EDUCATION POLICY ANALYSIS ARCHIVES

Examining the Streams of a Retention Policy To Understand the Politics of High-Stakes Reform[1]

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Abstract
Using John Kingdon's (2003) multiple streams approach to agenda setting, I analyze how key actors within the state of Wisconsin understood the need to construct and implement the state's *No Social Promotion* statutes to improve students' academic performance. Policymakers within the state focused their standards-based reforms on the issue of improving students' academic performance through increasing accountability. In doing so, they did not see these high-stakes policies as a form of punishment for those who fail, but rather, as a tool to focus the education establishment on improving the academic skills and knowledge of all their students. Thus, the retained student is not the primary concern of the policymaker, but rather, the retained student demonstrates the state's system of accountability works. Raising the question as to whether those who support or oppose high-stakes policies such as these should focus their efforts on the agenda setting process rather than analyzing effects of such policies. I contend that while evaluating a policy's effects is important, education stakeholders must pay attention to all three streams of the

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[1] I would like to thank the editor, Sherman Dorn, and the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions in strengthening this article.

agenda setting process as they promote particular reforms to improve students' academic performance.

Keywords: education reform; high-stakes accountability; retention.

Examinando las políticas de corrientes de retención para entender las reformas de políticas educativas de "consecuencias severas"

Resumen
Utilizando el modelo de John Kingdon (2003) de corrientes múltiples para entender la configuración de una agenda de políticas, investigue como actores clave en el estado de Wisconsin entendían la necesidad de construir e implementar reformas que no incluían sistemas de promoción social para mejorar los resultados del desempeño académico de los estudiantes. Los políticos en el estado enfocaron la reforma en el objetivo de mejorar el desempeño de los estudiantes a través de aumentar los sistemas de evaluación-responsables ("accountability"). Al hacer esto quienes decidían esas políticas, no consideraban que las mismas no castigaban a quienes no aprobaban los cursos, sino como una herramienta para orientar los esfuerzos del "establishment" educativo en mejorar las habilidades académicas y conocimiento de los estudiantes. De esta manera los estudiantes que eran retenidos no eran la principal consideración de los políticos, sino que los estudiantes retenidos demostraban que el sistema de evaluación-responsable del estado estaba funcionando. Haciendo la pregunta acerca de si aquellos que apoyan o se oponen a la políticas de "consecuencias severas" deberían enfocar sus esfuerzos en el proceso de establecer esas agendas, en vez de analizar los efectos de esas políticas, yo propongo que mientras evaluar los efectos de esas políticas es muy importante, los que deciden esas políticas deberían prestar atención a las tres corrientes del proceso de determinación de la agenda para mejorar el desempeño académico de los estudiantes.

Palabras claves: reformas educativas; evaluaciones con "consecuencias severas"; retención

Introduction

The debate over the use of retention as tool to improve students' academic performance has been going on for decades (e.g., Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 2003; Sashkin and Egermeir, 1993; Smith, & Shepard, 1987). Recently, the use of high-stakes promotion policies at the state (e.g., Florida) and district level (e.g., Chicago) that require students to perform at a specific level of proficiency on a assessment measure to advance to the next grade level have brought this issue back to forefront of education research (e.g., Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Jacobs & Lefgren, 2004; Roderick, Nagaoka, Bacon, & Easton, 2000). Within the education community, untangling the debate over the effectiveness of these policies to improve students' academic performance involves understanding the political and empirical conceptions of this type of reform measure.

Politically, the implementation of retention policies have had an inconsistent history at the national, state, and local level whereby one administration might support these policies and the next eliminate them altogether (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005; Shepard & Smith, 1989). However, recent

actions by policymakers at the national (e.g., Clinton, 1998; Office of the White House, 2006) and state levels of government (e.g., Texas, Florida) have solidified retention as a major component of the standards-based accountability reform movement. This political backing for retention is rooted in a twofold logic. First, the current systems of education in the United States (U.S.) possess a fatal flaw—they socially promote students (advancing them to the next grade level simply because they turn a year older). To correct this flaw, specific performance criteria must be put in place for students to meet to move forward to the next grade. Failure to meet the performance criteria results in retention. Imbedded in this logic for the need of retention policies is the belief that the threat of repeating a grade level will motivate students to perform their best on the required academic measures—increasing the performance of all students.

Muddling this logic is empirical research. Studies over the past 30 years have consistently shown that teacher retention (e.g., Holmes, 1989) and retention based on a student's level of proficiency on a high-stakes test offer little positive effect for students' academic careers (e.g. Roderick & Nagoaka, 2005). While some studies have shown an immediate increase in retained students' test scores (e.g., Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 2003; Jacobs & Lefgren, 2004) and an improvement in test scores among those who achieve proficiency (e.g., Allensworth, 2005), retention dramatically increases the likelihood that the retained student will leave the education system and continue to perform poorly on these standardized assessments (e.g., Alexander et al., 2003; Allensworth, 2005; Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997; Meisels, 1992; Perterson, DeGracie, & Ayabe, 1987; Reynolds, 1992; Roderick & Nagoaka, 2005; Shepard & Smith, 1986). For instance, Alexander et al. (2003) found the students' test scores in their sample increased after retention, but they also found that retaining students significantly increased the likelihood that they will not complete high school. These findings led Alexander et al. (2003) to argue for a more flexible education system that does not have low performing students merely repeat the same grade a second time. However, they conclude that the current framing of grade retention within U.S. public schools, which typically has students simply repeat the same grade, offers an "early positive" but "later negative effect" for these students (p. ix). While these reforms measures produce an uneven set of results, many educational researchers believe that the immediate short-term gains in test scores do not outweigh the long-lasting negative effects that result from this intervention (e.g., Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005).

This conflict between a 'logic' rooted in notions of common sense and accountability versus a history of empirical evidence that questions such reasoning creates a tenuous policy and research environment--particularly since the opposing sides in this debate of the use of retention both want to improve students' academic performance (Cusick, 1992).

Amplifying this debate over how to improve students' academic performance is the federal government's renewal of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) in 2002, typically referred to as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). While this act does not mandate states that receive Title 1 funding to implement any type of retention policy, it does require them to have 95% of their students in grade 3 through 8 score at the proficient level on the state assessments by 2014. These increased academic performance expectations have the potential to influence what types of accountability policies state policymakers might put in place to improve students' academic performance.

