

Policy Leadership for the Future of Education

A Guide for Practitioners

MCREL

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About McREL

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) is a nonprofit education and research organization based in Denver, Colorado. For more than 40 years, McREL has been helping educators use research to improve student achievement. As a national leader in research, school improvement, standards-based education, balanced leadership, professional development, policy development, and scenario planning, our highly respected experts provide services to educators in 50 states and 18 foreign countries. McREL's client list includes federal, regional, and state agencies; school districts; institutions of higher education; foundations; private organizations; and international entities.

McREL operates the Central Region Educational Laboratory, providing field-based research, evaluation and policy studies, and information services to state and local education agencies in Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. McREL also houses the North Central Comprehensive Center, a U.S. Department of Education-funded program that provides research-based services to state education agencies in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota to implement the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

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Introduction

Even with powerful forces of change hurling us into an uncertain future—demographics, economics, technology, and globalization, to name a few—one sobering certainty emerges: the current system of American schooling is unlikely to meet the expectations we have for it. It simply *is not designed* for high achievement for *all* students.

While we owe it to the children in our schools today to provide them the very best education possible, we must begin to transform the system so that it can deliver on the promise to prepare all students for success in the 21st century. But, with the field of education facing multiple, converging trends and uncertainties about the future, how and where do we begin to do this?

We think one place to begin is with effective policy solutions and a focused, research-based process for policymaking. Policy leaders must *look back* at what we know from years of research about what works in schools, *look around* at what is going on in the current environment that is impacting student learning, and *look ahead* to what is on or over the horizon that may affect education in future decades. Not only will the quality and effectiveness of education policymaking improve, but we will gain the forward-thinking policy leaders critically needed for the future.

The Role of Policy Leadership

Research on the effects of school- and district-level leadership on student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Waters, & Marzano, 2006) has guided McREL’s work and commitment to developing leaders at all levels of the system. McREL’s services in school and district leadership development are aimed at preparing school principals, assistant principals, district superintendents, and other central administrators to fulfill the responsibilities research show to be correlated with improved academic performance.

“Along with expert instructional leaders, policy leaders have a crucial role to play in ‘getting the system right’ for the students of today and tomorrow.”

In addition to the critical work of improving curriculum, instruction, and assessment in our schools, an important challenge is to develop *high-quality policies* that align with and support these efforts. Along with expert instructional leaders, policy leaders have a crucial role to play in “getting the system right” for the students of today and tomorrow.

Scientifically Based Research

Since the authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 (NCLB) the nation has put a much-needed emphasis on bringing scientifically based research to solving problems of persistently low academic achievement. This emphasis has sparked a growing research and development enterprise in the education world and has begun to change the culture of teaching and learning from one based primarily on experience and professional wisdom to one based on scientific evidence of what works.

Although there are many research questions remaining to be answered regarding which specific curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices work for which students under what circumstances, there is greater demand for this type of evidence among teachers and school and district administrators than ever before. This demand will, eventually, help to build the evidence base needed in the field.

Too much policy, however, is crafted in the absence of sound research. State legislators, city council members, or members of the U.S. Congress all have equal or higher standing than a district superintendent when it comes to initiating, advocating for, or passing a local, state, or federal education policy. Such policies are sometimes responding to the “squeaky wheels.” They should be responding to academic achievement problems and supported by research. Often, solutions are designed before problems are thoroughly analyzed and understood. When policymakers become attached to specific solutions, their goal becomes passage of the policy rather than solving the problem.

Public Policy

While the first question an effective policy leader always should ask when approaching a policy issue is, *What is the research on this?* the truth is, policymaking is rarely so rational a process.

Public policymaking is characterized by the interaction across three dynamics: polis, or a sense of community; policy, or a plan for the present and the future; and politics, or the totality of relations between people living in society. Policymaking reflects the dynamic interchange of these elements and, as such, is frequently a struggle over ideas and meaning, not just over a proposed set of actions.

Moving any policy issue forward in the public arena requires the blending of intellect, constituency building, and coordinated action. Policy leaders must be attuned to the key issues facing their field, able to sense the emerging challenges of their time, and able to develop and advocate for solutions to address those challenges. And, in the midst of constant change, policy leaders still must look ahead, understanding that learning will be impacted by many forces outside of the educational system and, as such, is likely to change in dramatic ways in the coming decades.

Purpose of this Guide

This guide aims to help education policy leaders develop effective policy in support of good teaching and learning. The guide provides tools and resources that help policy leaders to:

- **Look Back: Apply the Principles of Knowledge Use.** Learn how to apply what we know works in education toward improving the system through effective policymaking.

Effective policy starts with research. This is the fundamental principle of “knowledge use” and requires looking back at the body of evidence and research on strategies and practices that have proven to bring about the results sought for the greatest number of students.

- **Look Around: Develop Situational Awareness.** Understand the current context and implications of proposed changes to the *status quo* well enough to effectively manage change.

Policy leaders must consider multiple contexts when advancing policy solutions. This means understanding promising practices, key organizations and individuals involved, and their various positions relative to a particular issue. By looking around and analyzing information about people, organizations, positions, and their own strengths and weaknesses, policymakers are prepared to position their policy solution for success.

- **Look Ahead: Become Forward Thinking.** Explore emerging trends in multiple domains to develop policy that will more strategically stand the test of time.

Many policy leaders, reflecting on forces of change in the world and the increased demands these changes place on preparing students for their future, know that for the system to deliver on the 21st century promise for all, they must invest time in looking ahead, analyzing trends, and considering the implications for learners and educators.

We can no longer only look to the past for examples of what to expect in the future. Policymakers must learn how to think beyond their own experiences to envision *plausible* futures as they construct reform-minded policies. Doing so deliberately, systematically, and with guidance can help policy leaders prepare for an uncertain future, and in turn help educators prepare all students for the new demands of a global, connected community. This guide is intended as a resource in the effort to prepare for the uncertain future of American education.

This guide presents a comprehensive policy process outlining five dimensions of policymaking:

Dimension 1: Problem Identification. *The emergence and framing of a policy issue*

Dimension 2: Analysis. *Looking back, looking around, and looking ahead*

Dimension 3: Deliberation. *Identifying and selecting possible solutions*

Dimension 4: Implementation. *Developing and executing the action plan*

Dimension 5: Evaluation. *Identifying and measuring indicators for the success of a policy*

While it is tempting to think of these five dimensions as a linear progression of steps or stages, toward a neatly defined outcome, we caution readers against this. In fact, the real-world experience of policymaking rarely follows such a neatly organized series of steps. More likely, it weaves each dimension in and out, placing weight and emphasis on some of them at one time and others during other times, as the real world experience necessitates. We purposefully selected the term, “dimensions” to convey the multiple, simultaneous, and often complex forces at work in the ongoing process of policymaking. Each of these dimensions is, in fact, one aspect, or one “dimension” of the larger whole that is the policy process. We urge readers to keep this in mind as they consider each dimension presented.

