

Policy Evaluation Benchmark

Anissa Bennett

Liberty University

### Abstract

Policy is the glue that holds an organization together. For education, policy keeps all stakeholders and legislators on the same page. Each level of government has a piece to fit in the puzzle of education, whether big or small. Regardless of the amount of involvement each governmental level influences one another from the top down. This essay explores the federal, state, and local levels of government along with their roles in education and their common policies.

*Keywords:* education, federal government, local government, policy, roles, state government, school district

### Policy Evaluation Benchmark

The term *policy* can have many definitions. According to Business Dictionary (n.d.), they are guidelines that the government is steered by, while Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) describes it as a plan or set of ideas. Simply put for this essay, policy is a rule that must be followed. Policy sets the foundation for how an organization should operate. It is the playbook that everyone needs to abide by. The federal government writes most of these rules in which everyone under it needs to follow, regardless if they agree to the terms or not. The state government can apply their own policies and regulations as well, but they cannot overrule federal ones. Policy is what keeps everyone in line. Without it, our country could be in disarray. Every branch of government, federal, state, and local, have policies set, and at times they affect one another and even their citizens. In regard to education, policies tumble down like a domino effect, leaving local government to uphold them for both federal and state, as well as their own.

### **Federal Government**

#### **Federal government role on education**

The federal government plays in role in education through the U.S. Department of Education. Their mission is “to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, para. 10). This is done in two ways. One, through the communication from the secretary and department on efforts to improve student achievement. Secondly, through programs developed by the department ranging from preschool to post-doctorate (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The U.S. Department of Education (2017) states that education is the responsibility of the state and local government, but the federal

government has a critical influence on state and local governments. This is simply through funding.

### **Funding**

Without funding, a system may be at risk of failing. The federal government gives about nine percent each year to help fund primary and secondary education. This is approximately \$71 billion, but the amount varies from state to state (Lynch, 2016). Throughout history, federal funding was given by categorical aid, grants, and Title I funds.

#### **Categorical aid**

Categorical aid is given for a specific purpose and in order for the state to utilize it, they must abide by their rules. An example that Lynch (2016), used was if the categorical aid needed to be used strictly for textbooks, then the states had no other choice than to use it for that purpose. There is not a way around this since the school districts are required to keep a record of what the funding is used for. According to Lynch (2016), if any funds were not used, it “had to be returned to the provider, if they were not spent within an allocated time frame” (para. 3). Categorical funding had an influence on the state government’s decision making for funding, which will be discussed later.

#### **Block grants**

Block grants were developed by the Reagan administration, which had minor regulations attached than categorical aid (Lynch, 2016). This was the federal government’s attempt to be less involved in the state government’s educational policymaking. With block grants, the states can decide what the funding can be used for (Lynch, 2016).

**Federal policies****Title I, Part A**

Title I, Part A deserved its own section under policies since is a part of one of the most important acts to the nation's education system, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Title I, Part A of ESEA provides funding to schools with the majority of children from low-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). This is "to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards" (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, para. 2). This policy alone has funded more than 55,906 public schools during the 2015-2016 school year while targeting 26 million students with 58 percent from primary schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

**Civil rights policies**

There are three civil rights policies at the federal level that the nation's public schools must abide by, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 2008, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 2008 combined the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 "prohibits discrimination based on disability in any program or activity operated by recipients of federal funds" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, para. 1). The ADA prevents disability discrimination by public entities with or without federal financial assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Discrimination based on the sex of an individual is prohibited in education programs and activities that receive federal funding, which is covered under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Lastly, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discriminations from the remaining identifiers of a

person, which are race, color or national origin. Again, this law pertains to programs that receive federal funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

### **Federal influences on the states**

The federal government may not have the direct responsibility to oversee the policies and procedures set forth for the states, but funding plays a critical part in the health of schools nationwide. One of the most current funding policies was mentioned in an article by Klein (2019). The article explained that Betsy DeVos, U.S. Secretary of Education, is seeking to provide a means for support for the states to receive funding for scholarships. DeVos is considering the use of a new federal tax credit for individuals who donate to organizations that offer scholarships for students (Klein, 2019). To continue being the innocent bystanders in education decisions, the federal government will leave the decision making to the states to determine “how big those scholarships are, which students and organizations would be eligible for them, and what they could be used for” (Klein, 2019, para. 2).