A Case Approach

For this case study, I use John Kingdon's (2003) multiple streams approach to agenda setting to analyze how education policymakers and stakeholders in Wisconsin justified the need to construct

and implement the state's *No Social Promotion* statutes as a means to improve students' academic performance.[2] Through this analysis, I contend that state policymakers implement retention-based policies not to hold students back but rather to instill accountability into the education system, and thus, empirical research that analyzes whether these policies improve the retained student's academic performance misses the point. Furthermore, this case study, like many others (e.g., Roderick, Bryk, Jacob, Easton, & Allensworth, 1999), demonstrates that these retention policies do achieve many of the policymakers' goals by motivating a large urban district to center its resources on improving their students' academic performance.

A unique feature in this case is that the Wisconsin Legislature and former Republican Governor Tommy Thompson had to amend the state's original *No Social Promotion* (NSP) statutes from a single indicator to a multiple indicator system. This call for change emerged from a set of constituents who typically aligned their views with the Governor and his party's legislators. The debate over amending the statutes did not center on retention, but rather, on the issues of local control and a one-size-fits-all approach. In particular, state policymakers mandating that local school district personnel use their students' test scores on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) to determine whether they would advance from 4th to 5th or 8th to 9th grade. These actions demonstrate that the debate over improving students' academic performance through high-stakes policies is a political rather than empirical issue.

This raises the question as to whether those who support or oppose policies such as these should focus their efforts on the agenda setting process rather than effects of such policies. While evaluating a policy's effects is important, education stakeholders must pay attention to the politics of policy formulation and offer viable policy alternatives that improve students' academic performance if they are to alter the policy agenda.

Kingdon's Multiple Stream Model

This case study of reform can be viewed micropolitically (Marshall & Scribner, 1991), as competing arenas (Fowler, 1994; Mazzoni, 1991), a series of games (Firestone, 1989), and so on. For this article, I use Kingdon's multiple streams model to analyze how policymakers understand the use of retention as a policy lever to eliminate social promotion. By bringing their understanding of the policy problem to the forefront, I raise the question as to whether the current emphasis on evaluating the effects of these reforms on students' academic performance within education research affects policymakers' decisions to implement these types of high-stakes policies.

For Kingdon (2003), developing policy is a process that includes, at a minimum, the following: the setting of the agenda; specifying alternatives from which a policy choice is to be made; making a choice from the alternatives (i.e., by the president, a governor, or the legislature); and implementing the decision. While this rough outline of the policymaking process seems to follow a lock-step approach, Kingdon does not view policymaking as a linear process that progresses through a series of stages. Rather, Kingdon (2003) conceptualized his multiple streams model to consider "why some subjects rise on governmental agendas while others are neglected, and why people in and

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[2] I presented a version of this paper at the Annual Conference of the American Education Research Association in San Francisco on April 14, 2006.

around government pay serious attention to some alternatives at the expense of others" (p. 196). His concern is not with how policymakers make their final decisions but rather "why participants deal with certain issues and neglect others" (p. 196).

Kingdon (2003) centers his analysis on three explanations as to how government agendas are set: problems, politics, and visible participants. This agenda setting process evolves out of the coupling of three independently operating streams within the policy process: the problems stream, the policies stream, and the politics stream. Simply put, "people recognize problems, they generate proposals for public policy changes, and they engage in such political activities as election campaigns and pressure group lobbying (p. 197).

While researchers question whether these separate streams of problems, policies, and politics exist and operate independently within the policy process (e.g., Mucciaroni, 1991), there are times when an opportunity for change arises (e.g., a pressing problem, political event, such as an election, or a budget cycle). When what Kingdon (2003) terms a "policy window" opens, it is "an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems . . .opportunities for action on given initiatives"(pp. 173–174).

It is the "policy entrepreneur" who couples these streams into a package to address the issue at hand. However, open policy windows do not necessarily create policy change. It is the role of the policy entrepreneur to take advantage of this open window, or it will be lost—which means the entrepreneur must wait for the next window (Kingdon, 2003). To take advantage of this window of opportunity, the policy entrepreneur must be persistent as well skilled at coupling the solution to the problem and finding policymakers willing to take on their ideas. While an issue's chances gain prominence with the coupling of two streams, its chance for success rises significantly when all three streams are coupled together. Policy windows open in the problem stream (e.g., a plane crash) and the political stream (e.g., outcome of an election). Some windows are predictable (e.g., biennial budget cycle) others are not (e.g., natural disaster).

state policymakers' AYP requirements--including such steps as having state or district education officials reconstituting their school (Goertz et al., 2001).

While IASA was a predictable policy window, it did not require the state to implement high-stakes accountability measures. Rather, Thompson coupled the state's retention statutes, which, like most policy solutions, constantly floats in the policy stream, with a series of additional standards-based accountability reforms to address a rising concern over the effectiveness of the state's education system. This concern emerged from the convergence of varying data sources. One source was the publication of statewide student test results on which the students performed at the average range in all content area except writing where students performed below the national average (Bougie, 1994). A second was a survey released by the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce Association (WMC), which found 61% of the executives in their organization did not believe that the state's primary and secondary schools were adequately preparing children for work after high school (Bergquist, 1994). A third source was the release of Education Week's Quality Counts report in January 1997, which questioned the rigor of Wisconsin's education system. The authors of the report gave Wisconsin's public schools low marks across the board. In terms of standards and assessments, the report stated, "Wisconsin is no pacesetter in developing academic standards" and gave the state a B- (Associated Press, 1997).

These concerns over students' academic performance were somewhat new to the state. The majority of Wisconsin's students have historically performed at the top on numerous national education markers--e.g. the ACT (a college entrance exam), the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and a high school graduation rate above the national average (e.g., see WEAC, 2005; Henry, 1993).[3]

Thompson saw standards-based accountability (SBA) reform as another means to "shake up the status quo" to improve students' academic performance (Mayers, 1995; Thompson, 1996). However, prior to implementing his high-stakes SBA agenda, Thompson, like many governors at that time, took on an entrepreneurial persona towards education reform. Using this persona, Thompson (1996) framed himself as someone who was not part of what he termed the "education establishment of government bureaucracy" and promoted market-based reforms to change the state's education systems (p. 87). Some of his policies were successful—establishing the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE), which was one the first indicators of poor student performance. Other reforms failed—attempting to eliminate the position of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, which the State Supreme Court rejected, and slashing funding for the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in the 1995–1997 biennium budget. Either way, Thompson (1996) offered a constant stream of policy alternatives that shook up the education establishment and "softened" the state legislature and the electorate in such a way that many of his policy solutions begin to pass through the state's most predictable policy window, its biennial budget (Kingdon, 2003).