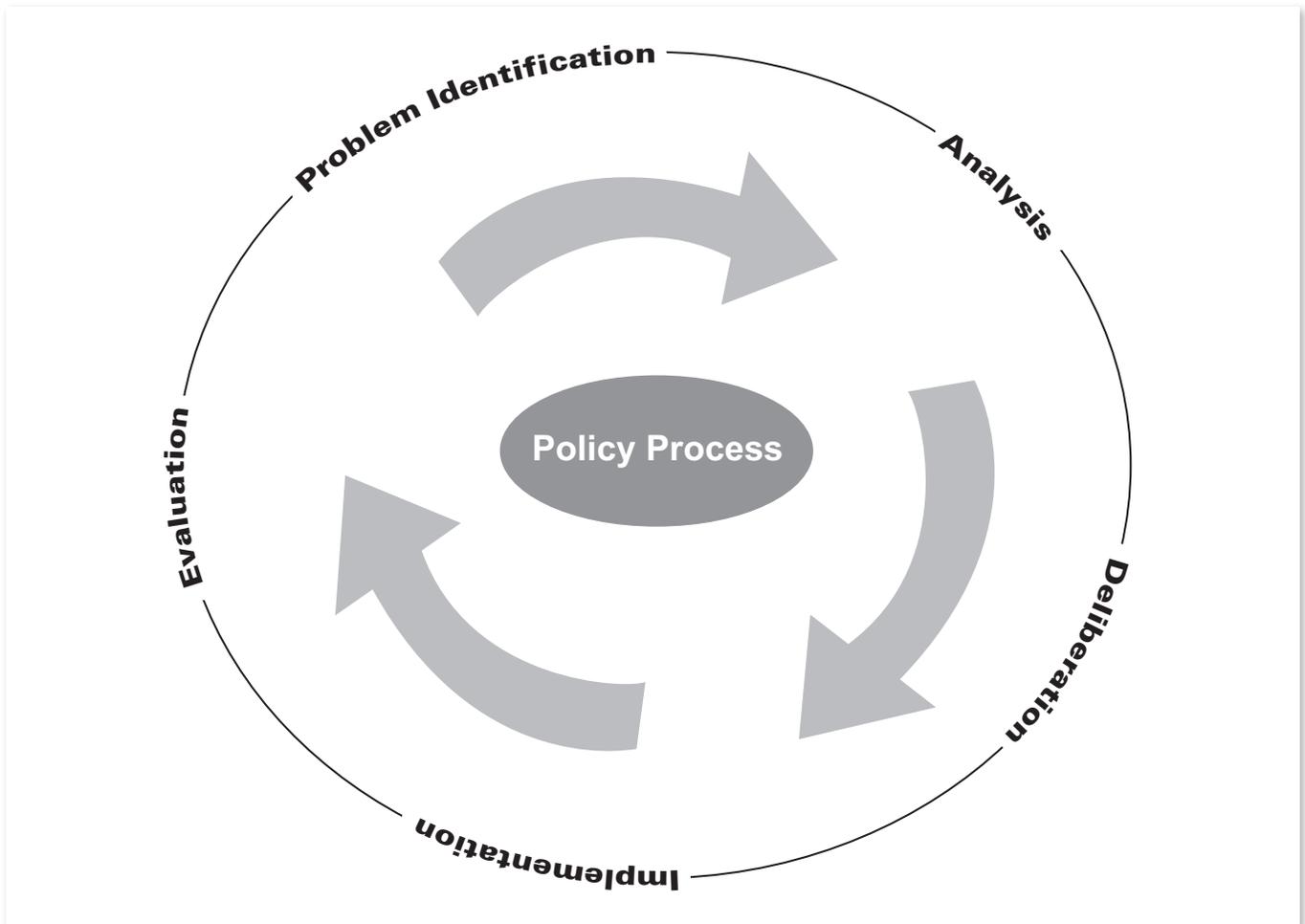
In addition to the guidance, tools, and insights on each of the dimensions, we also include a sample policy issue (smoking and public health) that you can follow in order to demonstrate the usefulness of various policy tools. We understand how intense education policy discussions can sometimes become—even when hypothetical! Thus, we have chosen an example outside of the field of education in order to focus your attention on the policymaking process rather than its content.

While much public policy is made without the benefit of systematically following each of the above dimensions, each is in some way reflected in all public policy. We contend that education policy leaders who consider these dimensions explicitly and deliberately in the policymaking process will be well on their way to preparing for the future of education.

The Policy Process: Five Dimensions

The five dimensions are dynamic forces present throughout the policy development process.

Dimensions of Policymaking



Dimension I: Problem Identification

Policy challenges abound in the field of education. But what is it that enables some issues and not others to emerge onto the policy table? As Kingdon (2003) observed, there is a continuous “stream” of issues and a continuous “stream” of solutions at play within the policy arena all of the time (p. 86). Policy leaders themselves play a key role in bringing these streams together in a way that commands attention and motivates action.

The Emergence of a Policy Issue

Policy issues come to the attention of policymakers through a variety of factors:

“Good policy leaders are adept at keeping a close eye on all of these factors related to a particular policy domain.”

Indicators. Changes observed in routinely measured indicators reveal issues inherent to particular areas (e.g., academic achievement, poverty rates, graduation rates, public opinion, etc.).

Research. Studies published highlight policy and programmatic impacts and challenges.

Trend Analysis. Analyses of trends lead to conclusions that push new policy issues to the forefront.

Events. A crisis, natural disaster, political election, or other precipitating event pushes issues to the surface.

Feedback. Experiences implementing a program or its consequences (both intended and unintended) are shared either formally (e.g., through an evaluation) or informally to indicate looming issues.

Intentional Leadership. Leaders build a vision around a shared goal and decide to move an issue forward.

Political Agenda. Influential leaders gain power and decide to pursue a specific policy agenda to advance their positions.

The first three sources—indicators, research, and trend analysis—require ongoing tracking of news reports, research studies, publications, Web sites, and other information sources to be able to recognize emerging policy issues. The remainder—events, feedback, intentional leadership, and political agendas—call for ongoing awareness and frequent analysis of people, their views, relationships, and the power dynamics in the political arena. Good policy leaders are adept at keeping a close eye on all of these factors related to a particular policy domain.

Sample Policy Issue: Smoking and Public Health

Let's consider the emergence of lung cancer and other diseases linked to smoking as an issue of public policy. How did people begin to detect this as a policy issue worthy of public solutions?



First, they may have read newspaper articles reporting the results of a new study showing that the number of people dying from smoking-related illnesses has increased (see box). Such an article might have caught the attention of many people, including a policy leader who might then have consulted the original study, read

it, and discussed some of its findings with colleagues. Perhaps the same policy leader had a family member who was affected or even killed by lung cancer, bringing an emotional motivation to the issue. This policy leader might have initiated an effort to gain the attention of others and generate concern about the need to lower the incidence of smoking-related deaths in the United States. In this way, the issue of reducing the incidence of deaths caused by lung cancer due to smoking becomes a *public policy* issue commanding the attention and resources of multiple stakeholders and the development of policy solutions gets underway.

