small group work, student presentations, case discussions, guests, and field trips. You should be well-prepared to discuss all assigned readings and media and to respond to any study questions. Because classroom discussions are most productive when a variety of voices shape the dialogue, I ask you to come ready to participate as both a speaker and listener. It is the responsibility of all class members to make room for, and to learn from, individuals with different views and different ways of engaging in public conversation. This means allowing for silence and honoring the participation of others by respecting, critiquing, and building on the ideas of those who have spoken before you.

Assignments & Grading:

Attendance, Preparation & Participation: 20%

In addition to attending class, coming prepared and actively participating in all activities, this grade includes completing the weekly exit ticket and honoring all [norms](#), which we will set and agree to as a class.

Attendance will be taken very seriously. If you are not in class, you cannot demonstrate your preparedness, nor can you participate. I expect 100% in-person attendance from all students. If you must miss class because you or someone you care for is ill, for a religious reason, or because you have a one-time professional conflict, please email me by 9am on the class day.

Students will complete the class [exit ticket](#) at the end of every class in order to earn credit for attending that class meeting. Exit tickets are due by 11:59pm following each class session.

The Context of School Reform Group Presentations: 10%

School reform does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, change happens in the context of specific communities, which have unique histories and concerns, geographic considerations and resources. To provide depth to our work, we will take deep dives into reform efforts in 3 cities: New York, Boston, and New Orleans. Each student will be assigned to a group that will be responsible for introducing our class to their focal city, to the communities that populate it, and to its efforts to reform its schools. Groups will help us understand the political and cultural contexts that shape the city's schools, the structure of school governance and the role of labor unions, and the dynamics of change efforts. Groups will present twice during the semester—once at the start of each Reform unit. We will discuss this assignment in depth during the first class. This assignment is supported by Harvard librarian Quetzalli Barrientos, who has prepared a [resource guide](#) about each city specifically for this assignment.

School Visit: (10%)

So much reform is done TO schools, often by policymakers who are not themselves educators. But, to understand school reform, it's important to learn about the wide variety of schools that students attend. We will have two structured opportunities to visit schools as part of this class. In March, you will visit a public school in the Boston area during the school day with at least one other classmate for a minimum of 1.5 hours. With support from me, your group will be responsible for choosing a school, requesting a visit, and planning your visit. You will reflect on your experience in a mini-assignment following the visit.

Mini-Assignments: 10%

There will be 5 mini-assignments throughout the semester. Mini-assignments will be graded on a credit/no credit basis. Mini assignments should take the form of one single-spaced page (400-500 words), a 3-5 minute recording of yourself (audio and/or video!), or another form that you propose. Directions for each mini assignments are included below. Please upload mini assignments to the Canvas site discussion board.

Final Project: 50%

Over the course of the semester, students will conduct a final project focused on a single reform effort in a specific city. Students will have the opportunity to choose both a reform and a city that is important or interesting to them. The final project will be due in stages, and each step will account for a portion of a student's final project grade. Students will have significant time in class to work on the final project, and students will be supported by the Learning Lab and the Harvard Library throughout the semester. We will discuss the final project assignment at length in the first few weeks of class.

Leading Change in City Schools: Urban Education Reform in Action

Note: Readings & preparation are listed for the date DUE. All dates are tentative as of 1/24/24.

We will refine this list of readings over the course of the semester as we learn together.

Unit 1: COURSE INTRODUCTION	
Guiding Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is in our class community – what are our entry points to Urban Education? What are our personal and collective goals in this class? What is the purpose of American public education? What exactly are we trying to “reform” – and why? What’s been tried, by whom, and to what end? What gives us hope and what remains a challenge? What might our contributions be? 	
Week 1 1/24/24	Class Readings & Preparation
	Assignment Due <i>Show up!</i>
Week 2 1/31/24 Classroom Guests: Quetzalli Barrientos, Research Librarian, HGSE	Class Readings & Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Guide to the Organization & Structure of US Education (Pre-K-12). Kozol, Jonathan. (1991). <i>Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools</i>. New York: Crown Publications. (Read or Listen to “To The Reader,” “Looking Backward” and Chapters 1&3). Anyon, J. (1997). <i>Ghetto Schooling</i>. New York: Teachers College Press. (Read or Listen to the Preface by William Julius Wilson, Introduction, and Chapters 1,2 & 8). Noguera, P. (2003). <i>City Schools and the American Dream: Reclaiming the Promise of America's Schools</i>. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2003. (Pages 1-40).
	Assignments Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mini Assignment #1 – Due Friday, 1/26/24 @ 11:59pm to the Canvas site. Describe your personal education background and your goals with regard to education reform.
UNIT 2: Reforming Teacher Quality	
Guiding Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is local context important in urban education? What aspects of context matter and how? Over time, a significant focus of education reform has been on improving the quality of school-based educators. Why is this so – and how effective have reform efforts been? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who teaches in urban public schools? What efforts have been made to improve teacher quality? What are the problems with focusing on teachers? How has changing teacher quality been used as a lever for reforming school systems? How have these reforms played out in different contexts? 	
Week 3 2/7/24	Class Readings & Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Readings for Group Presentations
	Assignment Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Context of School Reform – Group Presentation #1