Thompson's success in pushing through the policy window many pieces of his education reform agenda was aided by the fact that Republicans controlled both houses of the state legislature from 1994 through the 1998 elections, which created a significant force for amending his education

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[3] In Wisconsin, a dramatic achievement gap exists, particularly in Milwaukee. For instance, Greene, Winters, and Forster (2003), using year 2000 data, rated Wisconsin as having the highest disparity in high school graduation rates between black and white students. Only 40% of black students in WI graduate, compared to a national average of 56 percent; 92% of white WI students graduate, compared to a national average of 78%.

agenda within the state. Unlike the U.S. Congress, the Wisconsin Legislature is, as an administrator from the Department of Administration stated, "Extraordinarily majority-party controlled. There is no filibustering. If you're in the minority party, you have very little influence," and thus, Thompson had ample political support to achieve his education goals.

Former Governor Thompson continued to challenge the status quo by working independently from DPI to address the requirements put forth by IASA. When Thompson signed legislation to eliminate the Superintendent and financially cripple DPI, he created the Governor's Advisory Taskforce on Education and Learning, which worked to formulate educational polices on standards, assessment and accountability.[4] Thompson saw high-stakes SBA reforms as "the next step in laying a clear plan for greater performance and accountability measures for students and schools" (Thompson cited in Mayers, 1996, p. A1).[5]

Benson and DPI, both of whom Thompson attempted to eliminate from the reform process, tried to take control of the education agenda setting process by releasing the first of what they hoped to be three drafts of content and performance standards for the state's schools in the fall of 1996. The Governor's office, through former Lieutenant Governor Scott McCallum, immediately criticized Benson and DPI's work (Karraker, 1996; Wideman, 1996), and political interest groups, such as the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute (WPRI), and a parents group, Parents Raising Educational Standards in Schools (PRESS), questioned these reforms put forward by Benson and DPI (Brinkman, 1996).[6]

In his 1997 State of the State message, Thompson offered his own policy alternative to Benson/DPI's work by putting forward a set of content standards,[7] reintroducing a proposed a high school graduation test, which he promoted the year before, and called for the elimination of social promotion.

The details of these political interactions can become tedious. The primary point is that an escalation in how to respond to this issue of poor student performance emerges between Benson/DPI and Thompson. Both Benson and Thompson portrayed themselves as leaders in education by putting forth ideas that demanded improved academic performance by all students and a stricter level of accountability. The key political idea within this political framing of the problem of

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[4] While Benson was excluded from the Governor's Taskforce, he did not disappear from the state education scene; through DPI, he had secured a federal grant to create the content and performance requirements that were put forward by IASA.

[5] Thompson also promoted these reforms at the national level. As chairman of the National Governors Association and the Education Commission of the State, he advocated for the establishment of a national clearinghouse on education standards, which became known as Achieve (www.achieve.org), so that stakeholders and the business community can know which states and districts have the best schools and "to put pressure on the states that are not doing the job" (Thomspon cited in Miller, 1996, p. A1).

[6] The WPRI was one of many interests groups that the Bradley Foundation provided funding to (go to http://www.mediatransparency.org) within the state that aligned the organizations conservative agenda (Leverich, 1998). The WPRI issued papers that typically garnered media attention. Advocates representing the WPRI wrote papers promoting issues such as the elimination of the state superintendent, the expansion of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, and a pay-for-performance plan for teachers.

[7] Thompson's standards were an edited version of the Hudson Institute's *Modern Red Schoolhouse Standards* (Mayers, 1997).

poor student performance is not that the state is socially promoting too many kids. Rather, Wisconsin's schools are not providing a rigorous education system for their students. This intense debate over the direction of Wisconsin's education system "softened" both the legislature and the electorate to the idea that standards-based reforms must be put in place to fix this problem of Wisconsin's low performing students (Kingdon, 2003, p. 128).

Eventually, Thompson and Benson realized the political chaos that this fragmented process of releasing two sets of standards-based reforms might cause the state's local school districts. They settled upon a compromise to pursue the state's standards-based reforms through a committee co-chaired by the Lieutenant Governor and Superintendent Benson.

In 1998, the State Legislature passed the 1997–1999 biennial budget, which is the primary vehicle for setting the education agenda in Wisconsin. It included Wisconsin Act 237, which put in place Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards (WMAS), defining content standards in reading/language arts, math, science, and social studies, the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) requirement, the High School Graduation Test (HSGT), and the state's *No Social Promotion* (NSP) statutes. The NSP statutes required all Wisconsin school districts, starting in the 2002–2003 academic school year, to retain students in grades four and eight if they did not score at least a basic score on the state's WKCE, and HSGT was to become the sole determinant for high school graduation (DPI, 2000).

While the WMAS eventually garnered a large amount of support at the state and local levels, mixed support existed for the state's new performance requirements (Davis, 1998a). The primary concern centered on the issue of using only a student's test score to determine whether she is promoted to the next grade level or receives a high school diploma. Conservative white middle-class community-based organizations, such as the Advocates for Education of Whitefish Bay, school-based organizations, such as the Port Washington-Saukville School Board and the Janesville School Board, and education organizations such as the Wisconsin Education Association Council, the Wisconsin Association of State School Boards, and the Wisconsin Parents and Teachers Association rallied their constituents and lobbied various state legislators to amend the statutes (Davis, 1998b).

In the November 1998 election, the Democrats gained control of the State Senate. This altered the structure of who could push policies through the state's legislative window. In Wisconsin, the State Legislature introduces education legislation, typically through appropriation bills. Then, the Governor, using his/her veto power, which includes the line-item veto, can approve or reject the state's education legislation. The change in control of Senate fractured the unified party voice between the Legislative and Executive Branch. So as the voices of dissent over the HSGT and the NSP statutes mounted, this change in the legislative power structure caused state policymakers to reexamine this legislation (Brinkman, 1998; Davis, 1998b).