Smoking as a Policy Issue

Smoking is the most preventable cause of death in the United States. Tobacco and smoking attribute to at least one-third of all cancer deaths. One in every five deaths is due to the effect of tobacco use. In 2002, about 170,000 people died of cancer because of their use of tobacco products. This number represents at least 30 percent of all estimated cancer deaths in the United States.*

*Cancer Facts and Figures 2002, American Cancer Society <http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/>

What policy issues arise in your school, district, community, or state as you encounter various sources of information and experiences? Policy Tool 1.1 is an organizer for tracking information from different sources, so that you can identify key policy issues in education. Use this form to record items such as recent news articles, research studies, trend data, important events, and discussions with colleagues that can serve as indicators of emerging policy issues.

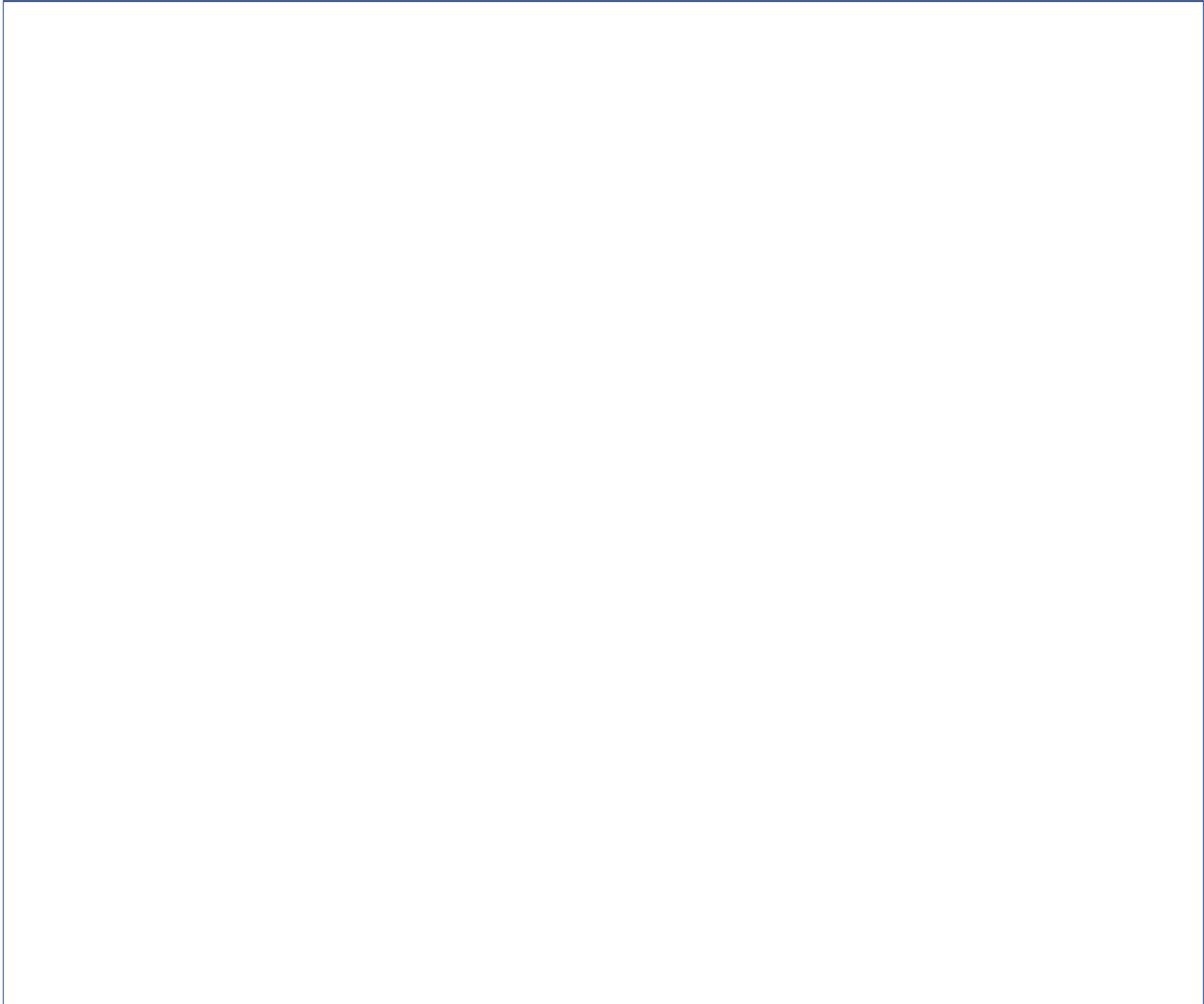
Policy Tool 1.1: Identifying Key Policy Issues from Seven Sources

Sources	Data Points	What are these sources revealing about a policy issue in education?
Indicators	<p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test scores • Gallup poll • Census data 	
Research	<p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic research • National studies • Published studies 	
Trends	<p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic data • Economic trends • Technological trends 	
Events	<p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elections • Wild card events (e.g., terrorist attacks, Hurricane Katrina, etc.) • Celebrations 	
Feedback	<p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comments • Editorials • Evaluation reports 	
Intentional Leadership	<p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition agendas • Strategic plans 	
Political Agenda	<p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political positions • Election of a new legislator 	

As you look across the factors, what common themes emerge? Is there an issue emerging from a variety of sources that seems timely and appropriate for your attention? Policy Tool 1.2 will help you identify your priority policy issue.

Policy Tool 1.2: Identifying Your Priority Policy Issue

Priority Policy Issue: What common themes emerge from what the sources are revealing? Is there an issue emerging from a variety of sources that seems timely and appropriate for policy attention?



Effective policy leaders clearly define and articulate their issues so that others become motivated to participate in developing solutions. Rochefort and Cobb (1994) suggest that policy leaders consider causality, severity, incidence, novelty, proximity, means, and solutions when defining a policy issue. Apthorpe and Gasper (1996) add an additional consideration, the level of agreement. Problem identification involves “defining” or “framing” the issue in such a way as to focus policymakers’ and stakeholders’ attention on the right things—the essence of the policy problem, its root cause or causes, who it affects, and why we should care.

Framing the Policy Issue

To effectively frame an issue, policy leaders must determine the *precise nature* and *cause* of the issue. A concerned policy leader might try to frame the issue by asking and answering relevant questions about the issue as shown in Policy Tool 1.3 on the next page. For our sample policy issue, the answers to these questions are shown in the box below.

