

EDUCATION 352
American School Reform
Spring 2014
Monday 11am-1:30pm
Stein 318

Jack Schneider
jschneid@holycross.edu

Office hours: Monday 1:30-2:45pm and Friday 10:30-11:45am

Course Description

How can we improve 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. What, particularly, requires improvement? What would improved schools look like? How can we tell which schools need improving? Who should lead the effort? What should the means of improvement 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 semester, 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 do a good deal writing in this class, and you will be asked to complete several different kinds of assignments over the semester. This emphasis on writing reflects the nature of policy advocacy. Additionally, however, it is designed as a service to you, because writing is so essential in the world beyond college, and because instruction around writing is often so inconsistent. For much more detail, see the Guidelines for Analytical Writing at the end of the syllabus.

Grading and Assignments

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

1. Class participation: 10%
2. Op-ed (first draft *and* final draft combined): 15%
3. Weekly blog posts: 25%
4. Integrated essay: 20%
5. Final project: 30%

All assignments, unless otherwise noted, should be uploaded via 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: February 3 (and April 28 as a *final draft*)

For this assignment, write a double-spaced 700 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 the schools in the city closest to where you attended high school.

Briefly describe the schools in that city, where you see those schools falling short, and what it would take to turn the district into a more “successful” one. Try to be as specific as possible when describing the kinds of reforms that would improve the quality of schooling in that city.

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.

We will discuss in class what the general format of an op-ed looks like.

3. Weekly blog post

Due: Each Sunday by 4pm (comments due by class time Monday), Weeks 3-5 & 7-12

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

Posts should be between 600 and 800 words in length. Comments should be roughly 100-200 words in length. 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 improving schools. What, in short, are your thoughts about improving schools this week?

Each week you should make one post AND one comment.

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 improving schools that does not rehash previous ideas
- 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: April 7

For this assignment you will be writing an essay of roughly 2000 words, offering your reader a coherent perspective on school improvement.

In so doing, you should consider the following three questions:

1. Why is school reform so hard? (Is it a problem with ideas, politics, implementation, etc.?)
2. What are the most promising possibilities for reform? (What makes them promising?)
3. What is the most that we might hope for in a robust reform effort? (What are the limits?)

After considering these questions, spend some time figuring out what you could say in 60 seconds that would encapsulate all of your answers collectively. This is your "big idea" (or thesis) about school reform. It must be at the conceptual center of your essay.

After figuring out your "big idea," consider how you will organize your paper. You will want to discuss *both* the general nature of school reform *and* particular reforms we have read about and discussed in class. You will also want to use lots of different examples to support your claims.

You will be evaluated on the degree to which you address the three core questions, the quality of your primary analysis, the coherence of your organization, the effectiveness of your examples, and the thoroughness of your execution. And, as always, you will be evaluated according to the criteria laid out in the “Guidelines” section at the end of the syllabus.

4. Final project

Presentations May 5

Projects due: May 12

In this project, you will be working in pairs to help an urban school district think about its current approach to educational improvement. What is it doing right now? What’s good about what it’s doing? What’s not so good? What should it do instead?

A. Choose an urban school district. Pick one where access to people and sources is relatively easy to obtain. Districts like L.A., New York, Chicago, and Boston are frequently in the news.

B. Your next task is to figure out what reforms are currently being carried out in the district. Search no further back than one school year. What are the district’s goals? Where is it pouring money? What has the superintendent been pushing for? What does the union want? 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.

C. After you have figured out what the district is up to, you will be asking one central question: “are those good ideas?” The district is probably pursuing multiple plans simultaneously, so you’ll have to dig into several different issues. As you do, you’ll want to consider not only what research says, but also what the experiences of other districts reveal. For example, if the district is pursuing class size reforms, you’ll want look at the research to find out if reducing class size actually helps kids learn; and you’ll want to see if other districts have had success with it.