While Thompson and his administration initially resisted such changes (Davis, 1998b), the mounting political pressure "tipped" Thompson towards signing the Legislature's budget repair bill on October 4, 1999 to avoid the political fallout that might result from opposing a change to the NSP statutes from his own constituents--e.g., the Advocates for Whitefish Bay (Gladwell, 2000; Kingdon, 2003, p. 161). Amended Statute 118.30 under Wisconsin Act 9 expanded the NSP statutes from a single indicator system to a multiple indicator system. The "burden of adjustment" to these policies was now in the hands of the local districts rather than the state policymakers (Kingdon, 2003, p, 110). School districts were to determine grade promotion to the 5th and 9th grades on a set of multiple factors, including the student's WKCE score, and school districts were to adopt a written policy specifying the criteria that they would use to award a high school diploma, which was to include a student's HSGT score (DPI, 2000). Retention was still the result for failing to meet a school district's promotion requirements.

The High School Graduation Test was in a position to remain a part of the state's system of accountability, but the departure of Thompson in 2001, a change in administrations in the 2002 election (what Kingdon terms "key personnel"), and the high cost of the HSGT in a time of budget deficits and social uneasiness over high-stakes reforms led to its eventual demise (Borsuk, 2001).[8]

This "muddled" process of pushing Wisconsin's NSP statutes through the policy window results from the coupling of the problem of poor student performance, which became evident through the publication of key indicators and the concerns of constituency groups, with the politics of high expectations and accountability by Thompson, his administration, and DPI (McLaughlin, 1987). By embedding the NSP statutes in IASA's requirements, which provided a necessary source of funding for Wisconsin's public schools, Thompson was able to push these statutes through the state's most predictable window, its biennial budget. However, Thompson's success in pushing the NSP statutes through the policy window met stiff resistance from many of his and the Republican-led Legislature's constituents. Thus, the Legislature responded to critics within the political stream by amending the NSP statutes to a multiple-indicator retention policy (a policy alternative). While Thompson initially resisted such a change, he eventually joined this political "bandwagon," and the statutes remain a part of Wisconsin's standards-based accountability policies (Kingdon, 2003, p. 161).

Kingdon's (2003) agenda setting process is a conceptual tool that categorizes political actions taken by stakeholders within the policy process. It offers a descriptive and interpretive device to examine how visible actors in the political stream understood the problem of social promotion and justified the need for these state's statutes to be pushed through the policy window (Holderness, 1992). Using Kingdon's model, I illuminate how policymakers continue to frame retention policies as a part of the need to hold schools, teachers, and students accountable, and thus, any proposed policy alternative to this issue of correcting social promotion must address these education stakeholders' concerns over accountability.

Methods

The Case

The research presented in this article is from an instrumental case study that examined the formulation and implementation of a Wisconsin high-stakes accountability policy at the state and school district level (Stake, 1995; 2000; Yinn, 1994).[9] Former Governor Thompson signed Wisconsin's NSP statutes into law in 1998. The State Legislature amended them in 1999, and the statutes went into effect during the 2002–2003 school year.

For this article, I focus on how education stakeholders at the state and district level construct the problem of social promotion. Within my interview protocol (Yin, 1989), I asked each participant

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[8] In this election, Jim Doyle defeated former lieutenant governor Scott Jensen. Jensen took Thompson's position as governor when Thompson left for D. C in 2001. Interestingly, Jim Doyle was the former attorney general who defended the constitutionality of the State Superintendent's position when Thompson attempted to eliminate it in 1995.

to describe the origin of the political problem of social promotion within Wisconsin. Furthermore, I had them describe the types of communication and negotiation took place across the various levels of policy formulation and implementation (Rist, 2000).

This instrumental case study of high-stakes accountability reform in Wisconsin provides insight into how education stakeholders justify the relationship between retention and improved students' academic performance.

Data Generation

Data generation for this instrumental case study occurred through interviews of state and district stakeholders between the years of 2002 to 2004 (n=39) and the analysis of political documents related to the state and district policies. The chosen district is a large urban district with almost 25,000 students, which 40% of that population identifying themselves from non-Anglo/European cultures.

The interviewees included policymakers, state administrators, government advisors, representatives from state-based political organizations, district school board members, and district administrators to ensure a valid and reliable case study. (See Table 1 for a description of study participants.) Archival documents included the NSP legislation from both the 1997–98 and 1999 legislative sessions; documents generated by the Department of Public Instruction that focus on this policy (e.g., DPI, 2000); district documents pertaining to the 4th and 8th grade summer school program (e.g., handouts pertaining to the promotion policies given at the district's Performance and Achievement meetings); the reporting mechanisms that communicate both the existence of the accountability program and its implementation for an individual student (i.e., letters that inform parents of the 4th and 8th grade testing program, report cards, etc); district-level data that examine 8th grade students' report card performance and WKCE performance in relation to student attendance, school, race, ethnicity, income, disability, and English language learner status.; position papers put forward by state agencies, such as the Legislative Fiscal Bureau; position papers put forward by the state based political organizations, such as the Wisconsin Education Association Council; public records, such as testimony from the Senate and Assembly Education Committee hearings on re-writing the NSP statutes, and newspaper articles that examined the formulation and implementation of these policies.

Table 1
Informants

Participant category	N
State actors	
Legislators	6
DPI staff	9
Blue Ribbon Education Panel members	2
Department of Administration, Joint Legislative Council, and Legislative Reference Bureau staff	5
State based political organization representatives	5
Local actors	
District-based advocacy group	2
School board members	3
District supervisory staff and management	6
Parents	1

Data Analysis

I employed the following qualitative methods to analyze my data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Erikson, 1986; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Strauss, 1996; Wolcott, 1994). After reading the interview transcripts and policy documents twice to identify relevant themes in the data, I then coded the transcripts using both external and internal codes (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Themes came from the relevant data and were read against the text in search of contradictory evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss, 1996; Wolcott, 1994). With these themes, I created a research text that outlined the data according to these themes, which include references to quotes and notes that supported and challenged my initial understanding of this case (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This interpretive document that represents the final understanding of how Kingdon's multiple streams (2003) interact to foster the policy solution of retention as a means to improve students' academic performance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Eisner, 1991).