Sample Policy Issue: Framing Smoking and Public Health

- **Cause**—Smoking and chemicals added to cigarettes.
- **Seriousness**—Burden on healthcare system is high; too many people are dying.
- **Frequency**—Too many people are dying *every year* and *every day*.
- **Level of Interest**—Almost everyone knows of someone who died from lung cancer.
- **Relevance**—This issue affects high poverty communities more than affluent communities.
- **Benefactors**—Tobacco companies benefit from the sale of more cigarettes.
- **Strategy**—It is possible to devise an acceptable strategy.
- **Feasibility**—Solutions that are doable are possible.
- **Consensus**—There is growing consensus that this is, indeed, a problem that needs attention.



Take a few moments to consider the priority policy issue you identified on page 9. Now respond to the questions in Policy Tool 1.3 on page 11.

Policy Tool 1.3: Framing the Policy Issue

Framing Criteria and Questions	Responses to Help Frame the Policy Issue
Cause <i>What is the root cause of this issue?</i>	
Seriousness <i>How serious is the issue?</i>	
Frequency <i>How often do people experience this issue?</i>	
Level of Interest <i>Is it of interest? If so, to whom?</i>	
Relevance <i>Who does the issue affect? Who is hurt by the current status quo?</i>	
Benefactors <i>Who benefits from the current status quo?</i>	
Strategy <i>Are the means or strategies necessary to address this issue acceptable?</i>	
Feasibility <i>Are the solutions doable?</i>	
Consensus <i>To what extent is there agreement about the issue?</i>	

Developing an Issue Statement

A written issue statement that can be easily shared with others, including members of the public, as well as other policymakers, provides a concise articulation of the problem you are trying to resolve. This statement should be no more than one paragraph and should refer to the issue itself, its cause, its seriousness, and provide some sense about why others should care about it.

Referring to our lung cancer example, a possible issue statement might look like this:

Sample Policy Issue: An Issue Statement on Smoking and Public Health

The incidence of lung cancer has reached epic proportions due to the rapid increase in cigarette smoking among high-poverty Americans, including teenagers. This crisis in public health is preventable and must be addressed before too many people lose their lives.



Policy Tool 1.4 provides a template for constructing an issue statement that accomplishes the above objectives. Use it to compose an issue statement based on your priority policy issue.

Policy Tool 1.4: Drafting Your Issue Statement

Write a brief paragraph (2–3 sentences) outlining the nature of the issue, its causes, level of impact, and why others should care about it. Use the following sentence prompts as a guide.

Our issue is _____ because _____.
(state the issue) (identify what is causing the issue)

This issue affects _____.
(identify who is most affected by the issue)

This issue is important because _____.
(identify why others should care about the issue)

Rewrite your issue statement in your own words:

Dimension 2: Analysis

Effective policy leaders have the capacity to look back, look around, and look ahead when making policy decisions. These elements, often overlooked, are critical to sound policy development.

Looking Back

Looking back entails basing policy decisions on what we know works in education. This is the fundamental principle of “knowledge use.” No matter how a policy issue comes to light and gets defined, a commitment to knowledge use on the part of the policy leader is essential. This means that policy leaders should base educational programs, policies, and other interventions on the collective knowledge that has accumulated in the field. Usually, supportive knowledge takes the form of research studies. Effective policy leaders will *always* ask for supportive research before adopting a new program or practice.

“Research” is a term frequently used in education practice, but it is often misused or misunderstood. Research can mean anything from the collecting of existing information about a topic to conducting experiments to gain new knowledge. In education, the term “scientifically based research” is frequently used to encompass a set of characteristics that high-quality research must possess in order for it to guide education practice or decision making. References to scientifically based research, often abbreviated as SBR, appear throughout education legislation, most prominently in the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Scientifically based research includes research conducted to establish causal relationships. Causal relationships are established through careful random assignment experiments. Causal claims carry substantial weight in terms of their value to decision making; knowing that “A” causes “B” can provide clear direction for selecting school improvement interventions. In addition to causal experimental research, there are other types of high-quality scientifically based research available as evidence for policy development.

It is critical to distinguish high-quality research from questionable research. Fortunately, there are tools that policy leaders can use to enhance their ability to evaluate any research that is presented to them. For example, in partnership with the Education Commission of the States, McREL developed a resource titled *An Education Research Primer: How to Understand, Evaluate, and Use It* (Lauer, 2006). This guide, available online at www.ecs.org/html/educationIssues/Research/primer/foreword.asp, and for purchase at www.josseybass.com, describes a method for discerning among various types of research and evaluating the causal claims made by researchers and product developers. In addition, the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy has developed for the Institute for Education Sciences (the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education), a helpful evaluative rubric for policymakers seeking to draw their own conclusions from research reports. This document may be accessed at http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorousetid/guide_pg5.html.

Analyzing research for its utility to policy development comes down to evaluating its *quality*, or strength of evidence that supports conclusions, and its *relevance*, or similarity to current context. The following illustrations contain the important questions to ask when evaluating the quality and relevance of existing research. The following tables provide more explanation and guidance for answering these questions.¹

¹Figures and tables adapted from Lauer, P. A., (2006). *An education research primer: How to understand, evaluate, and use it*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (Available at <http://www.ecs.org/html/educationIssues/Research/primer/foreword.asp>.) and the U.S. Department of Education's *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported By Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide*. (Available at http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorousetid/guide_pg5.html.)

Assessing the Quality of Research



Additional Guidance for Assessing the Quality of Research

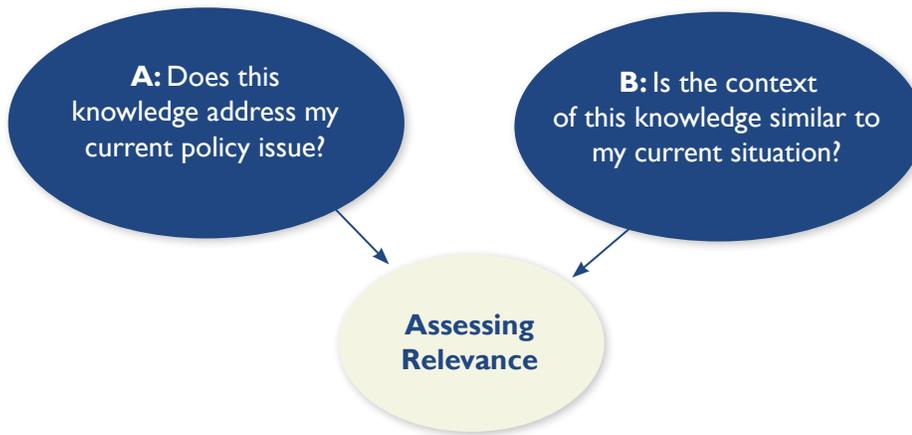
More Explanation	How to Answer the Question
A Observations of real events or data are called “empirical evidence.” Empirical evidence is verifiable by any user.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read the article or report. Are there descriptions of subjects? Of data? Of data collection methods?• Could you make a map that describes the data/observations → analysis → conclusions? If the article is missing pieces of this map, it is probably not an empirical study.
B High-quality research draws conclusions that are supported by evidence, method, and analysis but does not over-represent the conclusions that can be drawn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using the map you constructed to answer question A, do the conclusions make sense based on what the study says about data/ observations and analysis?• Make sure the conclusions match the method. Only random assignment experimental studies can make causal claims.• If you have doubts, ask an expert to review the study and give you their opinion.
C The review of research by other experts is called “peer review.” If other experts offer confirming opinions, this adds credibility to the findings and to the quality of the knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some publications are “peer reviewed” publications and subject all material submitted to experts for review. The publication’s Web site usually describes if it is peer reviewed or not.• Who has cited the work? If other experts have used this research to support their own work, they have implicitly agreed with it. On the other hand, some experts cite work in order to refute its claims or findings. Pay attention to how the research is used by other experts.