D. You will next want to figure out how your district could *better* address its needs. Maybe the reforms are all terrible. What would you suggest instead? Or, maybe the reforms are good but imperfect. In that case, what would you recommend to improve them?

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

- A description of your district and its general characteristics
- A description of what reforms the district is pursuing
- A discussion of what the research says about those efforts
- A discussion of what other districts have learned through such efforts
- Your suggestions for how the district might better address its needs
- Robust evidence supporting those suggestions
- An appendix that includes any relevant studies, data, etc.
- A work distribution description that describes what each team member did in organizing the work, collecting data, analyzing the data, and writing the report.

E. Length of report. No longer than 10 pages exclusive of endnotes and appendices (12-point size type and single-spaced). Endnotes are to be included should you quote sources or other materials (including and interviews or surveys you have administered). Whatever annotation style you use (APA, University of Chicago, etc.) be consistent throughout your report.

F. You will be making final presentations to the class in which you will act as consultants to the district. Plan on 20 minutes. Be prepared for questions. Each team member should participate in a way that reflects his/her contributions. This will count for 25% of your total project grade.

Key dates (due by class time)

- Week 3: Teams must email me their top three choices for districts
- Week 4: Email work plan, including overview of district
- Week 5: Email an updated work plan, including description of district’s current reforms
- Week 7: Email a memo detailing prior reform in the district
- Week 9: Email a memo describing research on those reforms
- Week 10: Email updated memo describing research on reforms and experiences of others
- Week 12: Email an outline detailing new/amended reforms
- Week 13: Email a rough draft of PowerPoint slides
- Week 15: Teams will present in class
- Week 16: Teams must email me their final projects

Classes and Readings

<p>Week 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state of education <p>Jan. 27</p>	<p><u>In class tools:</u></p> <p>U.S. Department of Education, <i>The Condition of Education 2013</i> U.S. Department of Education, <i>NAEP Report Card</i> Phi Delta Kappan and Gallup, <i>Attitudes toward Education</i> Primer on American Education</p>
<p>Week 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where students go to school <p>Feb. 3</p> <p>Op-eds due</p>	<p><u>School assignment policies</u></p> <p>Boston Public Schools Student Assignment Task Force Report Emily Bazelon, “The Next Kind of Integration,” <i>New York Times</i></p> <p><u>School choice</u></p> <p>U.S. Department of Education, <i>A Commitment to Quality</i> CREDO, <i>National Charter School Study</i> (Executive Summary) Wisconsin Policy Research Institute report</p>

<p>Week 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out-of-school issues <p>Feb. 10</p> <p>First blog post due</p>	<p><u>Promise neighborhoods</u> Tough, “The Harlem Project,” <i>New York Times</i> U.S. Dept. of Education, <i>Promise Neighborhoods Program Description</i> Hanson, “Assessing the Harlem Children’s Zone”</p> <p><u>Full-service community schools</u> Varlas, “Full Service Community Schools” Dryfoos, <i>Full-Service Community Schools</i></p>
<p>Week 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management <p>Feb. 17</p>	<p><u>Districts</u> Rumberger and Connell, <i>Strengthening School District Capacity</i> Lake and Hernandez, <i>Portfolio School Districts Project</i> Education and the Public Interest Center, <i>Urban School Decentralization and the Growth of “Portfolio Districts”</i></p> <p><u>CMOs</u> Mathematica Policy Research, <i>Learning from Charter School Management Organizations</i> Peysner, “Unlocking the Secrets of High Performing Charters”</p>
<p>Week 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School culture <p>Feb. 24</p>	<p><u>Building culture</u> Thompson, “Understanding School Culture” <i>NAIS Bulletin</i> Picucci, et al., “Shaping School Culture” The New Teacher Project, <i>Greenhouse Schools</i> Elbot and Fulton, “Building an Intentional School Culture”</p> <p><u>Assessing culture</u> 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></p>
<p>Week 6</p> <p>March 3</p>	<p>NO CLASS</p>
<p>Week 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inputs and their limitations <p>March 10</p>	<p><u>Money</u> Baker, <i>Does Money Matter in Education?</i> Hightower, Mitani, and Swanson, <i>State Policies That Pay</i> Baker, et al., <i>Is School Funding Fair?</i> Smith and Petersen, <i>Steering Capital</i></p>

