From Rethinking to Reshaping:
The Many Modes of Philanthropic Policy Advocacy

Heather McCambly
Northwestern University

Key Takeaways

- Four primary philanthropic strategies for policy advocacy emerged in the literature: thinking, engineering, brokering, and building

- Efficacious policy advocacy can be measured by its results: when grantmakers use *thinking, engineering, brokering, and building* tools to *reshape* the policy domain even in the absence of further funding

- There is limited causal evidence in the literature about *what works* in specific contexts to achieve educational policy reshaping

- Evidence on processes of persistence and change provides a framework for surfacing *reshaping* strategies by matching *policy advocacy tactics* at the right level, to the *embedded structures* that automatically reproduce existing outcomes, which may require the simultaneous use of multiple advocacy tactics.

- While many philanthropic actors routinely align their tactics, goals, and problem definitions, this framework recommends increased strategic attention to displacing the embedded structures that persistently reproduce a given status quo. This requires attention to the question: what pressures, rewards, or structures consistently produce the relevant outcome, process, or policy?

- The potential complexity of this work highlights the need for collaborations across philanthropic actors—particularly across local, regional, and national levels—in united strategies to "move" particular policy domains.

Philanthropic involvement in education policy arenas is not new; indeed, foundations have exercised influence in this domain since the early 20th century.[i] However, a growing number of today's philanthropic organizations are increasing their investments in efforts to shape education policy, often directed at reducing persistent social inequities.[ii] While the Tax Reform Act of 1969 continues to prohibit foundations from direct lobbying and electoral politics, there are many forms of policy influence that sit safely outside the boundaries of the tax code. In this new age of philanthropy, referred to by different authors as disruptive, strategic, muscular, or venture philanthropy, grantmakers as policy advocates focus on two primary areas: 1) building evidence about interventions aimed at achieving specific social outcomes, and 2) multiple strategies to mobilize these interventions and their necessary policy components to shape government and sector action according to the foundation's agenda.[iii]

This report summarizes existing literature on known strategies for education policy advocacy and influence adopted by philanthropic actors, and to surface directions for future work. While philanthropic actors can play a role in both bottom-up (by providing resources to grass-roots movements) and top-down (acting as policy advocates) processes of policy change, the scope of this brief only takes in the top-down perspective. Whereas we know a fair amount descriptively about the scope and purposes of philanthropic advocacy in the education policy arena, we know less about which modes are most effective in establishing lasting social change. As such, the second half of this brief includes both a framework for predicting the strategies for policy influence that would be more or less effective for creating sustainable change, and also suggestions for developing stronger causal evidence in this domain. I preface these two main sections with a brief caveat regarding emergent critiques that are material to the primary research questions.

Points for Reflection in Philanthropic Policy Advocacy

Before diving into the body of this brief, it is important to acknowledge the critiques of philanthropic participation in public policy. Foregrounding these critiques can offer valued reflection points with which grantmakers can critically examine the intentions and assumptions underlying their work in policy advocacy. Three top-level and interconnected critiques to keep in mind:

1) **How are philanthropic actors supporting or subverting the needs and intentions of minoritized racial and economic groups?** Empirical studies have demonstrated numerous instances in which philanthropic actors have used their substantial power to subvert justice-oriented movements relevant to inequality toward more dominant-serving ends.[iv] This includes some grantmakers' persistent preference for funding white and wealthy institutions and leaders even when grantmakers espouse equity-oriented agendas. Alternatively, historical evidence demonstrates that philanthropy has redirected more radical civil rights aims (e.g., antilynching movements) to policy paths less threatening to the white majority (e.g., education reform), even as black lives were still under threat. If racial, class, or gender equity are central to a desired policy outcome, evidence shows that protecting and promoting the representation and power of these communities on boards, implementation, and decision-making groups are important at every step.

2) **How are philanthropic actors addressing preferences for government vs. market-based solutions, and shaping opportunities for democratic accountability through their policy agendas?** Many of the papers cited in this brief note the preference in philanthropically-funded movements (e.g., the charter school movement) for privatization or market-driven types of educational interventions.[v] The concern in this domain is that philanthropy can label preferences as objective "best practices" without being transparent about how and whether their underlying ideologies preference private action over public. This potential lack of

transparency has important implications for how democratically accountable these systems will be to the communities they serve.

