

Implementing Indiana's "Putting Students First" Agenda

Early Lessons and Potential Futures

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Foreword

Today, a wave of states are aggressively moving forward on an array of education reforms. Louisiana, Idaho, and Indiana are among those that have enacted multiple pieces of legislation as part of comprehensive, governor-driven education reform plans that may constitute the most ambitious package since Jeb Bush's first term in Florida.

In the case of Indiana, the 2011 "Putting Students First" agenda saw major legislative changes to state laws surrounding teacher evaluation, collective bargaining, school choice, and low-performing school turnarounds. The plan, driven by governor Mitch Daniels and overseen by state superintendent Tony Bennett, has elicited widespread reaction from education reformers and pundits. And yet, while much has been said about whether these new laws are good or bad, far less attention has been paid to the looming implementation challenges. The time is ripe for a serious treatment of such issues, both for Indiana policymakers, educators, and citizens and for those in other states weighing similar reform legislation.

In "Implementing Indiana's 'Putting Students First' Agenda: Early Lessons and Potential Futures," I team with Paul Manna, associate professor of government and public policy at the College of William & Mary, and Keenan Kelley, a research assistant at William & Mary, to explore some of the challenges and lessons of these reforms' initial implementation. Ultimately,

although leadership at the state level is invaluable for articulating and advancing an education reform agenda, local understanding and follow-through of the reforms is instrumental if these measures are to yield more than compliance, wasted spending, or disillusionment from educators.

In particular, a few key lessons worth noting are:

- **State capacity:** State education agencies are often focused on rote tasks such as monitoring federal funding or ensuring that local school districts comply with an array of state and federal laws. And yet this new agenda will require the state agency to provide more significant training and oversight to the local agencies, as well as to gain expertise in such complex tasks as shutting down failing schools or hiring private operators to turn around low-performing schools.
- **Local capacity:** Although policy actors at the state level passed Putting Students First, local actors will ultimately implement these reforms, and questions abound about their capacity to do so. Many local school districts will need a significant cultural shift to become less compliance-oriented, as well as the knowledge and capabilities to

implement new teacher evaluation plans or collective bargaining policies.

- **Culture of compliance:** This strong culture of compliance exists in many local school districts, which are used to merely checking off an array of federal and state mandates. The districts will likely need to be more assertive in implementing the laws and less reliant on state support going forward. For example, state-level officials designed a teacher evaluation system called RISE as a suggested, but not required, model for districts to use. And yet despite having the flexibility to design their own evaluation system, it appears that around 80 percent of localities will use the RISE model. In the words of one state official, local officials “can’t grasp” that “there is not one way to do this.”

When it comes to school reform, good intentions only go so far. Without an eye toward the gritty lessons of what it takes for good policy ideas to work in practice, even well-intentioned laws can go south. For further information on the paper, I can be reached at rhess@aei.org and Paul Manna can be reached at pmanna@wm.edu. For additional information on the activities of AEI’s education policy program, please visit www.aei.org/policy/education/ or contact program manager Daniel Lautzenheiser at daniel.lautzenheiser@aei.org.

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Implementing Indiana’s “Putting Students First” Agenda: Early Lessons and Potential Futures

In 2011, Indiana’s legislature reshaped the state’s education policy landscape with a package of laws that enabled local leaders to make swift and potentially sweeping changes to district and school operations. The Hoosier State’s reforms, dubbed by supporters as the “Putting Students First” agenda, provide a valuable case study of the crucial launch period that all reform agendas encounter.

Although it is too early to judge the ultimate effects of these policy changes, in this paper we begin considering what challenges the reform package will confront as it moves deeper into implementation. We offer neither naïve praise nor uninformed criticism of Indiana’s efforts, nor do we judge whether legislators passed the right mix of reforms. Instead, we consider carefully how implementation has begun and likely will continue to unfold so that Indiana’s officials, citizens, and observers elsewhere can begin learning lessons from the state’s work.

Indiana’s experience so far shows that state-level leadership is invaluable for articulating, supporting, and advancing an education reform agenda but that eventual results depend on several things: local leaders and teachers using reforms to carefully, creatively, and properly reshape critical tasks and school cultures to improve students’ experiences; state and local officials effectively leveraging resources from nongovernmental organizations to

support that reshaping; and implementers inside and outside government having a clear understanding of the opportunities and consequences that will follow from their actions. Unless state and local implementers seize opportunities present in the law, efforts such as Putting Students First likely will prompt new rounds of compliance-oriented behavior, wasted money, bureaucratic busyness, frustrated teachers, and few or no substantive gains.

After summarizing the essential elements of Putting Students First, we will offer several lessons about implementation based on the state’s experience. We conclude with broader observations and actionable suggestions about implementing ambitious multidimensional education reforms. Our discussion relies on interviews with Indiana state officials and others conducted during the spring of 2012, official state documents and data, and other publications. A brief appendix describes our data sources and research methods.

The Putting Students First Agenda

Since 2009, when Tony Bennett was elected superintendent of public instruction, Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) officials and their allies in the legislature and the administration of the state’s governor,

Mitch Daniels, have stated their support for three basic ideas: (1) great teachers and principals need to be identified and rewarded for their work; (2) local schools and school districts (called "school corporations" in Indiana) need to be held accountable for results yet simultaneously given flexibility to act; and (3) all families should have access to high-quality education options. The Putting Students First agenda represents an effort to make those ideas concrete and serve the state's more than one million students. This section summarizes the agenda's main elements, which became law in 2011.

Evaluation

The Indiana state legislature reformed teacher evaluation with Senate Enrolled Act 1 (SEA 1).¹ Local school districts must begin implementing new teacher evaluation systems in 2012–13 that include measures of student achievement and growth, evidence from classroom observations, and other measures of professionalism and performance. The overall goals of the evaluation process, according to IDOE documents, include providing opportunities for additional compensation and locally determined rewards for high-performing teachers; developing improvement and mentoring plans for those who can do better; and potentially, for those who perform poorly, serving as the basis for termination. SEA 1 requires an annual performance evaluation that puts teachers into one of four categories: Highly Effective, Effective, Improvement Necessary, and Ineffective.

Using locally developed evaluation systems or adopting the state's suggested model system, local school districts must evaluate all teachers, new and veteran alike. Teachers receiving an Ineffective rating for two consecutive years or an Ineffective or Improvement Necessary rating in three years of any five-year period may be fired. Further, the law requires that teacher salary increases be based on a combination of four factors: teaching experience and degrees or educational credits attained (to count

for no more than 33 percent of the calculation that determines increases); the results of the teacher's annual evaluation; the assignment to instructional leadership roles; and the academic needs of students. Although the state's public charter schools are required to evaluate their teachers each year, the schools themselves and their authorizers determine how those evaluations will be used to determine employment status and salary increases.

Technically, it is worth noting that one of the first sections of SEA 1, which defines key terms, defines a teacher as "a professional person whose position in a school corporation requires certain educational preparation and licensing and whose primary responsibility is the instruction of students." This includes, according to the law, classroom teachers, superintendents, principals, and librarians. As a result, all of these district employees are subject to evaluation under SEA 1. Still, the subsequent sections of the law, particularly the provisions discussed in our prior two paragraphs, appear to apply most directly to traditional classroom teachers. Further, since the adoption of Putting Students First, most of IDOE's implementation efforts concerning evaluation have focused on those district employees.² For those reasons, our discussion of SEA 1 will focus on traditional classroom teachers.

Collective Bargaining

Unlike more assertive efforts from Republican administrations that recently attempted to curtail teacher collective bargaining in Wisconsin and Ohio, Senate Enrolled Act 575 (SEA 575) managed to limit but not eliminate bargaining rights.³ Specifically, SEA 575 limited bargaining to matters related to salaries, wages, and benefits. The IDOE's stated position has been to support teachers' rights to negotiate these matters but to oppose negotiations over other topics like the school year calendar and evaluation procedures that traditionally have been bargained. SEA 575 states that conversations about those other matters can still occur in formal discussions between

union leaders and district management outside the bargaining process.

Another important part of SEA 575 was designed to ensure that all district contracts are settled no later than December 31 of any given year. If disagreement persists after the first sixty days of bargaining, then a mediator enters the discussion. Up to three subsequent meetings may occur, after which both sides must provide a last, best offer that follows the collective bargaining rules and does not force the district to deficit spend. At that point, a fact-finding process, lasting no more than fifteen days, begins and culminates with the fact finder imposing contract terms on the parties. Either side may appeal the fact finder's decision to the Indiana Education Employment Relations Board, which must render a final decision within thirty days.