Analysis

Policymakers' Justification for Needing Wisconsin's NSP Statutes

In this case of a set of retention statutes, the federal government's IASA opened the policy window, and the NSP statutes were attached as part of the state's standards-based reforms. These statutes did not arise from a critical incident, and as former assistant superintendent at DPI remarked, "the state did not have data to determine whether social promotion was occurring or not." Rather, as a former Democratic Senator who sat on the Senate Education committee mentioned, these statutes "piggy-backed" on to the other SBA reforms.

In analyzing the need for these reforms to be on the agenda to standardize the state's systems of education, the problem stream is defined differently by the positionality of the stakeholder (Stone, 2002). As Kingdon (2003) and others (e.g., Mazzoni, 1993) point out, it is typically the executive and the legislative branch that set the agenda.

Thompson—the policy entrepreneur—framed these standards-based accountability reforms as a means to position Wisconsin as an educational leader—the problem being poor student performance. For instance, he stated, "If you want Wisconsin to lead—to be No. 1—the standards are going to allow us to get there, and the high school graduation test is going to show that we've arrived" (quoted in Jones, 1997, p. B5). Thompson put forth the idea that by holding students accountable for their performance student achievement would improve. As former member of Thompson's Advisory Taskforce on Education and Learning stated, "Thompson's big goal was accountability." Embedded within this need for accountability, the former Governor thought "catching" low performance early would pay off for the state and student in the end. For instance, Kevin Keane, Thompson's executive assistant, asserted that:

> The test is a strong measure of where a child is at. It lays out what you should know and whether you know it or not. Thompson thinks it makes common sense to catch children as early as possible. We have a lot of research that shows passing kids along when they don't know the material is very harmful. That's how kids who graduate from high school who are illiterate. And then what happens is they can't get a job and they end up getting involved in crime and living in poverty (quoted in Shepard, 1998, p. A1).

Thompson and Keane frame their policy solution as a logical consequence for students who do not possess the skills necessary to succeed at the next level. Retention will help the student and the state. However, in Keane's justification for these policies, he states that the research demonstrates that socially promoting students is harmful. Besides there not being any state data to back this claim up, this statement runs counter to most of the empirical studies that were conducted up until that time, which demonstrate that retention, not social promotion, increase the likelihood a student will drop-out (e.g., Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997; Perterson, DeGracie, & Ayabe, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1986).

These statements demonstrate how the Thompson administration framed this debate over improving students' academic performance through common-sense rather than empirical data. As Kingdon (2003) points out, policymakers use empirical work to generate support for their ideas in the political stream when it suits their needs. In this case, the reporter talking with Keane would have to know a genre of research that many people outside the education establishment do not to be able to question Keane about his statement. The power of this political rhetoric exemplifies the burden that exists for those who produce research results that run counter to the political framing of the policy problem of education.

No matter Keane's understanding of the policy problem or expectations of the results that the Thompson administration's policy solutions would provide, many legislators saw the passage of Wisconsin's high-stakes NSP statutes as afterthought. For instance, the Democratic Senator I mention in the above stated,

> The issue of eliminating social promotion by making the test be the sole factor
> for determining a child's promotion or retention really happened in the blink of
> an eye.

This legislation was part of a larger policy solution to improve Wisconsin's schools through defining rigorous content and expecting high performance by all. This Senator (as well as other legislators, bureaucrats, and constituent groups)[10] saw the state's SBA reforms coming out of . . .

> A national movement that Wisconsin was just asked to come on board with. For
> Governor Thompson, a national figure among the governors, this was one of his
> issues of interest. Certainly, when you disaggregate the data and look at
> particularly children in school districts that have a high proportion of families in
> poverty, Wisconsin could do better. Those scores were always significantly below
> that of the statewide average, and I think that may have been another reason for
> the standards. nd the business community and the issue of economic
> development and having a work force which is literate and educated and the idea
> there that standards should be set.

According to this Senator, Thompson fostered the need for accountability measures within Wisconsin through coupling numerous political discourses circulating within the policy and politics streams at the state and national level.

Adding to this idea of political positioning and the state's retention policies, I found that one's relationship with the former Governor and his or her belief in the power of high-stakes

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[10] For instance, a former administrator in the Department of Administrations stated, "Thompson wasn't any different than most governors throughout the country. He was following the standard party line--the National Governors Association and other Republican governors who were making the same policies. It's a very textbook example. Texas had already had these in place. Florida was looking at it. Wisconsin was not that radically different."

policies directly affected how the policymaker justified the need for these reforms (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987). For instance, another Democratic Senator who sat on the Senate education committee saw these statutes coming out of a culture that saw improving students' academic performance through "testing kids to death." A Republican Assemblyperson who sits on the Assembly's Committee on Education Reform saw these statutes as a way to ensure the state was getting "it's bang for the buck" on education.

Moving away from political positioning and party loyalty, other legislators tied this problem of social promotion to the concerns of local constituents. For instance, a Republican Assemblyperson who sits on the Assembly's Committee on Education and the Committee on Education Reform stated that,

> We had heard a lot of anecdotal stories from teachers and parents. There was a sense of frustration that we have children being promoted simply to get them out of the grade and on to the next one. Teachers don't want to deal with them any more—be it a difficult student, troublemaker, etc. So we did implement the *No Social Promotion* statutes to get at that, and other states have done that too.

For this Assemblyperson, feedback from his/her constituents highlighted the fact that students were just passing through the system because teachers did not want to "deal with them any more." This anecdotal reasoning, which feeds into the problem stream, defines the problem of poor student performance as result of social promotion, and thus, the system requires policies that hold students accountable for their learning.

Another Republican Assemblyperson, who also sits on the Assembly's Committee on Education, elaborated on this public concern over a broken education system. The Assemblyperson commented,

> People were concerned that boys and girls couldn't read. That when they got out of high school, the diploma meant nothing. They weren't ready to go to college, they weren't ready to get a job, and so it became pressure from the outside of the education arena that we've got to have some standards to hold people accountable because nobody is holding anybody accountable for anything. The kids are just going through the motions--going to class, getting a diploma, and not learning anything.

