HOT TOPICS

The Supply of Qualified Administrators: A Future Shortage?

The recently passed No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) legislation underscores the importance of school and district leadership in education reform, amid growing concerns about a current and future shortage of qualified administrators. A new RAND report by Susan Gates and colleagues finds that, while there is little evidence of a nationwide supply crisis in this field at present, many professional administrators are nearing retirement, leading to the risk of significant manpower shortages in the near future. Substantial variation in career incentives at the state and local levels, coupled with barriers to entry, raise concerns about future supply—especially in localized areas.

Improving Systems of Educational Accountability

Test-based accountability (TBA), the cornerstone of the bipartisan NCLB, uses a straightforward strategy to improve educational performance: Develop standards that describe what students should know and be able to do; use annual tests to measure students’ progress toward meeting those standards; and reward or sanction schools and districts based on test scores. The ability to meet national student and school performance goals depends crucially on how the states design and implement their TBA policies in response to NCLB. RAND researchers, in a series of published reports and briefs, offer evidence of some of the known effects of state TBA systems and provide useful guidance on how best to design these policies to minimize unintended, negative consequences. Toward a strategic research and development program aimed at reading comprehension education. The panel’s work in education policy.

Mathematical Proficiency for All Students

Improving proficiency in mathematics and eliminating the gaps in proficiency among social groups is and has been the goal of many public and private efforts over the past decade and a half. The RAND Mathematics Study Panel, chaired by Deborah Loewenberg Ball, was convened as part of a broader effort to inform the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Education Research and Improvement on ways to improve the quality and relevance of mathematics education research and development (R&D). The Panel’s report proposes a long-term, strategic program of R&D in mathematics education. The program would develop knowledge, materials, and programs to help educators achieve two goals: raising the level of mathematical proficiency and eliminating differences in levels of mathematical proficiency among students in different social, cultural, and ethnic groups.

An earlier report of the RAND Reading Study Panel, chaired by Catherine Snow, outlines a proposed research program aimed at reading comprehension education. The report proposes three specific domains as having the highest priority for further research: instruction, teacher preparation, and assessment.

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Track test scores of individual students over time both to ensure that school test scores reflect individual student learning and to provide better diagnostics to help improve instruction for individual students.

Provide information on student and school performance in ways that are accessible to parents and meet parents’ needs.

Read full report Making Sense of Test-Based Accountability in Education
Read full article Putting Theory to the Test
Read full report Accountability Testing in Kentucky
Read full report School and Classroom Practices During Two Years of Education Reform in Washington State
Read full report The Validity of Gains in Scores on the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System

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