Charter Schools

House Enrolled Act 1002 (HEA 1002) tries to increase the number of Indiana charter schools and hold them accountable for their performance.⁴ Specifically, HEA 1002 expanded the number of charter authorizers to include all private universities in Indiana and a new state-level authorizer known as the Indiana Charter School Board (ICSB). Also, HEA 1002 added accountability standards for charters' performance, which focus on student academic growth, increased investment in college preparatory courses, financial performance and stability, and the governing board's performance and stewardship. The Indiana State Board of Education (ISBE) also received new powers to limit or suspend charter school authorizers that oversee poorly performing schools. Previously, the state essentially had delegated oversight for charter performance to charter school authorizers. With HEA 1002, the state now possesses more leverage to demand results from charter authorizers and schools.

In addition to expanding the authorizer pool, HEA 1002 contains two other measures to grow the number of charter schools. The law established a

means by which existing public elementary or secondary schools can become charter schools. It also created a Charter School Facilities Assistance Program to provide loans and grants to charter schools for start-up costs.

Vouchers

Alongside HEA 1002, school choice supporters also won a victory with House Enrolled Act 1003 (HEA 1003), which created a state school voucher program.⁵ The law defined eligible students as those between five and twenty-two years old who have been or currently are enrolled in an accredited school and have annual household income of no more than 150 percent of the federal free or reduced-price lunch income level. The student also must have been enrolled for two semesters in a school that did not charge transfer tuition, received a scholarship from an organization other than his or her school, or received a charter scholarship in a preceding year.

Private schools must fulfill multiple requirements to be eligible to accept voucher students. The two most pressing are to participate in the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP) program and to submit the required data to the IDOE. These schools also must teach a basic citizenship education curriculum for Indiana and the United States.

A to F Ranking System and Turnaround

Although technically not part of the education initiatives that became law in 2011, the state's A to F school ranking system and turnaround policies are worth noting given that state officials see them as a strong complement to Putting Students First. Indiana's legislature passed a comprehensive school accountability system in 1999, and recent policy changes by the ISBE have adjusted how the state rates schools.⁶ As of the 2010–11 school year,

schools received a grade from A to F corresponding to the following levels of performance: A is “exemplary progress”; B is “commendable progress”; C is “academic progress”; D is “academic watch—priority”; and F is “academic probation—high priority.” State law allows the IDOE to take over schools that receive F marks for six consecutive years; options for intervention include the IDOE running the school under a contract with a private or non-profit school provider.

Early Lessons Learned

Any large education reform package always contains internal tensions that state and local policy implementers must manage. Indiana’s recent experience offers several insights about how those tensions work themselves out when state and local bureaucrats and other relevant members of the private and public sectors begin implementing the initiatives. We focus here on six specific topics, which consider politics; the roles of the state education agency, local school districts, and new-sector actors; and enforcement and leadership issues.

Politics

The politics that generate education reforms produce downstream political dynamics that can influence implementation.

The research literature on policy change suggests two conflicting theories about enacting ambitious reforms.⁷ The first argues that lasting substantive change is likely when all relevant stakeholders engage one another and produce a strategy based on political compromise. The second suggests that major change occurs when political conditions and growing public concerns intersect with salient events that open up windows of opportunity for leaders to advance their ideas. When those three stars align—politics, problems, and policies—ambitious initiatives have a

strong chance of emerging, often by brute political force rather than by forging consensus.

Indiana’s Republican leaders opted for wielding brute political force in passing the Putting Students First agenda in 2011. Republican control of key institutions (Daniels as governor, the state legislature, and Bennett as state superintendent) moved party leaders to use their overwhelming power to advance these reforms with essentially no Democratic support. As table 1 shows, none of the 2011 reform bills received a single Democratic vote in the state senate, while three of the four received only one Democratic vote in the state house. Although some Republicans opposed each bill, across both chambers overwhelming majorities of Republicans voted to pass them.

Lacking power to win major legislative concessions, opponents of Indiana’s reform bills have advanced their ideas in other venues now that implementation is underway. Among these, the courts have been and likely will remain important. The day after the voucher initiative in HEA 1003 became law, a group of teachers and religious leaders, supported by the Indiana State Teachers Association, challenged it in court, arguing that it violates the state constitution because it provides public funds to private religious schools.⁸ They asked for an injunction that would have temporarily delayed program implementation, but a judge rejected that request in August 2011. In January 2012, a state district court upheld the program because it gives money directly to parents, who, based on their own choices, might or might not redirect it to religious or other private schools.

To date, HEA 1003 has withstood legal challenges, but these added legal hurdles have complicated efforts to publicize and help recruit potential parents into the program. Still, state agency officials were pleased that 3,919 vouchers were awarded on such short notice in 2011–12, the program’s first year.⁹

The courts eventually may play an additional role as local school districts begin implementing the state’s new teacher evaluation law. Some of our interview respondents predicted that local personnel decisions could prompt subsequent legal challenges. Remember that low evaluation marks can become the basis for firing

teachers or denying them raises. Teachers who believe these evaluations were conducted improperly may choose to sue to keep their jobs or obtain pay increases.

Beyond the courts, local school boards are an additional venue for critics to contest various elements of the reform package or to “dig in their heels,” as one respondent put it. The reason is that school boards remain popularly elected and empowered to set district policy. In theory, at least, the legally required discussions between union and district representatives over issues that can no longer be collectively bargained could contribute to that end. We were told of examples in which union leaders appeared to use such sessions to probe and listen to the district’s perspectives without offering any counterarguments of their own. The union then obtained time on the agenda of the subsequent school board meeting to publicly air its counterarguments against the district’s positions. Thus, rather than a forum for back-and-forth conversations about implementation, the local union appeared to use the mandated discussions to obtain information that it could then rebut in the public forum of a school board meeting.¹⁰ The president of the Indiana State Teachers Association, Nate Schnellenberger, has agreed that topics emerging from required discussion sessions should make their way into local district policy and that teacher input in local board meetings likely will facilitate that.¹¹ This strategy is perhaps unsurprising given prior research that shows how local school boards tend to reflect union preferences.¹²

When education reform packages pass without consensus or bipartisan support, opponents have greater incentives during implementation to challenge the laws in other venues. As a result, supporters of reforms must continue waging battles that they may think had largely ended after proposed reform bills became law. Leaders in the IDOE have felt this

Table 1
Votes in the Indiana Legislature on Education Reform Bills in 2011

Education Bill	House Republicans			House Democrats		
	For	Against	Margin	For	Against	Margin
SB 1	59	1	+58	1	31	-30
SB 575	51	7	+44	1	33	-32
HB 1002	60	0	+60	1	37	-36
HB 1003	56	4	+52	0	39	-39

Education Bill	Senate Republicans			Senate Democrats		
	For	Against	Margin	For	Against	Margin
SB 1	36	1	+35	0	12	-12
SB 575	30	6	+24	0	13	-13
HB 1002	29	7	+22	0	13	-13
HB 1003	28	9	+19	0	13	-13

Source: See www.in.gov/legislative/bills/2011/PDF/Hrollcal (House) and www.in.gov/legislative/bills/2011/PDF/Srollcal (Senate) for voting results. Final roll-call votes on SB 1, SB 575, HB 1002, and HB 1003 were vote numbers 617, 537, 679, and 680, respectively, in the House and 454, 405, 339, and 429, respectively, in the Senate.

on-going pressure to play defense. According to our interview respondents, since 2011, the agency has hired six additional lawyers to help address the current and anticipated future courtroom challenges to the state’s agenda. Also, state agency communication strategies have continued to counter ongoing claims from opponents who persist in resisting the new policies that they believe emerged without their due input or consultation.

Whether the opponents’ claims have some merit is not the important point here. What is important in terms of implementation is that such persistent opposition is less likely to exist when reform packages are constructed via compromise rather than brute political force. Trade-offs exist no matter which path is chosen. Reforms based on compromise may find smoother sailing during implementation. But if consensus can emerge only if reforms are relatively weak

or watered down, then they may be too weak to spark needed education improvements. Either way, state leaders who propose and then enact reforms should anticipate the eventual political dynamics likely to unfold and develop legal strategies, public communication efforts, and other methods to address them.

State Education Agency

Implementing multifaceted education reforms requires that state education agencies possess orientations and capabilities that traditionally they have lacked.

