RECENTLY RELEASED

Two new reports from RAND EDUCATION highlight RAND’s work with New American Schools (NAS). These reports provide insights about school reform and contribute substantially to the national discussion.

Facing the Challenges of Whole-School Reform: New American Schools After a Decade

NAS set out ten years ago to address the perceived lagging performance of American students and the lackluster results of past school reform efforts by offering schools “whole-school,” integrated designs for reform and providing assistance to the teams responsible for developing such designs. RAND has monitored the progress of the NAS initiative since its beginning. This RAND report summarizes several different analyses of the NAS effort and highlights some lessons learned. For example, the researchers found that reform can be negatively affected by rushing from research and development to scale-up before interventions are adequately developed.

Go to full report (MR-1498-EDU).

Challenges of Conflicting School Reforms: Effects of New American Schools in a High-Poverty District

RAND assessed the effects of NAS designs on classroom practice and student achievement in a sample of schools in one high-poverty district. RAND found a lack of cohesiveness and consistency in the environments at the high-poverty schools. Teachers in these schools face a steady stream of “new” accountability systems and reform agendas. They lack sufficient time for learning about, and then implementing, each new reform initiative and often become demoralized. Furthermore, high-stakes testing may preclude adoption of richer, more in-depth curricula that may improve the learning opportunities for all students, particularly those in high-poverty settings. RAND concluded that federal and state policymakers need to think critically about simultaneously promoting high-stakes testing, comprehensive school reforms, and multiple other concurrent reforms.

Go to full report (MR-1483-EDU).

HOT TOPICS

Voucher and Charter Schools

A team of RAND EDUCATION researchers completed a study that looked at the question “Does school choice improve education?” Their report—Rhetoric Versus Reality: What We Know and What We Need to Know About Vouchers and Charter Schools—provides the most comprehensive examination of the nation’s experience with vouchers and charter schools to date. Its conclusion: so many key questions remain unanswered that neither the hopes of choice supporters nor the fears of its opponents can be confirmed.

Go to full report (MR-1118-EDU).

Making Sense of Test-Based Accountability in Education

In response to a growing emphasis on high-stakes testing by school policymakers, RAND researchers have completed a book examining the state of the art in achievement testing and how testing and accountability can be used most effectively to promote positive outcomes. The book addresses several key areas, including how the tests are used, how to evaluate the technical quality and trustworthiness of the tests, how test-based accountability affects the practices of teachers and schools, and what effect political considerations have on the policy debate. The authors also provide some recommendations for developing test-based accountability systems that are more effective.

Go to full report (MR-1554-EDU).

PROJECTS UNDERWAY

- Evaluation of California’s charter schools
- Evaluation of California’s class size reduction program
- Evaluating the state of America’s middle schools

RAND EDUCATION conducts research on a wide range of topics in education. Our mission is to bring accurate data and careful, objective analysis to the national debate on education policy. To access all of our research, please visit our web site at www.rand.org/education

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