<p>Week 4 2/14/24</p> <p>Classroom Guests:</p> <p>Rashaun J. Martin Managing Director Recruitment, Cultivation and Diversity Programs</p> <p>Hannah (LeMieux) Hall Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer</p> <p>Office of Human Capital Boston Public Schools</p>	<p>Class Readings & Preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J. & Keerling, D. (2009). The Widget Effect: Our Nation's Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness. The New Teacher Project. • Spend 20 minutes on the BPS website understanding the district and the Office of Human Capital • Eyes on the Prize, Season 2, Episode 7, "The Keys to the Kingdom (1974-1980)" – <i>The first 30 min is about Desegregation in Boston.</i> • Simon, N. S., Johnson, S. M., & Reinhorn, S. K. (2019). Making a match: How successful high-poverty schools hire teachers. Annenberg Institute EdWorkingPaper, (19-45). • Review guest speaker LinkedIn pages <p>Assignment Due</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review final project assignment and project models and school visit assignment.
<p>Week 5 2/21/24</p> <p>Classroom Guests:</p> <p>David Adams CEO, The Urban Assembly</p> <p>Kiri Soares Founding Principal, The Urban Assembly School for Young Women in Math & Science</p> <p>New York City Department of Education</p>	<p>Class Readings & Preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloom, H. S., Thompson, S. L., & Unterman, R. (2010). Transforming the High School Experience How New York City's New Small Schools Are Boosting Student Achievement and Graduation Rates. New York: MDRC. (Read Executive Summary) • Wuest, C., Alterman, E. Unterman, R., Corrin, W. & Marshall, B. (2023). The Evolution of the Urban Assembly School Support Model. New York: MDRC. • Spend 30 minutes on the Urban Assembly website. Click through to the UA School for Young Women in Math and Science and at least 2 other schools. • Cohen, D. (1990). "A revolution in one classroom: The case of Mrs. Oublier." <i>Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis</i>, 12(3), 311-329. • Elmore, R. (2010). "I Used to Think... and Now I Think..." Reflections on the work of school reform." Harvard Education Letter. Volume 26, Number 1, January-February 2011. Harvard Education Press. • Review guest speaker LinkedIn pages <p>Assignment Due</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Proposal Part 1 – Monday, 2/19/24 @ 11:59pm to your Google Drive folder. • Review project proposals before class. • Midsemester evaluation (on CANVAS site) – Due by 2/28/24
<p>Week 6 2/28/24</p> <p>Meet at Derek Bok Center for Teaching & Learning – Learning Lab</p>	<p>Class Readings & Preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review project group proposals before class. • Review School Visit assignment!