Although state education agencies vary across the country, historically they have possessed low capacity and limited abilities to meet the increasing demands of citizens, interest groups, governors, and state legislatures.¹³ One reason is that for the last fifty years, state agencies primarily have served compliance-oriented functions, focusing on monitoring and managing the flow of education funds from federal and state coffers into local school districts. The crucial implications of these past practices are impossible to overstate, especially in the current climate, when a growing number of policymakers and citizens have become more concerned about schools producing results than following rules.

As the leader of IDOE, Bennett has tried to improve the agency's orientation and capabilities by changing its structure and personnel, two fairly conventional strategies that government executives use when they initiate reforms.¹⁴ When Bennett arrived, he "demolished a lot of the old structures," as one state agency staff member told us.

The agency's organizational chart (figure 1) reflects Bennett's interest in improvement of state test scores and overall academic performance. A noticeable shift has been his decision to staff up the agency's innovation and improvement division, which focuses on accountability, teacher effectiveness, and turnarounds. In contrast, the other divisions focus on somewhat traditional state agency functions. Regarding personnel,

one of Bennett's first moves in 2009 was to fire several dozen agency staff and recruit a cadre of relatively young new members to run state programs focusing on school improvement, teacher quality, and choice. He also sent strong signals, via these changes and through his own personal style, that the pace of the agency's work would quicken and embrace risk taking and creativity.

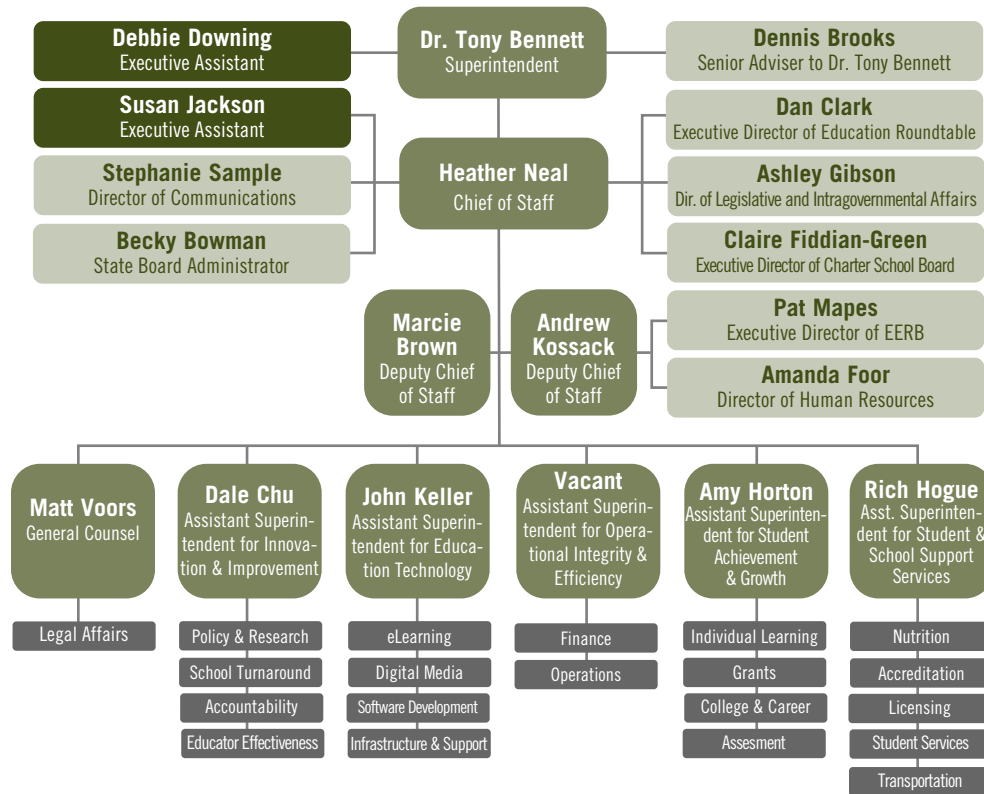
Bennett's efforts to realign the agency's structure and personnel have inspired his closest advisers and other top officials charged with implementing the 2011 reform agenda. How that support from our interview respondents will influence implementation across the divisions in figure 1 will be crucial, especially because the agency's traditional compliance-oriented activities will remain. These include managing the flow of funds and voluminous rules accompanying major federal programs such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as well as more mundane functions associated with teacher licensing and student nutrition efforts.

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Thus, one measure of Bennett's overall success as a leader will be whether the primary tasks across IDOE's many moving parts—not simply the agency's overall structure or the work of his closest advisers and agency executives—can be adapted to help carry out Putting Students First. School corporations may seek advice from state agency officials, for example, if elements of the 2011 reform agenda seem to conflict with other federal or state mandates. Given the web of regulations that envelop school operations, such conflicts are likely to occur. A coherent state agency response to those local questions will be more likely if all staff agree on core tasks.

A more aggressive posture focusing on performance also has created new management responsibilities

Figure 1
Indiana Department of Education Organizational Chart, April 2012



Note: Staff noted in interviews that some changes and proposed changes to the organizational chart have continue to unfold since April 2012. Source: Indiana Department of Education, April 2012, www.doe.in.gov/idoec/contact-indiana-department-education (accessed May 22, 2012).

for IDOE officials. A major example is the state’s role in taking over struggling public schools, which one staff member described as potentially the department’s biggest new task. (Other staff we interviewed believed other elements of Putting Students First constituted the biggest task, which attests to the magnitude of effort the reforms require of IDOE.) To date, the agency has taken over five schools and encountered numerous bumps in the road.

A big challenge has been determining how to strategically match turnaround operators with local needs.¹⁵ Communities have their own particular quirks, preferences, and local centers of power. Selecting school contractors simply based on their past performance elsewhere may be insufficient if the contractor fails to connect well with its new community.

As agency staff stressed, they face a dilemma because potential school operators with deep community ties may lack the technical skills required to run a school, while organizations with technical advantages may be community outsiders and therefore ill-positioned to cultivate local ties or knowledge that can accelerate success. Because school takeovers are highly charged, helping bridge the gaps between local communities and new school providers will be an important and difficult task for state agency officials to accomplish. Compounding that challenge is the relatively low statewide support for the takeover strategy. In 2010, a survey of Indiana residents about education revealed that only 5.4 percent agreed that consistently failing schools should be restarted by turning them over to an outside management organization.¹⁶

This helping to harmonize contractor and community relations is occurring alongside the work of writing and managing the contracts that define expectations for school takeover operators. Agency staff are learning the difficulties involved in crafting the requests for proposals and ultimately the contracts that define these relationships. For example, although IDOE has focused on hiring providers to run entire schools, some potential contractors have approached the agency with more narrowly defined proposals, focusing on areas such as curriculum development. As one state agency official noted, the state's requests for proposals and the contracts ultimately developed must be "airtight" to prevent providers from pushing back and saying that subsequent state demands go beyond the agreement. Anticipating and spelling out core functions in such proposals and contracts is new territory for essentially all state education agencies, which collectively are inexperienced at running schools on a contract basis.

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As the state's agent in the field, contractors running takeover schools also rely on the state to intervene when conflicts erupt between themselves and school districts. Even though IDOE has delegated school operations to contractors and their employees, state agency staff remain involved in seemingly mundane tasks, such as securing school materials and equipment that, IDOE says, districts cannot remove from takeover schools. State agency staff have encountered situations where, prior to takeovers, local district staff have shifted such assets into district-controlled school buildings. The state has been forced to engage local districts over these matters, given that the contractors themselves are poorly positioned to demand that district leaders return the schools' property. Contributing

to this dynamic is the lack of clear rules or state statutes guiding how school transitions from local districts to private operators are to occur. Commenting on the challenges the state and its private contractors have faced in Indianapolis, for example, IDOE director of communications Stephanie Sample noted, "Our goal was to be as flexible as we could be. We've never done this before, and the law is ambiguous."¹⁷

Beyond contractor management, Putting Students First also has required IDOE to manage in new ways its relationships with other state entities, which themselves vary in quality and have tended to perform compliance-oriented functions in the past. State agency officials, for example, are relying heavily on the bureaucratic infrastructure of the state's nine regional Education Service Centers (ESC) to help jump-start and support district training for the state's new teacher evaluation requirements. A perusal of the ESC websites and comments from state agency staff reveal that the quality, experience, and capabilities of these regional centers vary greatly.¹⁸ Still, via a "train the trainers" model, the ESCs are responsible for recruiting individuals to receive training on how to help districts implement their new teacher evaluation systems. The training itself is occurring through the ESCs by members of the New Teacher Project, a nonprofit organization based in New York City. Helping roll out such a consequential statewide initiative appears to be a new role for the ESCs, which have tended to provide more targeted professional development and district services, such as helping districts with purchasing, offering technology training, and conducting several more narrow subject-based workshops.