3) **How are philanthropic actors attending to the quality and bias of research used to back particular investment plans?** While we are no doubt living in a "data-driven" age, it is critical to remember that not all "data" or research findings are created equal. Indeed, many forms of data and knowledge creation can be more ideologically biased than they first appear. As such, grantmakers should be cautious about the research designs, assumptions, and potential biases that underlie data used to pull the field one way or another. Moreover, grantmakers themselves can fund research that is ultimately used to sway policymakers.[vi] It is critical not only to be cautious of potentially biased research methodologies, but also of the bias implicit in the research questions asked (e.g., the clustering of research on market-oriented interventions or the use of standardized test scores as proxies for learning).[vii]

These caveats, taken together, point to the need for a thoughtful definition of "success" in the area of policy advocacy. The rest of this brief elaborates on advocacy strategies and how to predict more or less efficacious strategies as defined by their impact on policy. However, these caveats foreground the need to understand "success" in such endeavors as more nuanced than a zero-sum game defined by a funders' policy agenda. Instead, "success" should be defined not only by the presence of change, but also by whether or not these changes are guided by principles of racial and economic equity, democratic flourishing, and by the instantiation of evidence-based practices.
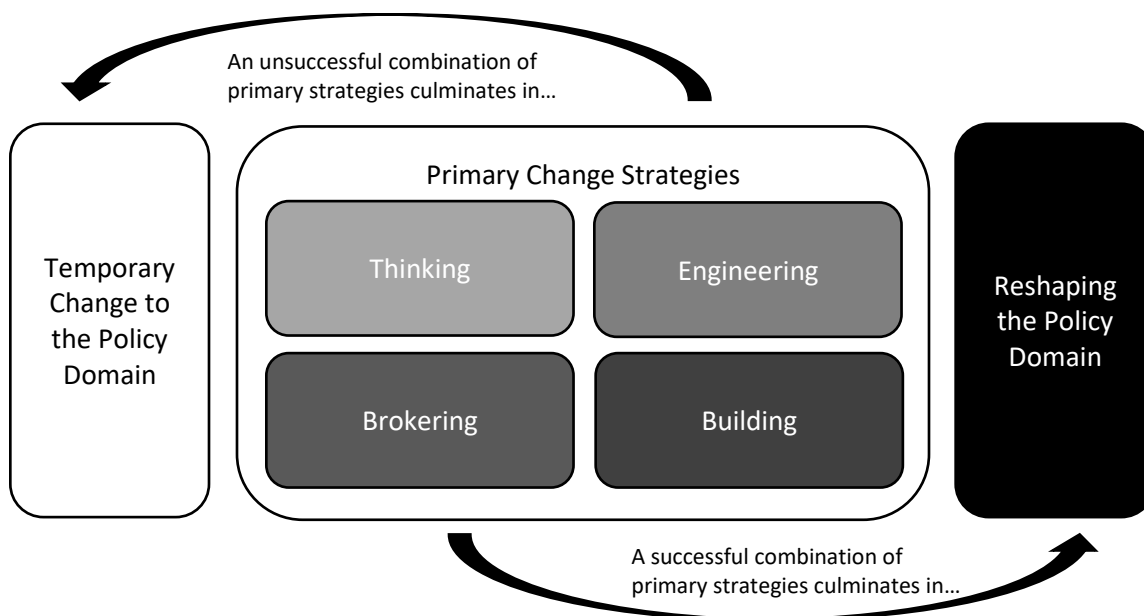
Policy Advocacy: What and How

Modern philanthropy's growing interest in policy advocacy is grounded in a commitment to creating self-sustaining systemic change.[viii] We know from the literature that traditional, top-down policy projects can have limited bearing on educational practice and outcomes,[ix] and successful efforts in achieving systemic change involve multiple forms of influence within and outside of policy designs.[x] Therefore, for purposes of this review, I conceive of policy broadly, including peer-reviewed papers or academic books that 1) analyze the influence or investments of philanthropic foundations, 2) look specifically at issues in education, and 3) are cases in which the ultimate goal is systemic and self-reproducing change in educational systems or outcomes. This third criterion operationalizes the "policy advocacy" element of the project. A narrower conception of this criterion would include literature only if a very specific type of policy was centered in the advocacy project; however, this would produce an incomplete sample of possible avenues for advocacy.