Not only were stakeholders concerned that students "weren't ready," these legislators saw having high standards and stakes in place as a means to insert accountability into the education process and to increase the value of Wisconsin's education system. Accountability tightens the education system, and in doing so, a student will not be allowed "to go through the motions." These increased performance expectations would address the problem of poor student performance, and imbedded within this policy solution was the belief that improved student performance would raise the economic and social value of Wisconsin's education system. Increasing the economic value would assist the governor and state policymakers in luring business to the state, and these reforms would enhance their social value by demonstrating to constituents that the state's systems of education ensured students would exhibit their knowledge and skills before they received a high school diploma.

Eliminating social promotion provided these policymakers with a visible political symbol that demonstrates their commitment to improving students' academic performance. In essence, retention is a byproduct of the policy and politics of increased accountability. It is not the primary component within either stream, but its presence symbolizes how policymakers create an education system that holds students accountable for learning (Kingdon, 2003, p. 97).

In talking with legislators and members of Thompson's administration, no one saw the goal of these statutes to be retaining students. Rather, as the Republican Assemblyperson whom I just

cited in the above commented that the goal is to identify failure and correct it. The Assemblyperson stated:

> The goal is not to hold kids back. The goal is to make sure that we teach them what they need to know, and they know it so they can move forward. It's not a vindictive thing. It's a thing that's saying this is where are our weak spots are and where we need to improve. We can't continue to fail. Kids get one chance at this game, and if they mess up, they could be lost for their lifetime. As a state, we can't afford that.

This Assembly member's comments illuminate the complexity that exists within this debate about how best to improve students' academic performance. This assemblyperson saw these policies injecting accountability into the system. Educators will align their practices with policymakers' SBA reforms so that students attain a particular set of skills and knowledge. While there are similarities to the minimal competency movement of the early 1980s (e.g., see Archbald and Porter, 1990; Baker and Stites, 1990), SBA reforms expect that all students will perform at a high level. Such a framing of education is hard to counter in the agenda setting process, and because the issue of retention has always been present in the policy stream, concern over a high-stakes test that could retain students did not surface to the top of the political rhetoric in Wisconsin until these policies were implemented (Kingdon, 2003).

      These statements demonstrate how the issue of accountability is present in state policymakers' framing of the three streams in the agenda setting process. The problem of poor student performance is the result of school personnel not holding their students accountable for their work, and thus, accountability policies need to be put into the state's education systems. Politically, by putting forward an image of high standards and accountability, policymakers address stakeholders' concerns over students' academic performance (Elmore, 1996). Thompson's policy solution coupled the problem and political streams, and intertwined together, he provided a reform agenda for state policymakers that spoke to stakeholders' concerns over students' academic performance, social promotion, and the state's ineffective education systems.

Viewing the need for the NSP statutes at the level of implementation

      While Kingdon (2003) points out that it is bureaucrats who typically concern themselves with the implementation of a policy, the education policy process at the state level adds another layer—the school district (p. 31). As I state in the above, I interviewed school board members and district administrators in a large urban district in Wisconsin, which is referred to as the "District" hereafter, to understand how school district personnel understand Kindgon's streams of the agenda setting process--the problem of social promotion, the need for a policy, and the politics that shaped the process. Using Kingdon's streams as a guide, I turn to their comments about the NSP statutes to provide insight into how these stakeholders for whom these policies addressed interpret the problem of social promotion and the effects of the state's statutes. While this analysis does not feed into Kingdon's agenda setting process per se, it does illuminate how the Thompson Administration's SBA reforms make it difficult for the local school districts in Wisconsin to alter the state's agenda for reform.

      To begin, the implementation of a single-indicator promotion policy caused District administrators to question whether state policymakers' understood the empirical contradictions that existed within their policy solution of retention. School board member #1's comments exemplify this concern.

> I think that the social promotion issue is one of those feel-good policies from the state and federal level but has little basis in research or reality. It is policy by fiat, and it's a bunch of people who haven't the slightest idea of what really happens in schools or classrooms who are deciding that this sounds like a good idea to pursue.

This statement reflects the disconnect that exists between the agenda setting process and the reality that exists at the school level. This District administrator does not believe that the legislators who formulated the NSP statutes understood how such reforms affect the classroom. According to this school board member, if policymakers did, the statutes would not exist.[11]

School board members and other District personnel wondered whether the state's politicians recognized the negative impact that would result from implementing a single indicator accountability system.[12] A District administrator from the department research and evaluation stated, "Anybody who knows anything about assessment would tell you flat out, don't use a single test score from a single date to make that decision. Morally, that's just wrong." These references to the research on retention and the use of a single indicator promotion system were common among District personnel. This in part is due to the roles of the policymaker and the district personnel. The policymaker has to put forward an image of accountability to demonstrate that he or she is addressing the policy problem.[13] While on the other hand, district personnel have to implement this policy solution and negotiate its requirements with the needs of the retained students, their families, their teachers, and so on. The effects of these policies are very different for the policymaker and for the district personnel, and it causes one to question whether the empirical research that examines the effects of retaining students is of value to the state policymakers. Raising the question as to whether empirical research addresses the needs of each stakeholder in the reform process.

Politics at the state level are different from the realities that district personnel face on a daily basis, and as such, district personnel are not picking policy solutions that align with evaluation research. Rather, they are implementing policy changes that the state policymakers frame as the solution to the problem, which in this instance do not align with it is known about the overall negative effect of retention a student's academic career.

Although District administrators questioned the merit of these state reforms, they did recognize the politics that are woven into this process of reform. School board member #2's statements exemplify this understanding of the 'assumptive worlds' in which the politics of reform play out (Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1986).

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[11] This includes policymakers at the state level as well. For instance, when discussing high-stakes testing, a Democratic senator who sits on the Senate's Committee on Education stated, "The biggest problem is you've got policy being made by legislators who have never been in a classroom, aside from a photo-op, in years. They have no idea what's going on. It just sounds really good. But it's not practical and it's not really living in reality."

[12] For instance, school member #2 stated "There's no study that I know of that indicates a positive in holding young people behind. In fact, if you start holding them behind, there's a whole bunch of not only academic but social kind of things that obviously would occur."

[13] To clarify, many current and former members of Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction publicly questioned the use of a single-indicator promotion/high school graduation system (e.g., Cook, 2001). For instance, DPI had representatives from CTB McGraw testify in front of Legislators, stating that they did not design the WKCE tests to make a decision about the promotion of a student.