Local School Districts

State education reforms heavily depend on school districts adapting their cultures, tasks, and capabilities so that reforms can succeed.

One of the strongest research findings in education and other areas is that even the smartest and most elegant reform proposals cannot succeed without

effective ground-level adaptations of institutions and practices.¹⁹ Changing local organizational cultures from afar, even with seemingly strong incentives, is difficult because prevailing cultures provide powerful ways for ground-level operators to sort out and prioritize their tasks. This reality is especially important in elementary and secondary education, where local cultures have been dominated by the same compliance-oriented visions typical in state and federal education agencies in which succeeding has tended to mean implementing education programs that follow rules and survive external audits.

A culture of compliance continues to influence the relationship between Indiana's school corporations and IDOE, despite efforts from state agency leaders to reorient local work toward performance. For example, although the state designed RISE, a teacher evaluation and development system that school corporations could adopt to fulfill obligations under SEA 1, the state did not require districts to use this model.²⁰ One frustrated state official told us that local superintendents still "can't grasp" that they do not have to use the RISE system. IDOE officials explained that "RISE is where we've landed," but "there is not one way to do this." Despite having the ability to design their own systems, early evidence gathered by the state suggests that 80 percent of school corporations will use the RISE model, although about half of those will adapt its elements to local use. Whether those adaptations amount to cursory or substantive changes is hard to know at this point.²¹

One irony that underscores the persistent dominance of compliance-oriented thinking is that district superintendents frequently complain when state initiatives seem inflexible. Yet when the state offers flexibility on teacher evaluation and development by not making statewide mandates, school superintendents still react as if they cannot maneuver. In fact, according to state agency officials, local pushback on the state requirement to develop a teacher evaluation system does not involve locals rejecting the idea, but rather saying to the state, as one official put it, "Just tell me what to do, and I'll do it."²² Breaking through that mind-set is important because reforms are likely to

stumble during implementation if local districts fail to see them as buttressing their own efforts to improve quality. Further, if local districts see reform initiatives as simply more burdensome compliance exercises, the state agency must shoulder a larger support burden when districts frequently call on it to lay out options and expectations. As much as state officials may wish to insist, "You figure it out—that's not the state's job!," they will find themselves in a tight spot because programs will not succeed if local ownership fails to take hold.

Even the smartest and most elegant reform proposals cannot succeed without effective ground-level adaptations of institutions and practices.

A report authored by the New Teacher Project on the state's teacher evaluation pilot of RISE recognized some of these hurdles ahead. It noted that "a sustained and meaningful culture shift at the school level" is required, which would alter "the way we envision the relationship between teachers and administrators."²³ Gerald Mohr, executive director of the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents, agreed that the new teacher evaluation expectations "will require a high level of manpower for administrators and thorough review of the corporation evaluation process."²⁴

In addition to cultural shifts, local school districts also need the knowledge and capabilities to redefine their daily tasks if state reform initiatives are to succeed. Education reformers commonly believe that policy changes can create incentives that prompt schools and districts to redefine or redirect their work in more promising directions. In practice, incentives can be no match for local values, powerful circumstances, or ingrained understandings about what it means to do one's job.²⁵

The state's new teacher evaluation requirement is instructive here. In practice, most school principals spend their days in meetings or tethered to their

offices doing order-maintenance work, such as disciplining unruly students, meeting or talking on the phone with concerned parents, and managing the rivers of paperwork and e-mails that flow across their desks each day and call for their judgments regarding budgetary matters, risk management for school events and trips, school requirements for special education, and implementation of state testing. This demanding list also includes the cheerleading functions that all principals play at school assemblies and after-school or evening events.

In contrast, Indiana's new approach to teacher evaluation presumes that a principal's key job is to be an instructional leader, helping evaluate and motivate a school's teachers to constantly improve their craft. That requires principals to perform a different set of demanding tasks, such as visiting and observing teachers in their classrooms, synthesizing those observations into useful feedback for teachers to review, and engaging in subsequent (and hopefully timely) meetings with teachers about those reports so that they prompt meaningful discussions rather than a massive shuffling of paper reports.²⁶ But accommodating these new requirements alongside the conventional responsibilities that persist will require creative adjustments of school resources and job descriptions.

Initial reactions of those involved suggested that localities were largely waiting for the IDOE to show the way forward. As Frank Bush, executive director of the Indiana School Boards Association, noted, "There was and has been no clear explanation of how the evaluation model or salary model will be implemented."²⁷ Staff at IDOE have pointed out that they will gladly field questions and provide training, including sessions through the state's ESCs but that, ultimately, local officials are charged with making these implementation decisions.

A final point about local adaptation is that Putting Students First provides superintendents with new managerial powers but does not guarantee their use. The new local collective bargaining process, for example, is strictly limited to teacher salaries, benefits, and wages. Collective bargaining agreements cannot include language regarding any other subject. In

theory, this circumscribed role for bargaining will unleash superintendents from potentially restrictive contract rules about class size, the use of time during the school day, and other matters. Removing those items from the negotiating table simply creates space for more creative and assertive management. But it does not guarantee it. John Ellis, executive director of the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents, indicated as much by noting that the change to collective bargaining "now provides districts with an *opportunity* to focus on real issues" (emphasis added).²⁸

The school choice elements of
Putting Students First reveal
many issues that come with
attempting to leverage organizations
outside government to advance
school reform agendas.

Superintendents must convince local teachers, principals, and board members that these changes ultimately will benefit students. Two interview respondents suggested that superintendents are glad to possess greater power and flexibility but, at the same time, somewhat nervous about exercising it. Yet unless superintendents lead, status quo practices—regardless of whether they work or appear in teacher contracts or district policies—will persist.

The state's new teacher evaluation law, which allows school corporations to fire teachers who consistently are rated ineffective, confronts superintendents with a related leadership challenge. It remains to be seen whether district leaders will have enough confidence in such measures to use them as the basis for terminations, especially in relatively small and tightly knit communities. State agency staff noted the significant personal challenge that superintendents and principals will face when they have to decide whether to fire a teacher who they will continue to see regularly at a local grocery store or restaurant. Still, state residents do appear to support some of the main

elements of the new teacher evaluation law, which may help advance the state's agenda. The same 2010 survey of Indiana residents cited earlier found that 74.3 percent favored using teacher evaluations to document ineffectiveness, 80.8 percent agreed that teacher evaluations should be based on student classroom improvement, and 75.4 percent agreed that student achievement in the classroom should help decide teacher compensation.²⁹

Local adaptations require local energy, capabilities, and initiative, to be sure. Yet one should also ask what the state education agency can do to bolster, equip, and support local leaders as they attempt to adapt district cultures and redefine their tasks to better implement the state's reform agenda. This difficult question produced varying responses in our interviews with IDOE staff. Bennett was the most direct in noting that the best approach is to "squash the system." By that, he meant that the state agency should aggressively challenge prevailing practices, engage the public and teachers and staff in face-to-face meetings or direct e-mail communications, and provide cover for local leaders by helping to absorb criticism when difficult local decisions prompt political firestorms. Bennett drew a clear line, though, in arguing that the state agency should hold locals accountable and rely on them to find the capacity to complete their work. Another staffer echoed those sentiments by noting that self-interest, rather than the IDOE's direct help, will drive leaders to take the steps required to save themselves and demonstrate performance.

Others were less certain. In discussing teacher evaluation, for example, another staff member reasoned that the state should not "be in the weeds." That sentiment echoed Bennett's belief that the state should focus on standard-setting and results, not managing the numerous "retail transactions" district and school personnel conduct each day. Still, the staff member did recognize that the state faces a dilemma because "principals do not have the training" required to accomplish the state's goals. Bennett even sympathized with local superintendents on that point. Having been a district superintendent

himself, he explained that superintendents typically receive training in how to follow rules and make cautious decisions.

Another agency member agreed regarding teacher evaluation, specifically, noting that the work could simply overwhelm local superintendents and principals. When they are feeling "overloaded," they are likely "to do a weak job."³⁰ A result could be teachers receiving very similar evaluations (as our interview respondents said they tend to do now), which would suggest evaluations are being done as a compliance exercise rather than as a performance-enhancing one. Poorly completed evaluations also could make districts vulnerable to legal challenges if teachers who are penalized or terminated can persuasively argue that evaluations were inadequate.

New Sectors

When education reform packages incorporate nongovernment actors in education reform, they expand possibilities while creating new management demands at the state level.