## **State Government**

### **State government role on education**

The primary responsibility of primary and secondary schools belongs to the states. States overlook the maintenance and operation of the schools while remaining involved in the “regulation of curriculum, teaching methods, and instructional materials” (FindLaw, n.d., para. 7). The U.S. Department of Education (2017) expands this concept by stating that the states, and their communities within them will develop the curriculum, therefore, determining the requirements for graduation and enrollment. Since the states have the responsibilities to oversee the well-being of their schools, and there are fifty states in the U.S., there are fifty different policies and standards that affect the quality of education nationwide (FindLaw, n.d.).

**The middle man**

The states are sandwiched between the responsibility to uphold policies and regulations from the federal government, and to provide to the local government in their jurisdiction. To help manage their duties, according to The Center for Public Justice (n.d.), most states delegate their authority to the school districts. One of the most exciting efforts to relieve the stress of curriculum decisions was the development of the Common Core.

**Common Core**

The Common Core was a major collaboration between state governors and other education professionals as a way for states to qualify for the federal government's Race to the Top competitive grants (The Center for Public Justice, n.d.). States can choose to adopt Common Core or create their own standards and benchmarks for reading and math. Additionally, states can include other subjects as educational standards, such as science, social studies, art, and foreign languages (The Center of Public Justice, n.d.). Surprisingly, there are nine states that choose to follow their own standards, which are Alaska, Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.).

**State policies**

States are busy working on bills to improve their quality of education, some more than others. For example, the state of Virginia, as of 2019, had 166 bills since January 2018 that has either failed, enacted, or is currently pending (Education Commission of the States, 2019). On the other hand, North Carolina had 18 bills since February 2019, all of which are pending (Education Commission of the States, 2019). By those numbers, it is easy to see that states have

the full responsibility of their school districts. In Virginia, there are policies ranging from licensure regulations to governing driver education to governing the nutritional standards for competitive foods for sale (Virginia's Legislative Information System, n.d.).

### **States' influence on local government**

Most of the states' influence on local government and school districts are through the curriculum and funding. The states make curriculum decisions for them, leaving teachers with little to no room for alterations. When distributing funds to the local school districts, the amount given is at the discretion of the state. The state uses a combination of the funding left in the budget, which only funds less than half of the operating costs for the schools, and income and sales taxes (The Center of Public Justice, n.d.). Essentially, states are scraping up funds from multiple means to attempt in meeting the needs of all school districts.

## **Local Government**

### **Local government role in education**

The role of local government, or school districts, varies extremely. School districts oversee the schools in their area to ensure they serve their purpose, which is to provide a quality education. According to The Center of Public Justice (n.d.), school districts are held accountable for how schools operate. Within the school district, is the leadership of the school board "whose members are either elected by the public or appointed" (The Center of Public Justice, n.d., para. 9).

### **School district variations and their policies**

School districts can directly affect the environment and function of their schools through the policies that are enforced. For example, the disclosure of directory information depends upon the school district. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), under the Family



Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), directory information is “the educational records of a student that would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). FERPA allows an extensive list of material that can be disclosed to a third-party as directory information, but it is up to the school districts to decide what they would like to allow. Virginia Beach Public Schools (2004), considers the student’s “participation in officially recognized activities and sports”, student’s “height and weight. Id a member of an athletic team,” and “awards and honors received” (para. 2). On the other hand, Norfolk Public Schools (n.d.), chooses to disclose the student’s name, photograph, date of birth, as directory information.

### **Gloucester County Public Schools**

One of the current discussions of policy reform at the local level is the transgender ban in Gloucester County Public Schools. The school district was considering removal of the ban until “several community members urged the board to keep the ban in place” (Finley, 2019, para. 1). The district is torn between attempting to meet the considers of the community or to meet the needs their students who seem to be discriminated against. This is an example of the amount of accountability that the school district has. Unfortunately, the district is now being sued by the student in the U.S. District Court (Finley, 2019).