Notes of Caution:

- Beware of research bias. High-quality knowledge is objective and free from bias. Bias can easily creep into research; sometimes the author may not even be consciously aware of it. You can find bias by reading with an objective eye. As you read, ask yourself questions such as, *Were any subjects or data unaccountably excluded? Did the author appear to stack the deck to get a certain outcome? Did the author reveal his or her own biases up front and explain how those biases were addressed?*
- Beware of opinion masquerading as fact. Conclusions must be supported by evidence, research method, and analysis.
- Correlation is not the same as causation. Different types of research can demonstrate that A and B occur together (are *correlated*) but only a random assignment experimental study can determine that A *causes* B.

- Make sure the research conclusions make sense based on what is already known. Generally, unless your policy issue is extremely new or extremely unique, some knowledge already exists about the issue. High-quality research usually builds on what is already known, serving to enhance and expand understanding.
- Listen to your own voice of common sense, knowledge, and experience. You have knowledge that you bring to the process. Look at research and question findings that do not make sense based on what you know.
- Finally, do not let quality trump relevance. The most outstanding study is of no value to you if it is not relevant to your context and needs. Do not be seduced by high-quality research that is of no relevance. How do you assess relevance? See the guidance below.

Assessing the Relevance of Research



Additional Guidance for Assessing the Relevance of Research

More Explanation	How to Answer the Question
<p>A Knowledge is valuable if it addresses the issue at hand. This seems obvious, but if research about an issue is scant, it can be tempting to accept it and use it rather than treat it as irrelevant and acknowledge that “we just don’t know.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As you review a piece of research, make notes on the top of the page defining the issue addressed and the context. Using the Issue Statement you defined in Dimension 2, compare the research piece with your Issue Statement. Is there a match in issue and context? • Ask an expert who is familiar with your policy issue and context to review the research and determine its suitability for your purposes.
<p>B Not all research is portable. Some research is very context-specific, especially in certain policy issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still uncertain? You can commission a pilot study based on the research to determine its applicability to your issue and context.

After you have assessed the evidence for your policy issue, discuss with colleagues if the knowledge base for the policy issue makes a strong enough case for a change. In some cases, the underlying problem may be due to a lack of knowledge about a particular issue. For example, small class size is a popular policy option, especially in the elementary grades. The research on the actual effects of this strategy on academic achievement is mixed, however, and highly dependent on context. One option for a school board, in response to a community's request for smaller class sizes would be to allocate resources to support a research study that would help determine the possible benefits of such a policy for their district.

Where do you find experts?

The Regional Education Laboratory Program (REL) is a federally funded network of organizations that employ experts on education research and policy. The REL laboratories (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/>) have undergone a strict and rigorous examination by the federal government and have been recognized as qualified providers of education research and policy expertise.

The 13 National Education Research and Development Centers (R&D Centers), also funded by the federal government, focus on specific topics in school improvement and disseminate research reports on a regular basis (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncer/RandD/>).

The What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>) disseminates research that has been evaluated using the strictest metrics for gold standard research.

“Remember, however, that the advice from the ‘experts’ must be evaluated just as carefully as you evaluate other elements of your policy. Ask for references, other scholarly work, and affiliations before accepting the assistance of an expert.”

For a comprehensive list of education policy research organizations, visit www.acenet.edu/resources/policy-research/index.cfm. Remember, however, that the advice from experts must be evaluated just as carefully as you evaluate other elements of your policy. Ask for references, other scholarly work, and affiliations before accepting the assistance of an expert.

Where do you find funds for necessary research?

Government agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (IES) National Center for Educational Research (NCER), fund evaluations of state or local education programs or policies implemented by state or local education agencies. Information on proposal requirements can be found at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncer/funding/>. Additionally, many private foundations that support education also may support education policy research. Occasionally, state legislatures appropriate funds to conduct research to support a proposed initiative.

Looking Around

McREL's research on district- and school-level leadership (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Waters & Marzano, 2006) refers to the importance of “situational awareness.” For policymakers, situational awareness, or, looking around, means being “tuned in” to what's going on in the community and schools, among policy influentials, and how this climate may impact the implementation of a particular policy solution. The following tool can assist in gaining a broader awareness of one's situation as it relates to a policy issue.

Analyzing the Current Political Climate

Effective policy leaders always take time to analyze the current political climate impacting the issue. Policy Tool 2.1 provides a framework for analyzing the political climate. To use the tool, first brainstorm the different “players” involved with your policy issue. Players might be organizations, leaders, coalitions, employees, and others. Second, describe the position that you think each of these groups have taken or might take with regard to the issue. These notations will become useful once your policy solution is fully developed and you wish to develop support for its approval and implementation.

Policy Tool 2.1: Analysis of Current Political Climate

<p>Players</p> <p>List organizations, leaders, and others involved with your policy issue</p>	<p>Position</p> <p>List the position these players take with regard to the issue</p>

Looking Ahead

Finally, before you start to generate policy options that will address your issue, it is important to stretch your thinking and understanding about the issue by examining trends of the future. Policy leaders who wish to craft successful policies that will be sustainable over the long term, look ahead. They take time to consider how trends in multiple domains might affect their policy issue (and possible solutions) in the future. We suggest looking out at least 10 years to see what effect specific trends will have on a policy issue. For example, what will the impact of anticipated baby boomer retirements be on your issue five or ten years from now? Are there certain policy implications for your issue related to the world's growing demand for energy and current and forecasted climate changes? What about technology? What impact will wi-fi clouds and the accelerating advancement of technological innovations have on solving or exacerbating your issue in the future?

Policy leaders who learn more about trends deepen their understanding about the impact a policy might have on the future before becoming too wedded to a particular policy solution that might not hold up over time. Understanding trends helps policy leaders frame issues in ways that produce sustainable solutions for education.

To accomplish this, policy leaders may consider a variety of sources. McREL offers guidance and presentations on trends as drivers of change of the future. Resources and publications are available on our Future of Education Web site at www.mcrel.org/future. The Knowledge Works Foundation also offers the *2020 Forecast: Creating the Future of Learning* on its Web site at www.futureofed.org/. In considering trends that might affect the future of education, be sure to look across several domains of influence such as demographics, economics, globalization, technology, and policy.