Today, private and nonprofit organizations play an increasingly important role in the development and implementation of public policy. As governments have diversified their tools beyond direct government provision of services, the possibilities for action have grown and caused governance and oversight demands to multiply. Many complications arise when traditional actors, such as state education agencies, attempt to recruit and oversee actors outside of government to serve the public interest.³¹

Numerous elements of Putting Students First create key implementation roles for groups outside government. We have already discussed school turnaround contractors and the New Teacher Project's role in teacher evaluation training. Other players include charter school operators, private schools that accept students using school vouchers, and nonprofit groups that perform outreach to students to inform them of available new educational

choices. Complicating matters for the state education agency, other private, nonprofit, or public organizations sometimes mediate the relationship between these new-sector groups and IDOE staff in Indianapolis. The ESCs interact most directly with the New Teacher Project. The state's charter school law created the new Indiana Charter School Board and names the state's private universities as new potential charter school authorizers. Finally, in a unique arrangement among the states, Indiana's state education agency is responsible for monitoring these and other charter school authorizers, while the state board of education ultimately must enforce any consequences against the authorizers for poor performance.

The school choice elements of Putting Students First reveal many issues that come with attempting to leverage organizations outside government to advance school reform agendas. To begin, consider the effort to expand the number of charter schools in the state. HEA 1002 has made Indiana a more potentially inviting destination for charter schools to operate by expanding the menu of charter school authorizers, facilitating the conversion of traditional public schools into charters, and providing charters with facilities support. In 2012, the state's charter law received its first-ever A ranking from the Center on Education Reform, a pro-charter group that analyzes state policy.³² Indiana's measures are designed to grow the state's charter community, where fifty-nine schools were operating before 2011, often with strong results. One summary of a comprehensive national study of charter schools, for example, noted that Indiana's charter school students "showed better gains in English and math than students in the traditional public schools they otherwise would have attended."³³

The new interest in charter school accountability, another feature of HEA 1002, illustrates some interesting tensions within the charter school community itself. State agency staff noted how some current charter operators resisted the added efforts to hold their schools accountable for performance. These operators expressed concerns that, because they tend to serve

more disadvantaged student populations, they may be unable to meet state performance expectations. State agency officials said those arguments caught them off guard because they usually they hear them from traditional public school providers.

Subjecting the state's charter schools to stricter accountability has revealed that some providers are perhaps more interested in preserving their schools than delivering the results the state has demanded. One state official indicated his frustration with such pushback, noting that the reason he likes charter schools is that "you can close them" more easily than traditional public schools. Such a view will sound hostile to some charter providers who see themselves advancing a larger effort to expand choice; in their view, increasing charter accountability would set back that broader movement. It also is an implicit critique of charter authorizers who, to expand their influence or brand, sometimes provide minimal or ineffective oversight. That attitude concerns state officials, given the dramatic expansion of authorizers that now includes all of the state's private universities. One state official called this influx of new, relatively inexperienced authorizers a potential "big weakness."

At the same time, though, the state's demands for charter accountability have stoked new interest from some well-known national charter providers, such as Carpe Diem and Rocketship. Those groups, noted one state agency staff member, have "called up and are more interested because they like the accountability piece." That sort of internal tension within the state's charter school community will create interesting dynamics as implementation unfolds and some charters excel while others struggle and face consequences for poor performance.

State officials also recognized how difficult it will be to make charter schools a viable reform model across the whole state of Indiana, rather than just in more concentrated areas.³⁴ Numerous operators have flocked to the state's capital and main urban center, Indianapolis, where the mayor is a charter school authorizer and thirty charter schools operate today.³⁵ The city features a vibrant urban core along with

abundant policy and intellectual resources available to charter proponents in the state agency and the city's well-known education nonprofit, the Mind Trust.

Contrast this environment with the city of Gary, which possesses struggling public schools and a severely depressed local economy. One state official we interviewed remarked that there must be at least ten thousand vacant commercial properties in the city limits. Although student demand for educational alternatives may be great in Gary, to date only six charter schools exist there. State officials recognize that it is more difficult for charter school operators to attract and keep teachers and administrators in such depressed urban centers. The same is true in the state's more isolated rural areas. The pattern of charter applications to the ICSB reveals that charter operators were biased toward locating in Indianapolis.³⁶ In 2011, among the thirteen applicants, seven proposed starting charters there, while twelve of twenty-four applicants in 2012 did. In all, the state's urban centers and counties represented the overwhelming preference for applicants to the ICSB across both years.

The state's new voucher law also reveals the potential advantages and limits of new sectors. Bennett sees the voucher program and the state's charter school reforms as creating "a parallel system" that can serve the children who use vouchers while pressuring traditional public schools to improve. Whether the state's voucher law helps create that parallel system will require private school providers to serve an increasing number of the state's students. Our interview respondents noted that the overwhelming majority of Catholic and Lutheran schools in the state already participate in the program. The voucher option will likely give some of those schools some more financial breathing room as students enroll to take seats that otherwise would have been vacant. Still, growing the program in subsequent years likely will require private schools from outside these more mainstream denominations to accept large numbers of students. That raises potential quality questions, given that these smallish and more independent schools, many religiously

affiliated, lack the technical and intellectual support of larger private school networks.

One hurdle to making these private schools accept additional students will be for the schools to demonstrate their willingness and ability to participate in ISTEP testing, a requirement that kicks in once a school accepts a voucher student. One state official noted how those schools have been challenged as they have worked with IDOE to develop the knowledge and capabilities to properly administer ISTEP. "The ISTEP program is the single biggest compliance-related piece of the program, so schools who have not done it before have a much steeper learning curve," the official told us.

Enforcement

Faithful enforcement of multifaceted education reforms can be difficult when state enforcement tools are limited or prompt local implementers to follow the law's letter but not its spirit.

Historically, enforcing multifaceted social policies, especially in education, has proven difficult in the United States.³⁷ Sometimes state enforcers lack the political will to hold implementers to account, or because of information disadvantages, they may be unable to trigger enforcement actions because localities strategically follow the letter of the law—treating it as a compliance exercise—without embracing its spirit. Also complicating enforcement, implementers sometimes possess low capacities to implement laws well, even if they agree with the reforms. As a result, state overseers, also typically operating with low capacity, often try to work with local implementers to keep them moving forward, albeit more slowly than the state prefers. Bringing in new implementers, as with school takeovers, is another option, but such a move simply trades one set of enforcement questions for another. Rather than ensuring that traditional school districts follow state requirements, now the state must guarantee that takeover providers follow the agreements defined in school takeover

contracts and then issue consequences if the providers fall short.

Our interviews revealed that IDOE staff possess a strong intellectual commitment to enforcing the laws that created Putting Students First. In discussing the overall agenda, we asked Bennett why the state's plan for added accountability will differ from prior initiatives, such as the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, that promised similar improvement. He said that the main difference was that the federal government did not enforce NCLB, yet he will enforce Putting Students First. Bennett said that as a leader, you cannot blink, stating, "The minute you blink, they [local officials] begin walking you back." He believed that the state's school takeover power provides IDOE with a powerful lever that will compel local districts to follow the law and that IDOE will go to battle over such matters. "Sue me if you don't want me to take over your school," he told us. "I'll expose you for protecting adults and not kids."

Although the threat of state takeover may prove a compelling incentive for local districts to act, other state officials we interviewed wondered whether the state possessed the proper enforcement tools to promote compliance with the law's letter and spirit. We often heard awkward pauses or ad hoc lists of ideas not clearly defined in statute when we asked about what would happen if local school corporations failed to implement the law's expectations. Of the state's collective bargaining reforms, for example, a state official said that superintendents and school boards tend to like the changes but have "botched" them in implementation. A big problem, this official noted, is that the consequences for those botched results are unclear. "We [the state] need to find consequences," the official said. Some suggested, for example, that the state agency could delay distributing state aid to local school corporations whose contracts are out of compliance.

Another example is the teacher evaluation systems that local districts must begin implementing in fall 2012. When asked if the state agency was going to ensure that the evaluation systems were consistent with the law, a state official told us that IDOE

was "not auditing" all of them. "We don't really have tools to enforce," this person told us, before noting that a more assertive use of the state's school accreditation procedures could be a path forward, given that evaluations are already a legal requirement for accreditation, although they would require other state policy changes. Another dynamic that state officials have observed is that teacher evaluation matters sometimes are still being bargained into teacher contracts, even though SEA 575 prohibits those provisions. According to superintendents, teachers union representatives have suggested including these items and simply removing them later if they are challenged, which suggests that some localities are testing the state's willingness to enforce the law.