> Most issues that deal with education you got the political side, which is simplistic. The simplistic things that most people would agree on are that we shouldn't pass kids if they're not proficient. The issue is how do we then get them all to be proficient? Is the solution just not passing them? Well it could be. That's an easy solution. Then what do we do with a 15-year-old 6th grader? We're not going to do anything with them because we know they're going to drop out, and then that's a whole series of other social spin-offs that occur from a well-intended policy. These statutes are simplistic in their implementation and in their general focus.

This school board member's comments get at the heart of the complexity of education reform. It is easier for state policymakers to couple the streams of reform by claiming that the state legislature is going to raise students' academic performance by holding students accountable. However, such rhetoric fails to take into account the effects of such policies on students do not meet these new performance requirements once they pass through the policy window (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990). State policymakers frame these policies politically as an issue of accountability, and so if a student does not succeed, the consequence of retention makes sense. However, the retained student raises a set of new issues for the local school district that the state's policymakers did not address in the NSP statutes.

According to these District actors, the policymakers who formulated the state's NSP statutes failed to examine what the educational establishment knew about the effects of retention, and in turn, they created a political environment in which District administrators questioned the integrity of the Legislatures' education reforms. These administrators thought that the state policymakers' promotion statutes reflected a simple political solution to the problem of poor student performance—the threat of failure would motivate students to work harder.

Yet, it was the state legislature's actions that "jump started" the District personnel into creating intervention programs to address the problem of students' academic performance in grades 4 and 8 (Spillane, 1999). The reforms forced the District to question how it serviced its students. As school board member #1 states, "The statutes put the responsibility on the teacher to really take account of children who are not doing well." This school board member's comments touch on the primary concern of many of the state politicians—teachers being held accountable for all their students. School board member #2 extends this idea to the entire district. This member states,

> If you look at the 4th and 8th grade promotion, you've got to address that. No district wants to have a large number of children that they're holding behind. The public would not be very tolerant if I told you 30% of our kids are not going to move on to 5th grade.

With these state statutes in place, District personnel had to examine their current practices and then implement a strategy that addresses the needs of all students. These District stakeholders recognized that if they failed to ready students for promotion that higher failure rates would cause create a different problem--political shame. While the student carries the brunt of the failure through retention, that child's failure also tarnishes the image of the District. This risk of failure caused the District to be accountable for all of its students.

The state's reforms made District administrators examine what the policymakers were asking the District's teachers to do. In essence, these policies achieved state policymakers' goal. Educators within the District had to begin to align policy, curricula, and teaching to ensure that students would advance to the next grade level. Even though District administrators, such as school board member #2, saw the NSP statutes "dictating certain things that have to be done," which in turn limit the Districts' priorities, the retention policies focused District personnel on ensuring that students met the District's promotion requirements.

From a policy perspective, the NSP statutes caused District personnel to center their efforts on the issue of accountability. District stakeholders picked up the state's agenda, which defined the problem of students' academic performance through the lens of accountability, and began to focus their efforts on improving students' academic performance in the promotion grades. Politically, failure to address the state's agenda would have created new problems for District personnel. Thus, the state's policymakers reset the district's agenda. I now turn to what this means in terms of altering the education reform agenda within contexts similar to Wisconsin.

Discussion

Kingdon's model, while not flawless, provides order and structure to the unpredictable process of how policies become part of the agenda and move through an open policy window. In this case of eliminating social promotion from the state of Wisconsin, the federal government's IASA opened the policy window for Wisconsin's policymakers. While this federal policy provided a basic structure to the policy itself, the politics surrounding Wisconsin's education system extended those details, and in fact, policymakers expanded the performance expectations for students more than the federal policy required—adding the HSGT and NSP statutes. Furthermore, the problem of inadequate student performance was not an issue of social promotion, but rather, a range of constituency groups and indicators questioned the effectiveness of the state's K-12 education systems. The coupling of standards-based reforms, the politics of accountability, and the problem of inadequate student performance allowed Thompson to push the state's NSP statutes through the window and onto Wisconsin's legislative books. While the statutes were altered to make an empirically appropriate decision at the local level, the issue of social promotion and the intervention of retention remained (American Educational Research Association, 2000; Heubert & Hauser, 1999).

The analysis here has outlined how stakeholders at the state and district level understood the problem of social promotion and what effects resulted from these statutes. In essence, state policymakers saw these statutes addressing the need to demonstrate that Wisconsin's education system was one of the best in the country, and they saw instilling a sense of accountability through the NSP statutes as means to foster this image—the problem was political and practical. These statutes would end the practice of passing students through the system simply because they turn a year older and force school personnel to address the academic needs of their unsuccessful learners. Policymakers did not see these policies as means to punish those who fail, but rather, as tool to focus educators on improving the skills and knowledge of all their students.

This framing of retention is conceptually different from other studies in which stakeholders view retention as an effective intervention (e.g., Byrnes, 1989; Jacob, Stone, & Roderick., 2004; Tompchin & Impara, 1992). In this case, the visible actors at the state level define the central problem being the improvement of students' academic performance on a systems level, not an individual level. Retention is a byproduct from instilling accountability into the education system. The individual who fails due to these statutes is not the problem. Rather, that individual is the result of a successful system of accountability—the retained individual demonstrates that the system works. The 'failure' of the education system corrects itself through failing the individual. Without the retained students, the system opens itself up for questioning, and thus, eliminating social promotion becomes an issue of quality control.

This case study also demonstrates that the actions of the District answered the call by state policymakers to alter their education agenda. The District's education services were modified (e.g., the creation of a 4th and 8th grade summer program for students who fail to meet the initial criteria

for promotion set by the District) and District administrators realigned their goals to reflect the state policymakers' reform agenda. While District administrators questioned policymakers' understanding of the problem of poor student performance and the use of retention as a policy solution, they recognized that public shame that could come from high rates of retention and aligned their practices to the objectives set forth by the state statutes.

This case adds to the discussion over the elimination of social promotion by highlighting how the rise of these NSP statutes onto Wisconsin's education agenda was a political process that centered on fixing the problem of students' academic performance by adding accountability measures to the education system. The issue of the effectiveness of these reforms that education researchers concern themselves within their empirical work (i.e., improving the performance of the retained students) was not present within how state stakeholders' set the education reform agenda. Thus, as the education community continues to promote particular education services at the state and local level to improve students' academic performance, it must move beyond the issue of 'what works' and address all of Kingdon's (2003) streams in the agenda setting process.