“Policy leaders who wish to craft successful policies that will be sustainable over the long term, look ahead. They take time to consider how trends in multiple domains might affect their policy issue (and possible solutions) in the future.”

Policy Tool 2.2 provides a framework for brainstorming and analyzing trends. In the first column, brainstorm and list all of the trends that you are aware of related to the impact area. In the second column, make notes about what these trends indicate to you about the future of education and about your issue in particular. Is your issue likely to continue to be important to the general public a decade or more from now? Who will be most affected by the issue in the future? Is a particular source of funding that you've identified likely to be available to address the issue in the future? What do you anticipate learning and schooling to look like 10 years from now? Are there certain policy solutions that might make more sense in the future than others?

Policy Tool 2.2: Analysis of Trends Affecting the Future of Education

Impact Area	Future Effects How will these trends affect your policy issue over the next 10 years?
<p>Demographics</p> <p>What are the key demographic trends affecting education?</p>	
<p>Economics</p> <p>What are the key economic trends affecting education?</p>	
<p>Globalization</p> <p>What are the key globalization trends affecting education?</p>	
<p>Technology</p> <p>What are the key technology trends affecting education?</p>	
<p>Policy/Politics</p> <p>What are the key policy/political trends affecting education?</p>	

Dimension 3: Deliberation

Deliberation in the policy development process is difficult and time-consuming, but it is a critical step. There is a tendency among busy policy leaders to jump ahead to select the policy solution that they prefer without sufficient deliberation. It is more effective, however, to take the time required to reflect upon the pros and cons of a variety of options, solicit opinions from experts and stakeholders, and to engage in “what if?” conversations with colleagues to explore possible consequences of different policy options before settling on a course of action. The consequences of moving too quickly to options, advocacy, and action include these:

- Generating a narrowly defined option that will not address the root causes of the policy issue or problem.
- Missing the mark in terms of incorporating best practices outlined in research or other sources of information.
- Risking irrelevance if the option is designed to address a long-standing policy problem with only short-term solutions, rather than taking the long view.
- Failing to secure the buy-in of stakeholders when the policy is implemented.

Establishing Agreements on Outcomes, Criteria, and Conditions

Now that you have looked at your issue through the lenses of past research, the current climate, and future trends, you are better equipped to identify policy solutions to address the issue. Part of deliberation includes clarifying the broader goals you have for your policy. That is, there may be specific outcomes you wish to achieve, conditions you would like the policy to meet, constraints or limitations that must be established, or benchmark indicators of success that you would like to measure as the policy is implemented over time.

We recommend that you establish a set of agreements to guide the selection of policy options. The agreements you generate at this stage help you hold yourself accountable for devising and selecting a policy solution that will best address the issue you have framed and defined.

We suggest looking at four different kinds of agreements:

1. **Desired outcomes and indicators of success.** What outcomes do you want to accomplish with this policy? What do you want your policy to achieve? If the policy were successful, what would happen? What indicators will you use to determine if the policy is being effectively implemented?
2. **Evidence of what works.** What evidence of “what works” in education will you use to make sure your policy aligns with the best available research?
3. **Conditions and constraints.** What conditions do you want to make sure that your policy meets? What constraints or limitations exist for different policy solutions? Do you have a specific budget limitation? Are there any policies to which this one must conform?
4. **Relevance to the future.** What trends are important to consider in developing the policy solution? What factors concerning sustainability do you want to consider? How much change are you willing to push for with your policy solution?

Sample Policy Issue: Agreements for Smoking and Public Health



Below is an example of a matrix outlining the possible agreements identified for a group trying to find solutions to the sample policy issue (smoking and public health). The agreements listed are ways in which group members will hold themselves accountable to achieve desired outcomes, build on evidence, and adhere to certain criteria and constraints.

Agreements Reached for Sample Policy Issue (Smoking)

	Desired Outcomes & Indicators of Success	Evidence of What Works	Criteria & Constraints	Relevance to the Future
Agreements	We want to ensure that our proposed policy solution achieves these outcomes and impacts these indicators of success...	We want to ensure that our proposed policy solution adheres to what we know works...	We want to ensure that our proposed policy solution meets these criteria and does not violate these constraints...	We want to ensure that our proposed policy solution will have a long term effect, be sustainable, and be positioned to both optimize and transform the system...
Policy Issue: Lung cancer caused by smoking is on the rise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces incidence of lung cancer caused by smoking • Promotes a healthy lifestyle among population • Causes fewer people to smoke • Improves early detection • Reduces youth smoking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is based on the best available research on prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is easy to implement • Targets high poverty communities • Focuses on prevention and education of young people • Does not cost more than \$1 million dollars • Does not require schools to change their curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand up to and optimize the biotechnological and pharmaceutical trends and advancements likely to develop in the future

Policy Tool 3.1 is a blank matrix for outlining the different kinds of agreements you will adhere to when selecting a policy solution. Consider the discussion questions (see p. 21) and record the various agreements that you reach in the appropriate columns.

Policy Tool 3.1: Establishing Agreements for Proposed Policy Solutions

	Desired Outcomes & Indicators of Success	Evidence of What Works	Conditions & Constraints	Relevance to the Future
Agreements	We want to ensure that our proposed policy solution achieves these outcomes and impacts these indicators of success...	We want to ensure that our proposed policy solution adheres to what we know works...	We want to ensure that our proposed policy solution meets these conditions and does not violate these constraints...	We want to ensure that our proposed policy solution will have a long term effect, be sustainable, and be positioned to both optimize and transform the system...
Your List of Agreements about Your Policy Issue “Our policy proposal should...”				

Identifying Possible Solutions

Now that you have identified the agreements that you will use to evaluate and ultimately select the best policy option, you are ready to brainstorm various policy solutions to address your issue. Here, the goal is to identify a comprehensive set of options that will address the agreed-upon cause(s) of the issue and that are aligned with your policy agreements. Below, are examples of possible policy options that address the sample policy issue of smoking and public health.

Sample Policy Issue: Policy for Smoking and Public Health

- Option 1: Ban smoking for all.
- Option 2: Develop an educational/prevention campaign in schools.
- Option 3: Invest in research to develop a new anti-cancer drug.
- Option 4: Require early screening for lung cancer.
- Option 5: Increase sales tax on cigarettes by 50 percent.



Use Policy Tool 3.2 to generate 5–6 policy options to consider. Each policy option generated should address the policy issue and honor at least one of your agreements; together, your options should offer a range of alternatives from which to choose.

Policy Tool 3.2: Generating Policy Options

Proposed Policy Options

To address our policy issue and honor at least one of our agreements, we should...

Policy Option A

Policy Option B

Policy Option C

Policy Option D

Policy Option E

**Policy Option F
(optional)**

You now have a variety of options that address your policy issue and honor at least one of your agreements. How, then, do you select the *best* option? Selecting an option with deliberation is more than simply choosing the best policy or policies from among several options. It requires careful consideration of each option in light of the available evidence to support it and the established agreements.