Lacking a well-defined arsenal of tools to enforce the numerous elements of Putting Students First, the state has reached for second- or third-best solutions.

When we asked about enforcement near the end of the interview, another state official noted, "[We had] hit one talking point I wanted to get in" to "share a lesson" with policymakers in other states. This person's main conclusion was, "Don't expect that any of the laws you pass will be followed unless there's a clear consequence for not following them." At the same time, this official recognized the balancing act that state agencies must execute to accomplish their ambitious goals. To encourage local control and ownership of new initiatives, the official suggested, you cannot be so heavy-handed with enforcement that locals never see the reforms as being in their own interest, yet consequences must ensue when clearly unacceptable behavior occurs.

One area where clear enforcement mechanisms seem to have worked is with the SEA 575 requirement that all teacher contracts be settled by December 31, which they were in 2011. Teacher unions and school

districts wanted to avoid having a fact finder settle their disagreements because in those instances each side would lose control over the outcome. Two of our interview respondents said it was “unprecedented” and “unheard of” to have contracts in place so quickly in all districts.

Lacking a well-defined arsenal of tools to enforce the numerous elements of Putting Students First, the state has reached for second- or third-best solutions. Some rely on opportunistic person-to-person exchanges to create a sense of local urgency. Bennett relayed one example of a district that had a school in the fourth year of probation on the state’s accountability system. He told the superintendent that if the school made it to year six then the state would take it over. The superintendent appeared to take the threat seriously and approached Bennett for help in negotiating a deal to have an outside organization come in, at the district’s expense, to help the district turn around the school.

A second strategy relies on making information and results transparent. This sort of naming-and-shaming approach to enforcement relies on the pressure of bad publicity to move local implementers to craft policies consistent with the law. For example, the state plans to post online for public inspection the teacher evaluation plans and teacher salary schedules that local school corporations develop. Further, the state intends to examine the intersection of teacher evaluation and school accountability results to identify schools and districts where teacher evaluations are relatively high but school performance is low. Still, no formal consequences exist for districts where these two measures diverge.

Finally, the state education agency can use a more indirect approach by helping advance enforcement actions by other state organizations. For example, the IDOE can report to the ISBE if districts fail to comply with new rules governing teacher salary schedules, and the board then can issue consequences. Further, the board ultimately is responsible for sanctioning charter school authorizers that oversee a noticeable number of underperforming charter schools. The ISBE can remove an authorizer’s authority to open

charter schools or dock a portion of the administrative fees that authorizers can charge their charters. Guidelines for authorizer penalties were still under development at the time of our research.

A couple of our respondents, including Bennett, also suggested that one way to deter districts from violating the new state law on collective bargaining agreements would be to request that the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) declare contracts that include items prohibited by SEA 575 to violate state law. Such a move could prevent district employees from getting paid. Since our interviews, IDOE has made progress working with the SBOA, which has developed a rubric it will begin using to audit collective bargaining agreements to determine whether they conform with SEA 575’s requirement. In its June 2012 bulletin to local school districts, the SBOA announced these forthcoming audits, which an IDOE staff member told us “puts school board members and administrators on notice that they could be held personally responsible for executing illegal collective bargaining agreements.”³⁸

Charismatic Leadership

States and communities engaged in ambitious reforms must recognize that charismatic leadership can simultaneously be a valuable asset and an enduring vulnerability.

Charismatic state or district leaders often can take organizations that are floundering or idling and inject them with a new sense of purpose, redefining core tasks and missions.³⁹ These leaders frequently can attract new talent from the outside and simultaneously energize veteran staff who have craved new opportunities. Our interviews with IDOE staff revealed that Bennett’s arrival has unleashed both dynamics. One new staff member joked that his colleagues described his agency division, full of new people, as the “nobody over forty department” while a veteran stressed how IDOE used to be a very “cautious place” but things are “much different

now," making the work more enjoyable and substantively meaningful.

In the field, as state agency executives venture into school districts and superintendents engage parent and community assemblies, charismatic leaders can aid in articulating a vision that helps everyone to understand the value of new initiatives. In our interviews, for example, we learned of local superintendents who have started district-sponsored virtual schools, trying to get a leg up on the potential competition from virtual charters; fostered a sense of urgency by compressing lengthier school improvement plans into shorter timelines; and become leaders in local assessment of subjects that presently are not part of ISTEP, an issue that local districts must work out as they develop their new teacher evaluation systems.

While charisma and smart leadership are undoubtedly important, tying a state or a school district's ultimate fate to a new, engaging, and inspiring leader with great communication and political skills can backfire when circumstances change. The sort of "great man" theory of history perspective does have its limits. For instance, when leaders design smart plans and build state or community support, other venues frequently come calling with generous salary offers and new portfolios of interesting work. The allure of competing offers can be enticing when state laws, as in Indiana, limit the compensation packages that agency executives can receive.⁴⁰

Especially in communities with persistent education challenges, a "spinning wheels" problem often persists in which compelling new leaders arrive with grand promises and top-down plans that ultimately fail to gain traction before the leader departs for the next best opportunity.⁴¹ The pattern then replicates itself when the next new inspiring leader arrives. And then the next. In a decade or so, communities realize that they have experienced a frenetic pace of policy change but little that is substantively valuable.

Even if these charismatic leaders are not lured away, they may provide a short-term boost of energy and inspiration that ultimately produces poor results once the excitement of policy development gives

way to the less visible but crucial implementation grind. When the bloom comes off the rose, states or communities may learn that a new leader's impulse to clean house and bring in new talent may end up turning away veteran staffers with superb institutional knowledge and connections that may be vital for anticipating needed policy adjustments during implementation.

The ultimate legacy of state and local leaders depends on whether their actions enable promising reform efforts endure after they have left the scene. Indiana's case is interesting in this regard given the tremendous loyalty and faith that state agency staff place in Bennett and his ability to carry out the Putting Students First agenda. One staff member said if Bennett does not win reelection in 2012, "this is just domino," meaning that an electoral defeat would topple all of the "dominoes" that legislators, agency staff, and local leaders have lined up to support the agenda. If so much depends on Bennett, personally, the state's overall strategy may be risky and beg the question of whether local superintendents, principals, and ultimately teachers will be able to sustain the energy needed to keep its ambitious agenda on track even after Bennett moves on. Although presently he is devoting his efforts to implementing and adapting Putting Students First, Bennett would be wise to look ahead and begin grooming some potential successors who could run for his position when he decides to step down.

Looking Ahead

Putting Students First is an ambitious and multidimensional effort to reform education for Indiana's students. The early lessons learned, which we described in the previous section, begin to sketch out the likely possibilities and hurdles in store for the state and its localities as they continue implementing the reforms. Indiana's experience also suggests several implications for action that intrepid reformers elsewhere should consider.

When proposing new tasks, be sure to eliminate some old ones.

When frustrations about performance build, reformers in state legislatures and elsewhere often propose new policies to change how the work of government gets done. In education, for example, concerns over student achievement and achievement gaps have prompted expanded testing. Worries that teachers are not providing valuable learning experiences for students have produced new approaches to teacher evaluation, including Indiana's RISE system. Overall, multifaceted and ambitious education reform agendas, by definition, demand that principals and teachers alter their daily tasks and rethink their beliefs about what it means to do their jobs well. Reformers looking down from on high should not underestimate how difficult it can be to make such a shift.⁴²

Indiana's reform package pushes several of the hottest buttons in education today.

When creating new tasks for state and local implementers, reformers often fail to offer any sort of task relief in return. Reforms are simply stacked atop existing commitments that can overwhelm implementers who must confront new directives while managing the numerous requirements that remain. Indiana's teacher evaluation reforms run this potential risk because those new expectations require a fundamental rethinking of how principals and other top school administrators should approach their jobs without curtailing any of their current responsibilities. Proposals that rewrite the principal's job description should not simply involve adding duties to an already lengthy list of responsibilities, but should include removing some tasks, too. Simply believing that principals will somehow manage to find the time to complete new directives sets up local implementation to become yet another compliance-oriented activity rather than something that creates value.

Give as much attention to systems that develop people as to systems that evaluate them.

The accountability movement in education has tended to focus narrowly on measurement, judgment, and the issuing of negative consequences (and sometimes rewards) based on performance. The theory of action behind Indiana's teacher evaluation system provides a good example. It focuses on producing ratings that eventually may serve as the basis for terminating teachers; freezing their salaries; or, at the other end of the spectrum, offering raises or recognition. Indiana officials we interviewed agreed that typical teachers, principals, and superintendents lack the instincts and skills required to implement and succeed with either the RISE system or the various locally designed evaluation systems that some Indiana districts are proposing.