Coding by mechanism, I have synthesized four key forms of policy advocacy that are emergent in the peer-reviewed literature thus far: *thinking, engineering, brokering,* and *building.* These categories can be employed individually, but they are not mutually exclusive and often emerge together in individual projects. While any grantmaker can employ one or all of these strategies, they may or may not achieve meaningful and lasting policy change. This leaves many advocates frustrated when their initiatives fizzle out after funding dries up. Lasting policy change – that is, change that achieves not just a new policy on paper but a change in the policy target – occurs when advocates use the tools at their disposal in a way that culminates in a *reshaping* of the field. *Reshaping* is discussed here as a fifth category of philanthropic work, but one that is ultimately a strategic combination of the four first-level strategies. Indeed, the main hypothesis fleshed out in this report is that the most potent forms of philanthropic policy advocacy occurs when *multiple* forms of influence are strategically employed in concert. *Reshaping* denotes the use of strategies to fundamentally realign the political and practical pressures in an area of education such that lasting and meaningful social and policy change occurs.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the five "strategies" described in the remainder of this section. Whereas a policy advocate may take on any combination of the four primary strategies, only certain combinations will result in a *reshaping* outcome for a given issue and context. The second half of this paper is dedicated to providing some analytical leverage for determining what combinations will result in a dreshaped policy domain, and which will result only in temporary change.

Figure 1. Grantmakers' Advocacy Strategies

An unsuccessful combination of primary strategies culminates in…

Primary Change Strategies

Temporary Change to the Policy Domain

Thinking

Engineering

Brokering

Building

Reshaping the Policy Domain

A successful combination of primary strategies culminates in…

Thinking: Idea or Knowledge Creation and Promotion

By "thinking," philanthropy sets the political agenda or answers the question for policymakers: what matters in education right now?

This category, commonly referred to in the foundation-world as "thought leadership," includes efforts to influence policy by cultivating new ideas or by amplifying the urgency of particular ideas through funded projects and papers, media outreach or training campaigns, and coordinated efforts using existing foundation platforms**.** Studies in this category indicate that philanthropic actors can play a key role in shaping the tenor and focus of knowledge production via investments in research and/or white paper production from think-tanks, associations (e.g., the National Association of State Boards of Education), and other bodies. In this way, foundations have been shown to generate idea convergence among key actors with influence over policy conversations.[xi] *Thinking* projects can occur through two primary processes. First, these investments can orchestrate and promote entirely new policy ideas through networks of researchers connected to policy circles. This can take the form of promoting new languages (e.g., "equity-minded"), advancing issues through the development of new or different policy metrics (e.g., college graduation rates), or motivating policy issues under a new framing (e.g., college completion matters because of the future of "work"). And second, they can keep particular ideas on the map by producing and pushing new content through media agencies both local and national and through work internal to the philanthropy, including blogs, podcasts, and so forth.[xii] To this end, in addition to funding distinct projects, foundations use their brand recognition and close ties to media organizations to

"anoint" particular ideas directly and amplify the message using the foundation's own legitimacy.[xiii] For example, the Lumina Foundation has built a broad thought leadership platform in the field of postsecondary change around its "Goal 2025," by reorienting the field around the belief that a measurable, time-bound goal could be critical to fostering change in college *completion* rates of non-dominant student groups, rather than the more muddied (and well-trodden) waters surrounding policy on issues of college admissions and *access.*

Engineering: Design and Test

By "engineering," philanthropy influences the field by answering the question: what interventions work to achieve key educational goals?[xiv]

Perhaps the strategy most commonly associated with philanthropic work is the role of foundations in launching or testing new mechanisms of social change. Foundations frequently invest in piloting and evaluating new interventions intended to solve educational problems.[xv] Although indirect in terms of its policy influences, the models that emerge from these investments are the raw materials with which foundations may choose to launch policy-oriented advocacy campaigns. Many key movements have been first launched as pilot and evaluation programs using philanthropic dollars, only to evolve into full-blown policy movements or templates. For example, research and piloting early projects in redesigning developmental education in the postsecondary setting were funded by philanthropic dollars, a project which ultimately spun off into state-by-state policy reform efforts. Similarly, grant funding played a central role in advancing Dr. Angela Duckworth's ideas about "grit" in educational success from a psychological construct to a full-blown category of educational intervention.