Weighing Policy Options against Established Agreements

“There is a tendency among busy policy leaders to jump ahead to select the policy solution that they prefer without sufficient deliberation.”

To assist in this important process, we offer Policy Tool 3.3 (see p. 29), a simple technical tool providing a quantitative, objective method for evaluating the options you have generated against your established agreements. It allows you to take a first look at how your options stack up against your aspirations for the policy, as represented by the agreements you have already made.

The following six steps will guide you through the process of using this tool.

Step 1: Identify Agreements. Refer back to the agreements you generated using Policy Tool 3.1. Number each of the agreements you identified and list them across the top of the table as Agreement 1, Agreement 2, Agreement 3, and so on.

Step 2: Apply Weights to Priority Agreements. Review your agreements and determine which ones should receive greater priority than the others. Indicate a +1 or -1 in the “Weights” row under the corresponding agreement. For example, if one of your priorities is to ensure that the cost stays within a certain budget, you might want to give additional weight to this agreement. As you score each policy option, you would give it a +1 if the option promotes the agreement, and a -1 if it works against it. *Weighting your agreements is an optional step. If you decide that all of your agreements are equally important, weights are unnecessary. In this case, leave the “Weights” row blank.*

Step 3: List Policy Options. Refer back to the policy options you generated using Policy Tool 3.2. List them down the left hand column of the matrix.

Step 4: Score the Policy Options. Do the next steps individually first, and then compile your results as a group. Read through each of the policy options you have listed. As you consider each one, ask yourself if it is a proposed solution that will promote the agreement, work against the agreement, or have an unknown or no effect on the agreement. If you have the opportunity to complete this exercise with colleagues, score each policy option individually first, and then deliberate with your colleagues to identify where there is consensus and where you may need to reconcile any differences.

Assign the following scores to each policy option, based on its effect on each agreement:

Score a **+1** if the policy option *promotes the agreement*

Score a **-1** if the policy option *works against the agreement*

Score a **0** if the policy option will have *an unknown or no effect on the agreement*

Step 5: Apply Weights. Once you have scored each policy option, return to the agreement columns where you determined that a weight should be applied. Add an additional +1 to any other +1 score appearing in the column for a policy option that has been identified to promote that agreement. Add a -1 to any other -1 score appearing in the column for a policy option that has been identified to work against the agreement. Repeat these steps for other agreements that you want to prioritize with weights.

Step 6: Total the Scores. You are now ready to total the scores applied to each policy option. Add up all of the scores assigned to each policy option and record the total in the right hand column.

Sample Policy Issue: Deliberating on Smoking and Public Health



Returning to our lung cancer example, below is a sample deliberation process on selecting the best policy option to address this issue. First, remember the agreements that were generated earlier:

Sample Deliberation on Selecting the Best Option to Address Lung Cancer Issue

<p>Example Agreements:</p> <p>Policy Issue: Lung cancer caused by smoking is on the rise</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces incidence of lung cancer caused by smoking • Promotes a healthy lifestyle among population • Causes fewer people to smoke • Improves early detection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is based on the best available research on prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is easy to implement • Targets high poverty communities • Focuses on prevention and education of young people • Does not cost more than \$1 million dollars • Does not require schools to change their curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stands up to and optimizes the biotechnological and pharmaceutical trends and advancements likely to develop in the future
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	Agreement 1	Agreement 2	Agreement 3	Agreement 4	Agreement 5	
Agreements	Reduces incidences of lung cancer	Causes fewer people to smoke	Is easy to implement	Targets high poverty communities	Does not cost more than \$1 million	Total
Weights (optional +1 or -1)	(+1) if promotes (-1) if works against	No weight applied	No weight applied	No weight applied	(+1) if promotes (-1) if works against	
Policy Option A Ban smoking	+1 (+1)	0	-1	0	+1 (+1)	3
Policy Option B Education program	0	0	+1	+1	0	2
Policy Option C Invest in anti-cancer drug research	+1 (+1)	-1	-1	-1	-1 (-1)	-3
Policy Option D Require early screening	0	0	+1	0	+1 (+1)	3
Policy Option E Increase sales tax on cigarettes	0	+1	+1	+1	+1 (+1)	5

Based on these results, the best policy option to address the policy issue of lung cancer, within the scope of the agreements reached—especially keeping the costs below \$1 million—would be Policy Option E, to raise taxes on cigarettes. The options of banning smoking (Policy Option A) and requiring early screening (Policy Option D) also seem to offer some merit. Policy leaders interested in reducing the incidence of lung cancer would do well to consider all three of these options as they move forward to address this pressing issue.

Now it's your turn to deliberate and identify the best policy solution to address your policy issue. Follow steps 1–6 (pp. 26–27) to complete Policy Tool 3.3.

Policy Tool 3.3: Deliberating to Select the Best Policy Option

	Agreement 1	Agreement 2	Agreement 3	Agreement 4	Agreement 5	
Agreements						Total
Weights (optional +1 or -1)						
Policy Option A						
Policy Option B						
Policy Option C						
Policy Option D						
Policy Option E						

Selecting the Best Policy Option

In some cases, the priority policy option will be quite clear as a result of the deliberation process—it will be the option with the highest score on the matrix, and everyone involved in your policy development effort will be in agreement. If this happens, you are ready to move forward to further develop the details of your policy solution, an action plan for gaining its approval, and guidance for implementation.

In other cases, selecting your policy option may not be as simple as following the steps outlined above. In some cases, you may have more than one policy option with a high score. If this happens, you will need to spend additional time deliberating with colleagues about the best option available. This situation may best be handled by presenting two or more alternatives for the consideration of policymakers and others. Your deliberation process will have eliminated some policy options so that your discussion can remain focused on identifying the best among fewer options.

If you are evaluating and deliberating on policy options with a group of people, you might score the policy options differently and yield different results from your colleagues. If this happens, you should spend additional time deliberating with colleagues about the best option available. This situation also may be best handled by presenting two or more alternatives for the consideration of policymakers and others.

Dimension 4: Implementation

Taking Inventory of Capacities

Implementing the policy option should begin with an examination of your organization's ability to effect change. An analysis of your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) is a helpful first step.

Ask yourself, what strengths do we, as an organization, have with regard to this policy solution? What weaknesses do we have? Your answers to these questions reveal your internal capacities relative to the policy solution in question. Next, ask what opportunities exist for your organization relative to the policy solution in question. What threats might exist? Answers to these questions reveal information external to your organization. Together, your responses to the SWOT analysis will help you consider the overall implications of the policy solution for your organization, and your capacity to respond.

Below, is a SWOT analysis for our sample policy issue.