A broader concept of human capital would link these evaluation activities to others that can improve the quality of people who enter and work in districts and schools. For example, developing a strategy that considered classroom- and school-level evaluations of teachers simultaneously with the operation of state schools of education, which train most teachers and principals, and the management of school district human resource departments would leverage these related systems toward common goals. Results will likely suffer when state education colleges, district human resources administrators, and teacher evaluators fly solo rather than in formation.⁴³

A related idea is to develop systems that recognize the entire range of talents and knowledge that all members of an organization—be it a state agency, local district, or school—can provide. Often, education reformers operate with a built-in bias toward people who are relatively young or new to the system and look askance at education veterans. Indiana's case shows that a healthy mix of both is likely to improve the chances for success. Veterans can provide invaluable institutional knowledge about laws, agency processes, and community networks that help leaders anticipate

or sidestep political battles, which can smooth implementation on the ground. When reform agendas provide opportunities for interesting, meaningful work, rather than simply creating more compliance tasks, they also can energize veteran staff members or teachers who are craving a challenging new assignment.

Never take your allies for granted.

Multidimensional education reforms, especially those that leverage new actors outside government, provide opportunities to form new networks and direct resources toward helping increase opportunities for students. Indiana's expanded charter school law, its new school voucher program, and the expanded use of turnaround providers are examples that incorporate those new actors. New-sector providers will flock to support reform agendas that seem to embrace their own visions of school design and operation or teacher training and evaluation. If such organizations can persuasively show how their product or method will "put students first," then they, too, may find a spot in the emerging reformist policy network.

Even as those groups become willing allies and line up to support new initiatives, state and local officials should remember that their own preferences may diverge from the priorities of these new network members. The somewhat surprising pushback, as IDOE officials described it, from the state's charter school community about proposals to increase accountability for charter schools is one example. Another is the puzzling response from district superintendents who clamor for flexibility, a demand that IDOE seemed to meet in allowing local experimentation with teacher evaluation, yet then argue implementation would be easier if the state just told them what to do, a line of discussion that emerged in our interviews about SEA 1. The lesson here is that allies can provide valuable support, but that does not mean they will embrace a reform agenda chapter and verse.

Undercut cultures of compliance by embracing accountability and evaluation as tools for continuous improvement.

Local ownership of reform is essential, especially with initiatives that emphasize individual and organizational performance and require creative leaders to juggle numerous difficult tasks. Much research shows that performance-based systems create value when the results they produce give implementers useful information that can inform and improve practice.⁴⁴ In education, specifically, Robin Lake, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, has found that in high-performing charter school management organizations, teacher evaluation "is understood to be more about organizational improvement than about passing judgment on an individual."⁴⁵

When school or teacher evaluations convey to principals meaningful information that inspires confidence, implementers will start to own the processes and the data they produce. In those situations, organizational improvement is more likely to flow from reform—perhaps not on the same timetable and certainly without some stress or tensions working themselves out along the way, but success nevertheless. Early results from the Indiana districts that have piloted the state's new teacher evaluation system suggest that such ownership at the ground level is indeed beginning to take hold.⁴⁶

In contrast, implementation is more likely to become a bureaucratic compliance exercise or, worse, stoke fears and suspicions if people on the ground lack faith in the results that performance-based systems produce.⁴⁷ In those situations, it will be unclear how results can foster improvement and so risk-averse leaders likely will manage to follow the letter of the law while avoiding conflicts or tensions that otherwise must be confronted to accelerate performance and embrace the law's spirit. The larger result will be to perpetuate the compliance-driven approach to implementation that we discussed earlier in this paper and that has been a recurring feature of implementation in K–12 education for several decades. In

developing any reform package—be it federal, state, or local—careful thinking about how to drive performance to higher levels absolutely must include pondering what it will take to get implementers on the ground to take personal ownership over a proposed set of reforms.

Leaders must be willing to absorb criticism to advance implementation.

One way that leaders lead is by providing cover for implementers who must manage controversial policies that have prompted vocal criticism. Leaders in state agencies or districts who prefer to pace in their offices rather than engage critics face-to-face likely will have short careers as education reformers. Further, these leaders will find themselves increasingly isolated as the principals and teachers they depend on become reluctant to assume the personal and professional risks required to make reforms work.

Indiana's reform package pushes several of the hottest buttons in education today. Policy changes that incorporate student growth into teacher evaluations, expand charter schools and create a new voucher program, limit collective bargaining, and turn over schools to outside providers unsurprisingly have stirred up supporters and passionate critics alike. Bennett and his staff have set a strong example by attending forums and engaging critics across the state where the 2011 reform package has come under fire.

Other leaders will need to emulate that behavior. Principals who refuse to take parent phone calls dur-

ing school hours so that they can spend more time observing teachers will need their superintendents to defend them during public comment sessions at board meetings and in articles penned for local newspaper opinion pages. Charter school authorizers who decide to pull a charter from a poorly performing school will need backing from state board officials and other charter school operators when critics suggest the authorizer is being hostile to the larger movement for school choice and parent empowerment.

Conclusion

Indiana's Putting Students First agenda remains a work in progress. State officials already have recognized and described areas where clarifications, refinements, and additions to the law and state regulations are needed. No doubt, future adjustments will emerge as the state's teacher evaluation system lifts off in local school districts, as more students sign up for the state voucher program or take advantage of charter school opportunities, and as districts become accustomed to operating in a new environment with a more circumscribed role for collective bargaining.

A crucial sign of the reforms' progress will be whether they alter the daily tasks in schools and school districts so that children enjoy better opportunities and improved outcomes. Observers hoping to derive future lessons from Indiana's reforms would be well served to keep their eyes trained on those ground-level forces to see how they play out and how they help to prompt smart expansions or contractions to the state's reform agenda.

Appendix: Data Sources and Research Methods

Our analysis draws on three main bodies of evidence. Collectively, they provide a detailed snapshot of state conditions as of early spring 2012, approximately one year after the Putting Students First package became law.

First, we interviewed twenty-three people familiar with the education policy landscape in Indiana, including eighteen IDOE employees. The remaining five (including one former IDOE employee) worked outside IDOE, yet have regular dealings with relevant state and local actors inside and outside government. All of our interviews occurred in Indianapolis during February 2012, except for two we conducted by phone that spring. We had subsequent e-mail exchanges with a few of the respondents to clarify ambiguities in our interview notes. The interviews were loosely structured. All began by asking respondents to summarize their background, how they came to work in the education field in Indiana (either inside the state agency or outside, depending on their position), and their main responsibilities. We then transitioned into discussing several specific topics based on the respondents' particular interests and areas of expertise. Our questioning was designed to help us better understand the potential opportunities and challenges of Putting Students First. We took handwritten notes (typewritten for the phone interviews) to record the respondents'

answers. Each interview ran approximately thirty to ninety minutes.

Second, we obtained and reviewed several policy documents and data sets from state education agency staff. These items provided broad contextual information about the agency, the legislative history and development of the Putting Students First package, and detailed descriptions of how the agency has begun implementing the reforms. The vast majority of these documents were already in the public domain, available on state or other websites. We cite several by name in this paper's endnotes. We also reviewed a small number of internal documents that the senior staff members and advisers exchanged and developed as they formulated agency strategy.

Third, we consulted other documents, data sets, reports, and commentary produced outside the state education agency. These sources came from outlets within Indiana, including local media, state universities, and state organizations, and other sources that helped place Indiana's experiences in a broader national context. The latter sources included national media reports and analyses of Indiana's education context and performance as documented in publicly accessible federal databases. We also cite several of these items in the endnotes.

Our research strategy enabled us to begin understanding Indiana's current and likely future

experiences with the Putting Students First reforms. Still, as with any study trying to grapple with a complicated and fast-moving topic, our work contains some limitations. We note two here. First, readers should be mindful that, by design, we used the state education agency itself, and experiences of state officials, as the focus for our analysis. That struck us as a wise substantive choice given that Putting Students First has only begun to take shape at the local level.

Future work that examines local implementation more systematically would be a valuable complement to our research. Second, the vast majority of our interview respondents were supporters of the Putting Students First agenda, or at least were somewhat agnostic about its likelihood for success. To provide substantive balance, we made special efforts to use print sources to identify the views of informed critics of the agenda as well.

Notes

1. For background on and legislative history of SEA 1, see www.in.gov/apps/lsa/session/billwatch/billinfo?year=2011&session=1&request=getBill&docno=1.