Implications

This case demonstrates how the formulation and implementation of high-stakes accountability policies that attempt to eliminate such things as social promotion go beyond the issue of program or policy effectiveness. Education stakeholders must be cognizant of how the legislative and executive branches of government (the agenda-setters) define the policy problem, the policy ideas that exist in the primeval soup, and the politics that surround the issue of improved student performance.

In this case, as with many education reforms, the stakeholders who set the policy agenda framed the system as the primary problem, and as in most political incidents, it is much easier to link a policy to the issue of accountability and system failure rather than the performance of individual students. The problem within these streams of the reform process is not retaining students. It is addressing poor student performance, which policies such as the NSP statutes do with visible sanctions.

In terms of the policy stream, many policymakers, educators, and families believe that a policy solution that requires low performing students to repeat a grade can give them the time they need to raise their skills and knowledge so that they are prepared for future grade levels (Byrnes, 1989; Jacob et al., 2004; Tompchin & Impara, 1992). Retaining poor performing students to improve their academic skills and abilities has been a part of the "grammar" of the American system (Tyack & Tobin, 1994) for decades (without or without legislation), and most policymakers, educators, and parents are comfortable with it (Smith & Shepard, 1987; Tomchin & Impara, 1992). Standardizing the policy of retention across contexts succeeds because it is merely reconfigures an idea that the populace understands (Kingdon, 2003). Unless a significant proportion of a district's or state's students are retained, which would create a focusing event on the negative effects of such policies, it is highly unlikely that this issue would become part of the state's policymakers' immediate agenda. In this case, the retention rates of Wisconsin's fourth grade students following the implementation of the NSP statutes slightly increased from .32% (200 out of 63,482 students) during the 2001–2002 school year to 0.54% (334 out of 61, 717 students) during the 2003–2004 school year, and for the state's eighth grade students, the retention rate decreased from 1.17% (782 out of 66,501 students) during the 2001–2002 school year to .79% (543 out of 68,586 students) during the 2003–2004 school year (DPI, 2004).

In fact, as NCLB increases its annual academic performance requirements, more students in Wisconsin and across the United States will be identified as failing (Linn, 2003), and with the opening of another policy window as federal policymakers renew ESEA in 2007, lower proficiency rates will only reinforce the political need to increase accountability, which could lead to an expansion of retention policies.

This case also demonstrates how the formulation and implementation of high-stakes accountability policies that attempt to eliminate such things as social promotion go beyond the issue of program or policy effectiveness. Evaluation is a part of the policy process, and this type of participation is typical for academic researchers (Kingdon, 2003). Over the course of setting the policy agenda, the short-term impact of research is limited, but in the long-term, its influence can be "considerable" (p. 56). However, in this case of retention, the existence of counter empirical studies that support the use of this intervention to improve students' academic performance can cause one to view the discussions among academics over the effectiveness of retention as a political debate rather than empirical exercise. Nevertheless, the state's retention policies provide the state's policymakers with a short-term political symbol of concern that demonstrates their effort to improve the state's education systems. The immediate gain of increased student test scores that retention policies offer (e.g., Jacobs & Lefgren, 2004; Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 2003) reinforce the need for this policy solution.

Retaining poor performing students also ensures that any new problems over academic performance for these students will not arise because they cannot advance in the system until they can pass the statutes' requirements. Therefore, the short-term versus long term effects of this intervention make it difficult for academic researchers to provide policymakers with a definitive answer about the effectiveness of this type of reform in improving students' academic performance. In fact, the compactness of the political cycle for policymakers as compared to the length of students' academic careers makes the immediate impact that this policy solution offers more attractive than long-term or costly reforms.

To change the agenda of policies such as the NSP statutes is difficult. Kingdon (2003) points out that the most common methods to alter the agenda result from a focusing event (e.g., an extremely high number of retained students) or a change in administrations. In Wisconsin, retention rates remain low, and although administrations have changed in the Legislature and the Executive branch, this low impact and politically attractive reform remains a part of the education system. Moreover, putting forth a technically feasible alternative that addresses accountability and stimulates improved student performance typically costs additional money for materials and training of instructional programs or for intervention services such as summer school or prekindergarten (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1998: McCay, 2001; McCoy and Reynolds, 1999; U. S. Department of Education, 1999). In Wisconsin, the various constituency groups favored local (e.g., the amending of the NSP statutes) and inexpensive reform (e.g., the elimination of the HSGT)--making any type of change to the education system politically difficult. While retention does cost the state and school district the price of another year of school for the retained student, that cost is 'hidden' through funding formulas based on student enrollment (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). Additionally, with the student retention rates in Wisconsin remaining constant through the implementation of the NSP statutes, it is very difficult to demonstrate an increased cost on the local school district.

The question becomes, can empirical research alter the agenda setting process? In Wisconsin, disruptions across the three streams of the agenda setting process did alter, but not eliminate, the state's retention statutes. Politically, the Senate leadership switched parties and important constituent groups in and outside government raised enough concerns to cause policymakers to revisit the issue. These constituent groups offered policymakers a viable policy alternative that addressed the problem of accountability.

If education researchers and stakeholders are to influence policy, they must continue to inform policymakers and the public of the long-term positive and negative effects of education reforms. At the same time, they must continue to put policy alternatives into the policy stream that address the issue of accountability in a low-cost and unobtrusive manner. Furthermore, researchers must understand how policy stakeholders across the various streams of reform frame the problem, which will have a direct impact on the questions researchers should be asking.

Understanding the political environment is of the utmost importance. Researchers must ensure that they present their work in such a way that stakeholders across the streams and political parties can access their work. Politically, education stakeholders must also demonstrate how their policy alternative addresses the concerns of policymakers' constituents. Thus, having data about the effects of current reforms available, putting achievable policy alternatives into the policy stream, understanding the various interpretations of the problem, and addressing policymakers' political needs in a language that they understand is necessary to affect the agenda setting process. Ignoring any of the streams that Kingdon (2003) identifies as part of the agenda setting process will only ensure that the agenda will not be changed.

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