	Assignment Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mini Assignment #2 – Due Friday, 2/23/24 @ 11:59pm to the Canvas site. Using Richard Elmore’s framework of “I used to think; now I think,” reflect on what you learned in this unit. (Watch these for inspiration!) Midsemester evaluation (on CANVAS site) – Due by 2/28/24 Optional: ATTEND AOCC (on 3/1 + 3/2)
UNIT 3: Reforming School Choice	
Guiding Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does “school choice” mean? For whom is the choice? What is the value of giving students and families the opportunity to choose a school? What are some models of school choice reforms? What are the different problems they’re trying to solve? How have they looked different in different places – and what factors explains those differences? What are the arguments for and against school choice? Why are some models of school choice (e.g. charter schools) so contentious? What has worked well about certain reform efforts and what challenges remain? 	
Week 7 3/6/24	Class Readings & Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simon, N., & Johnson, S. M. (2015). <i>Teacher Turnover in High-Poverty Schools: What We Know and Can Do</i>. Teachers College Record, 117(3), 1-36. Brill, S. (August 24, 2009). The Rubber Room. <i>The New Yorker</i>. Hannah-Jones, N. (2016, June 9). Choosing a school for my daughter in a segregated city. The New York Times. Nice White Parents Podcast. Episodes 1-3. The New York Times. Assignment Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Context of School Reform – Group Presentation #2 School Visit Plan Part 1 – Due Monday March 4, 2024 @ 11:59pm to your Group’s Google Drive folder.
Week 8 3/13/24	NO CLASS - HAPPY SPRING BREAK 🌞🌴🏖️
Week 9 3/20/24 School visit #1	Class Readings & Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lightfoot, S. L. (1986). On goodness in schools: Themes of empowerment. <i>Peabody Journal of Education</i>, 63(3), 9-28. Marshall, K., & Marshall, D. (2017). Mini-observations. <i>School Administrator</i>, 26. Assignment Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Visit Plan Part 2 – Due Monday 3/18/23 @ 11:59pm to your Group’s Google Drive folder.
Week 10 3/27/24	Class Readings & Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch <i>Waiting for Superman</i>. Johnson, S. M. (2020). Where teachers thrive: Organizing schools for success. Harvard Education Press. (Overview of Schools). Complete graphic organizer for the following school models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Massachusetts Innovation Schools State Charter Schools District Charter Schools (AKA Horace Man Charter Schools) District Pilot Schools Read the school charter for 3 different charter schools and spend 30 minutes studying the school websites.

	Assignment Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mini Assignment #3 – Due Friday, 3/22/24 @ 11:59pm to the Canvas site. <p>Grounding your thoughts in Sara Lawrence Lightfoot’s principles of conveying “goodness” and Richard Elmore’s methods for observing without judgment, reflect on your school visit. What did you learn – from the process of organizing the visit and from the visit itself? Who did you observe or talk with and what did you learn from them? What surprised you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Project Research Paper and Updated Project Proposal Due – Saturday, 3/23/24 @ 11:59pm to Google Drive. . ● Review project group proposals before class.
Week 11 4/3/24 Classroom Guests: Amanda L. Aiken Ed.L.D. Former Senior Chief Schools and Portfolio Officer, NOLA Public Schools Jerel Bryant CEO, Collegiate Academies	Class Readings & Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TBD
	Assignment Due
Week 12 4/10/24 Classroom Guest: Saskia Levy Thompson Program Director, New Designs to Advance Learning Carnegie Corporation of NY	Class Readings & Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TBD
	Assignment Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working Draft #1 of Project Due – Monday 4/8/24 @11:59pm to your Google Drive folder.
Week 13 4/17/24 Class field trip + debrief 12-6pm (includes travel)	Class Readings & Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide to East Boston ● EdVestors Schools on the Move Prize to East Boston High School ● East Boston High School Schools on the Move application ● Spend 30 minutes researching East Boston High School and the Otis Elementary School
	Assignment Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attend debrief of class field trip
Week 14 4/24/24 Meet at Derek Bok Center for Teaching & Learning – Learning Lab (OPTIONAL)	Class Readings & Preparation Directed Work Time @ the Learning Lab
	Assignment Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working Draft #2 of Project Due – Monday 4/22/24 @11:59pm to your Google Drive folder. ● Mini Assignment #4 due Friday, 4/26/24 @ 11:59pm to the Canvas site. <p>Using Richard Elmore’s framework of “I used to think; now I think,” reflect on what you learned in this unit. (Watch these for inspiration!)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Send invitations to final showcase!

FINAL PROJECT SHOWCASE 5/1/24 @ 1-3:30 @ Learning Lab (Event itself begins at 1:30)

- Final Project Due to Google Drive by 11:59pm on 4/30/24, Showcase on 5/1/24
- Mini Assignment #5 due to CANVAS by 11:59pm on 5/3/24

Using Richard Elmore's framework of "I used to think; now I think," reflect on what you learned from this class and specifically from working on your project. Include a short section about the feedback you received from others during the showcase and how you might respond to it.

Academic Integrity:

Academic dishonesty is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Cheating, forgery, plagiarism and collusion in dishonest acts undermine the educational mission of Harvard University and the students' personal and intellectual growth. Please see: <https://honor.fas.harvard.edu/> for further detail on Harvard College's Honor Code.

Accessibility and Accommodations:

Harvard is firmly committed to making higher education accessible to students with disabilities by removing architectural barriers and providing programs and support services necessary for them to benefit from the instruction and resources of the University. Early planning is easy and essential for many of the resources and accommodations provided. Please see: <https://aeo.fas.harvard.edu/>.