2. According to IDOE staff, as of June 2012, the department had just begun working with New Leaders for New Schools to roll out a statewide principal evaluation training in July 2012. New Leaders for New Schools also is helping IDOE develop its tool kit for administrators so that it is “as robust,” agency staff said, as the materials already developed on the classroom teacher side of evaluation.

3. See comments from Jonathan Plucker in Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, *Perspectives on the Key K–12 Education Legislation of 2011* (Bloomington, IN: Author, 2011), 6. For background on and legislative history of SEA 575, see www.in.gov/apps/lsa/session/billwatch/billinfo?year=2011&request=getBill&docno=575.

4. For background and legislative history of HEA 1002, see www.in.gov/apps/lsa/session/billwatch/billinfo?year=2011&request=getBill&docno=1002.

5. For background and legislative history of HEA 1003, see www.in.gov/apps/lsa/session/billwatch/billinfo?year=2011&session=1&request=getBill&docno=1003.

6. The relevant state statute is Public Law 221. See www.doe.in.gov/improvement/accountability/2011-public-law-221-pl-221.

7. See Jeffrey R. Henig et al, *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999) and John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

8. Background on some of the arguments is covered on the Scott Elliott’s Get on the Bus education blog at the *Indianapolis Star*. See, for example, Scott Elliott, “Will State’s Top Court Settle Vouchers?” February 28, 2011, <http://blogs.indystar.com>

[/education/2011/02/28/will-states-top-court-settle-vouchers/](http://education/2011/02/28/will-states-top-court-settle-vouchers/) (accessed July 23, 2012); and Scott Elliott, “Religious Schools Dominate Vouchers,” August 18, 2011, <http://blogs.indystar.com/education/2011/08/18/religious-schools-dominate-vouchers/> (accessed July 23, 2012). See also Sean Cavanagh, “Judge Upholds Indiana School Voucher Law,” State Ed Watch [blog], January 17, 2012, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2012/01/post_16.html (accessed August 1, 2012).

9. Data on voucher enrollments are from IDOE.

10. Precedent for this sort of behavior exists in other fields. For example, James Q. Wilson describes how a major part of the process of rule making in the Occupational Health and Safety Administration involves representatives from labor and management posing questions during mandated hearings not to advance the agency’s work, but to develop a record of the proceedings that will help them advance their arguments later in court. See James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

11. See comments from Nate Schnellenberger in Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, *Perspectives*, 6.

12. Terry M. Moe, “Political Control and the Power of the Agent,” *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 22, no. 1 (2006): 1–29.

13. Paul Manna, *Collision Course: Federal Education Policy Meets State and Local Realities* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2011).

14. Wilson, *Bureaucracy*.

15. Indiana’s request for proposals and current contracts with three turnaround operators, Charter Schools USA, Edison Learning, and EdPower, are available at www.doe.in.gov/improvement/turnaround/turnaround-school-operator.

16. Jonathan A. Plucker, Terry E. Spradlin, and Rodney S. Whiteman, *2010 Public Opinion Survey on K–12 Education in Indiana* (Bloomington, IN: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, 2011), question 3.

17. Quoted in Scott Elliott, "A Bumpy Transition for Indiana Schools," *Indianapolis Star*, April 27, 2012.

18. One state agency staff member we interviewed said that only two of the nine ESCs were any good. Links to all nine ESC websites are at www.doe.in.gov/idoeducation-service-centers.

19. Manna, *Collision Course*; David K. Cohen and Susan L. Moffitt, *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

20. For information on RISE, see www.riseindiana.org.

21. There appears to be somewhat more willingness to think creatively with respect to other aspects of the Putting Students First agenda. For example, state agency staff noted that they anticipate approximately 50 percent of Indiana school corporations to use or build on the state's suggested (but not required) salary schedule.

22. Other agency staff affirmed that superintendents around the state generally have been positive about the overall contents of Putting Students First.

23. The New Teacher Project, *The Indiana Evaluation Pilot: Mid-Year Report and Recommendations* (Indianapolis: Indiana Department of Education, 2012), 2.

24. See comments from Gerald Mohr in Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, *Perspectives*, 3.

25. Wilson, *Bureaucracy*; Kenneth J. Meier and Laurence J. O'Toole, Jr., *Bureaucracy in a Democratic State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

26. For example, the New Teacher Project's evaluation pilot study found that "communicating with teachers about RISE at least once per week is associated with greater teacher understanding of the system." See the New Teacher Project, *The Indiana Evaluation Pilot*, 6.

27. Frank Bush, quoted in Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, *Perspectives*, 3.

28. John Ellis, quoted in *ibid.*, 5.

29. Plucker, Spradlin, and Whiteman, *2010 Public Opinion Survey*, questions 7, 8, and 9.

30. The quote is from an interview with IDOE staff. See also Jonathan Plucker in Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, *Perspectives*, who notes: "If administrators do not receive the support they need to guide teacher evaluation efforts, those efforts will not succeed" (3).

31. Lester A. Salamon, ed., *The Tools of Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Paul C. Light, *The True Size of Government* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1999); Laurence J. O'Toole Jr. and Kenneth J. Meier, "Desperately Seeking Selznick: Cooptation and the Dark Side of Public Management in Networks," *Public Administration Review* 64, no. 6 (2004): 681–93.

32. For charter school law rankings, see Center on Education Reform, *The Essential Guide to Charter School Law 2012 National Ranking and Scorecard*, April 2012, www.edreform.com

[/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/CER-CharterLawsRankScore20125.2.12.pdf](http://wp-content/uploads/2012/05/CER-CharterLawsRankScore20125.2.12.pdf) (accessed August 1, 2012).

33. The study was completed by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University. The quote is from Scott Elliot, "Indiana Reforms Top Most in Study," Get on the Bus [blog], March 10, 2011, <http://blogs.indystar.com/education/2011/03/10/indiana-charters-top-most-in-study/> (accessed July 23, 2012).

34. See Jonathan Plucker, quoted in Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, *Perspectives*: "I suspect the extensive, rapid growth in charters that advocates predict and critics fear will not come to pass. Such growth assumes an unlimited capacity of human capital to create, implement, and run charter schools, which is unrealistic" (12).

35. Twenty-three of those thirty are authorized by the mayor's office.

36. For charter applications to the ICSB, see www.doe.in.gov/ido/icsb/charter-school-applications.

37. Martha Derthick, *The Influence of Federal Grants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Paul Manna, "Control, Persuasion, and Educational Accountability: Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act," *Educational Policy* 20, no. 3 (2006): 471–94; Michael Cohen, "Unruly Crew," *Education Next* 2, no. 3 (2006): 43–47.

38. See State Board of Accounts, *The School Administrator and Uniform Compliance Guidelines* 198 (June 2012): 10–12, www.in.gov/sboa/files/scb2012_198.pdf (accessed July 23, 2012).

39. Mark H. Moore, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Wilson, *Bureaucracy*.

40. By law, the salary of Indiana's state education chief is limited to \$79,400 per year. See Indiana Code 4-2-1-1.5 at www.in.gov/legislative/ic/code/title4/ar2/ch1.html.

41. Frederick M. Hess, *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1999).

42. Bryan D. Jones, *Politics and the Architecture of Choice: Bounded Rationality and Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Wilson, *Bureaucracy*.

43. For an interesting analysis of the human resources function in this context, see Herbert G. Heneman III and Anthony T. Malinowski, "Alignment of Human Resource Practices and Teacher Performance Competency," *Peabody Journal of Education* 79, no. 4 (2004): 108–25.

44. William T. Gormley and David L. Weimer, *Organizational Report Cards* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Donald P. Moynihan, *The Dynamics of Performance Management: Constructing Information and Reform* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008); Beryl A. Radin, *Challenging the Performance Movement: Accountability, Complexity, and Democratic Values* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006); Robin Lake, "Teacher Evaluations: We Need Trust, Not Just Tools," Rick Hess Straight Up [blog], April 19, 2012, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/trick_hess_straight_up/2012/

04/teacher_evaluations_we_need_trust_not_just_tools.html (accessed July 23, 2012).

45. Lake, "Teacher Evaluations."

46. The New Teacher Project, *The Indiana Evaluation Pilot*; see also video testimonials on the RISE website at www.riseindiana.org.

47. For example, research on Peer Assistance and Review, one of the teacher evaluation models supported in Indiana law, suggests as much. See Jennifer Goldstein, "Making Sense of Distributed Leadership: The Case of Peer Assistance and Review," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 25, no. 4 (2003): 397-421.

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