<p>Week 7 cont'd.</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 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum and testing <p>March 17</p>	<p><u>Standards and the curriculum</u> K-8 California, <i>Common Core Standards Parent Handbook</i> ACT, <i>First Look at the Common Core</i></p> <p><u>Testing and accountability</u> Chingos, <i>Standardized Testing and the Common Core</i> Gordon Commission, <i>A Public Policy Statement</i> Ayers and Owen, <i>No Child Left Behind Waivers</i></p>
<p>Week 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principals <p>March 24</p>	<p><u>The role of principals</u> Fullan, "The Role of the Principal in School Reform" Winerip, "The Secrets of a Principal Who Makes Things Work" Larry Cuban, "Principals as Instructional Leaders—Again and Again" DuFour, "The Learning Centered Principal"</p> <p><u>Recruitment and retention</u> Chapman, <i>Recruitment, Retention and Development of School Principals</i> Browne-Ferrigno and Muth, "Recruitment and Retention of Quality Principals"</p>
<p>Week 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New teachers <p>March 31</p>	<p><u>Recruitment and training</u> National Council on Teacher Quality, <i>Teacher Prep Review 2013</i> (read Executive summary and parts I & IV) AACTE, <i>The Changing Teacher Preparation Profession</i> National Council on Teacher Quality, <i>Student Teaching in the U.S.</i></p> <p><u>Alternate routes</u> Grossman and Loeb, "Learning From Multiple Routes" Feistritzer, <i>Teaching While Learning</i></p>
<p>Week 11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting growth (teachers) <p>April 7</p>	<p><u>Supporting new teachers</u> Goodwin, "New Teachers Face Three Common Challenges" The New Teacher Project, <i>Leap Year</i> Committee for Economic Development, <i>Supporting New Teachers</i></p>

<p>Week 11 cont'd.</p> <p>Integrated Essays due</p>	<p><u>Professional development for experienced teachers</u> Loeb, "Seat Time" McLaughlin and Talbert, "Professional Learning Communities" Thompson and Goe, <i>Models for Effective and Scalable Teacher PD</i></p>
<p>Week 12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rewarding and retaining (teachers) <p>April 14</p>	<p><u>Evaluation</u> Hanushek, "Valuing Teachers," <i>Education Next</i> Center for Public Education, <i>Trends in Teacher Evaluation</i> The New Teacher Project, <i>Teacher Evaluation 2.0</i> Haertel, <i>Reliability and Validity of Inferences about Teacher Evaluation</i> Cuban, "Bias toward Numbers in Judging Teaching"</p> <p><u>Retention and development</u> Ahn and Vigdor, <i>Making Teacher Incentives Work</i> National Council on Teacher Quality, <i>Teacher Quality Roadmap</i> Goldhaber and Walch, <i>Strategic Pay Reform</i> Rotherham, "Fixing Teacher Tenure"</p>
<p>Week 13</p> <p>April 21</p>	<p>NO CLASS</p>
<p>Week 14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The whole picture <p>April 28</p> <p>Re-drafted op-eds due</p>	<p><u>A multi-pronged approach</u> Bryk, et al., <i>Organizing Schools for Improvement</i>, chapters 2 + 3</p> <p><u>A teacher's perspective</u> Janet Grossbach Mayer, "Deception, Dismantling, and Demise of Public Education," <i>As Bad as They Say?</i></p>
<p>Week 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final project presentations <p>May 5</p>	<p>Due May 12: Final projects</p>

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? 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. 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. 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.

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.

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.