### **A Christian Educator’s Worldview**

As a Christian, we must lead by example and respect authority at all levels. Hebrews 13:17 (New International Version) states, “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” There may be times where our individual values and opinions may not align with government decisions or our

leaders, but must show a positive example to our future educators and leaders of the world.

Although, when we truly believe that a policy is developed without the best interest of the student, then Christian educators should gracefully explain their concerns.

Following policies and regulations should come naturally without rebellious behavior. Christians awake every day worshiping God and aim to do everything in life for His glory. Following Jesus is what every new and old Christian's goal is in life. This can be applied to the work we do as Christian educators when abiding by policies. If we are the ones to develop the policies, rely on Him for guidance. Psalm 121:2 (NIV) states "My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

### **Conclusion**

. Each level of government plays a role in education, big or small. Policy can be a complicated process from creation to implementation, but all have a purpose. We can choose to agree or disagree with them, but as strong, Christian educators, we still must abide by them. When we as though an unfavorable policy is becoming an issue, it is not the government that has the final say. It is Him.

## References

- Business Dictionary. (n.d.). *Policy*. Retrieved from  
<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/policy.html>
- Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). *Policy*. Retrieved from  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/policy>
- Common Core State Standards Initiates. (n.d.). *Standards in your state*. Retrieved from  
<http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>
- Education Commission of the States. (2019, January 4). *2019 State education policy watch list*. Retrieved from <https://www.ecs.org/state-education-policy-watch-list/>
- FindLaw. (n.d.). *The roles of federal and state governments in education*. Retrieved from  
<https://education.findlaw.com/curriculum-standards-school-funding/the-roles-of-federal-and-state-governments-in-education.html>
- Finley, B. (2019, February 21). *Virginia school board delays ending transgender bathroom ban*. Retrieved from <https://www.foxnews.com/us/virginia-school-board-delays-ending-transgender-bathroom-ban>
- Klein, A. (2019, March 5). *Devos pushes federal tax credit to boost school choice*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/03/06/devos-pushes-federal-tax-credit-to-boost.html>
- Lynch, M. (2016, September 18). *Understanding federal funding part i: 3 types of school funding*. Retrieved from <https://www.theedadvocate.org/understanding-federal-funding-part-3-types-school-funding/>

Norfolk Public Schools. (2018, August 20). *Student handbook*. Retrieved from

[https://www.npsk12.com/cms/lib/VA02208074/Centricity/Domain/765/NPS\\_2018-19%20Student%20Handbook\\_Web%20use.pdf](https://www.npsk12.com/cms/lib/VA02208074/Centricity/Domain/765/NPS_2018-19%20Student%20Handbook_Web%20use.pdf)

The Center of Public Justice. (n.d.). *How are the local, state and federal governments involved in education? Is this involvement just*. Retrieved from

[https://www.cpjustice.org/public/page/content/cie\\_faq\\_levels\\_of\\_government](https://www.cpjustice.org/public/page/content/cie_faq_levels_of_government)

U.S. Department of Education. (2012, September 21). *Disability discrimination*. Retrieved from

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/disability.html>

U.S. Department of Education. (2015, June 26). *Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved from

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/faq.html#q4>

U.S. Department of Education. (2015, October 15). *Disability discrimination: Overview of the*

*laws*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/disabilityoverview.html>

U.S. Department of Education. (2015, October 15). *Race and national origin discrimination:*

*Overview of the law*. Retrieved from

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/raceoverview.html>

U.S. Department of Education. (2017, May 25). *The federal role in education*. Retrieved from

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>

U.S. Department of Education (2018, October 24). *Improving basic program operated by local educational agencies (Title I, Part A)*. Retrieved from

<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>

Virginia Beach Public Schools. (2004, January 30). *Student dictionary information: Guidelines*

*5-66.1*. Retrieved from

[https://www.vbschools.com/about\\_us/our\\_leadership/school\\_board/policies\\_and\\_regulations/section\\_5\\_-\\_students/student\\_directory\\_information\\_\\_guidelines\\_5-66\\_1](https://www.vbschools.com/about_us/our_leadership/school_board/policies_and_regulations/section_5_-_students/student_directory_information__guidelines_5-66_1)

Virginia's Legislative Information System. (n.d.). *Virginia law: Administrative code*. Retrieved from <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/>