Sample Policy Issue: Taking Inventory of Capacities on Smoking and Public Health



In our example, the policy option of raising taxes on cigarettes was selected as the best choice among several options considered as a way to reduce the incidence of lung cancer caused by smoking. Let's assume that the advocacy group that developed the policy is the Detroit chapter of the American Cancer Society in the state of Michigan. This is the organization that now must attempt to implement the policy. Below, is how the SWOT might look for this group.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">American Cancer Society has strong name recognition with legislators.Chapter president is former state legislator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fundraising last year was down 10%.Newly hired executive director has no lobbying experience.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Recent public opinion poll showed strong concern about rise in youth smoking.Pew Foundation study showing high costs to all caused by need to provide long-term health care to smokers has caused a national uproar.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Economic conditions in Michigan are extremely poor, making any kind of tax hike unpopular.Recent attempt to ban smoking in all public places was soundly defeated by a strong pro-smoker's lobby.

Policy Tool 4.1 provides space for you to complete your own SWOT. Remember, strengths and weaknesses refer to *your own* capacities; opportunities and threats refer to the *external environment*.

Policy Tool 4.1: SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

At this point in the policy development process you, as a policy leader, ought to be asking, what are the points of leverage related to my proposed solution upon which I can build? You should also be aware of the degree to which your solution has a likelihood of advancing to the next stage. For example, Kingdon (2003) offers a set of criteria for successful policy solutions which includes examining these aspects: 1) technical feasibility (*is it do-able?*), 2) value acceptability (*does it align with peoples' values?*), 3) tolerable cost (*is it affordable?*), 4) anticipated public response (*will the public like or dislike it?*), and 5) receptivity of elected officials (*how will elected officials respond to the proposed solution?*). The goal at this stage is to position the format and approach to your policy solution in such a way as to improve its chances for success.

Developing the Policy Proposal

If your policy solution is a resolution or legislative bill, then the policy proposal will be a draft of these documents written in the style appropriate to these governing bodies. If your policy solution is the launching of a new initiative, then your policy proposal might be a strategic plan or a concept paper. An effective policy proposal will clearly state the issue, articulate supportive evidence from research, and describe how it will solve the problem.

Policy may be very broad or highly prescriptive, resulting in different conditions for those responsible for implementation. Although policy leaders are frequently admonished not to “micromanage” and to leave the implementation to the administrators, success or failure of a policy frequently depends upon the effectiveness of its implementation. Therefore, strong policy leaders are thoughtful about implementation while they are developing policy solutions, and they attend to the strategic issues surrounding implementation that could support or sabotage the outcomes. One way to accomplish this is by paying attention to three aspects: 1) identifying key stakeholders, 2) identifying assets, and 3) creating an action plan.

Identifying Key Stakeholders

Take some time to consider who the important stakeholders will be to both win approval for and successfully implement your policy solution. Refer back to your list of “players and positions” in the analysis of political climate (Policy Tool 2.1), and add more details now that you have a policy solution in mind. Categorize your players as “champions” who may facilitate the acceptance and successful implementation of your policy solution and “opponents” who may hinder its acceptance and implementation. Use Policy Tool 4.2 to identify the champions and opponents associated with your policy solution.

Sample Policy Issue: Identifying Key Stakeholders for Smoking and Public Health



Champions	Opponents
Medical professionals	Anti-tax organizations
Cancer societies	Tobacco companies
Health and wellness organizations	
Youth organizations	

Policy Tool 4.2: Identifying Champions and Opponents

Champions	Opponents
May facilitate the acceptance and implementation of the policy	May hinder the acceptance and implementation of the policy

Identifying Assets

Next, identify the capacities and resources available to ensure successful adoption and implementation of the policy. One way to think about this step is as an inventory of assets, both tangible and intangible, that support successful passage and implementation of your policy option (Kaplan & Norton, 2004). Tangible assets include financial and physical resources. Intangible assets involve a shared vision, shared assumptions, and shared ideals and beliefs (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). For example, if your policy option involves passing a ballot issue, you will need financial resources (tangible assets) to mount a campaign. You will also need to have the backing of key opinion leaders in your community (intangible assets) who you can rely upon to support the measure in both formal and informal ways throughout the campaign. Policy Tool 4.3 can be used to help you identify relevant tangible and intangible assets for your policy solution.

Policy Tool 4.3: Identifying Tangible and Intangible Assets

Questions

1. Do you have adequate data or research to support your policy solution? If not, what do you need?
2. Do you have access to sufficient political capital to convince others to adopt your policy? If not, what do you need?
3. Do you have access to sufficient personal capital (intellectual ability, time, motivation) to advance your policy? If not, what do you need?
4. Do you have access to sufficient financial resources to advance and carry out your policy? If not, what do you need?

Creating an action plan

Finally, develop an action plan that identifies the responsible parties and timelines for at least the following activities:

- Obtaining the necessary information about the legislative or other processes required for adoption and implementation of the policy.
- Gathering research-based evidence to support the policy option.
- Implementing mechanisms for identifying and including all stakeholders.
- Determining a budget and strategies for funding the policy.
- Recruiting public champions for the policy.
- Gaining public understanding and acceptance of the policy.

Dimension 5: Evaluation

Identifying Indicators for Evaluating Success

Effective policy leaders plan ahead for their policies to be thoroughly evaluated in both formative and summative ways, and then they respond to the evaluative information by making appropriate changes to the policy, including terminating policies that no longer meet their goals.

A rigorous evaluation should consider indicators of success that the policy was intended to meet. Effective policy leaders build appropriate indicators into the policy development process.

Sample Policy Issue: Evaluating Smoking and Public Health

In the box below are listed some potential indicators and sources of data that could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the taxation policy. An important reason to complete this exercise is to identify evaluation methods that should be initiated before the policy is implemented. If surveys are going to be used, a baseline survey might be required before the tax is implemented. Similarly, tracking mechanisms for cigarette purchasing may need to be put in place.



Tools for Policy Evaluation

List the indicators you will use to evaluate the policy

- Reduced cigarette purchasing
- Reduced incidence of cancer
- Reduced incidence of smoking

Identify the sources of data you would look to in order to evaluate the policy

- State taxation data
- State health records
- Survey data

Policy Tool 5.1 provides space for you to record the indicators of success you will use as well as available sources of data to evaluate your policy.

Policy Tool 5.1: Evaluating the Policy

Tools for Policy Evaluation	
List the indicators you will use to evaluate the policy.	Identify the sources of data you will look to in order to evaluate the policy.

Conclusion

As policy issues in education become more and more complex and require more thoughtful and deliberate solutions, effective policy leaders play a critical role in education reform. Success for America's students in the 21st century depends upon forward thinking leaders who can bring to bear the full measure of their intelligence, creativity, and knowledge to solve the complex problems posed by the goal of leaving no child behind. With the help of this guide and by taking the time to look back, look around, and to look ahead, we believe leaders in the policy arena will be well-equipped to join other education stakeholders in the important work of preparing our nation's children for the future.

“As policy issues in education become more and more complex and require more thoughtful and deliberate solutions, effective policy leaders play a critical role in education reform.”

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