Brokering: Policy Diffusion and Learning

By "brokering," philanthropy influences the field by connecting policymakers with "best practices" and partners who have already made progress on relevant policy issues.

Philanthropic actors have the power to bridge contexts—from industry to schools, from one district or region to the next—as they take interventions or policy designs and aid in their diffusion across networks. This occurs as grantmakers orchestrate connections, knowledge sharing, and encourage the adoption of "best practices" in a systematic manner.[xvi] Grantmakers can engage in brokering work by creating cross-sector or cross-region networks (e.g., via convenings, a durable network designation, institutes, etc.) through funded projects intended to "scale" a particular policy to multiple contexts. This can often take the form of leveraging philanthropic "convening power" wherein actors who would normally not interact are brought together by philanthropic actors with or without the promise of funds in the hopes that idea contagion will occur. Philanthropic actors can also act as intermediaries by investing in the creation of template policies and toolkits to lower barriers to adoption and facilitate the spread of policy ideas, including offering incentives to do so.[xvii] For example, foundations were central in the creation of Complete College America (CCA) which played a crucial role in the diffusion of performance-based funding models as a policy tool in the area of postsecondary education through the creation of networking opportunities, as well as the provision of technical assistance and policy templates carrying the legitimacy of being a CCA "Game Changer" strategy.[xviii]

Building: Capacity and Coalitions

By "building," philanthropy invests in talent infrastructure to fulfill new policy demands or bring together networks needed for the advancement of new policy goals.

Similar to but distinct from brokering, philanthropic actors can contribute to the spread and stick of new policies or ideas by building infrastructure to implement a proposed change or building coalitions dedicated to sustaining commitments to an issue.[xix] Perhaps the most saturated area in terms of the role of philanthropy as "builders" in educational policy has been in the area of teacher preparation.[xx] In multiple quests ranging from a desire to systemically improve student outcomes to increasing teacher labor supply, building capacity among teachers and the teaching work force has been a key area of investment among many philanthropic actors both large and small to achieve change. Significant policy change in this domain has indeed occurred, as evidenced in the sustained expansion of alternative teacher training models, for example. Unfortunately, these efforts have resulted in limited shifts in student achievement. In contrast, grantmakers' coalition-building efforts in the area of universal pre-K policy have yielded demonstrable results. In this instance, funders built long-term strategic partnerships amongst key membership organizations of public officials and foundation-funded researchers which created a complex and multi-voiced network of proponents who could apply policy pressure at multiple levels with mutually reinforcing messaging about the economic and social benefits of universal pre-K.[xxi] The differential attainment of desired policy *outcomes* seen in these two ostensibly successful examples of *building*, is a key tension picked up in the second half of this report.

Reshaping: Creating New Normative and Political Pressures
By "reshaping," philanthropic actors have used their primary advocacy tools to build new and durable constituencies, meanings, and beliefs that can carry on mobilization for a particular policy goal beyond the terms of their investment.

Philanthropic actors can reshape educational policy environments by embedding new standards, metrics, or organizations into the political and organizational environment. In other words, when philanthropy "reshapes" it has employed a critical mix of *thinking, engineering, brokering,* and *building* strategies such that the terms of the field are fundamentally altered*.* More than building a coalition, *reshaping* creates new interests and new measures of legitimacy that outlive active grants.[xxii]

For example, as some foundations, perhaps controversially, promoted the role of charter schools in school choice policy, they were able to elevate a new type of organization: the charter management organization through a combination of *thinking*, *engineering, and building* work.[xxiii] In the process, they created new evaluative frameworks, created a narrative that legitimated this organizational form, and began sponsoring the training of new professionals to populate charter management organizations. Given that the model was structured to be funded using permanent streams of public dollars, once legitimated and populated it became self-sustaining and could lobby and advance the interests of charter expansion even in the absence of foundation investment.[xxiv] Similarly, returning to college completion, grantmakers used CCA to create new normative pressures through *thinking, building,* and *brokering* in the field. CCA began to shame states with poor graduation rates, which created an incentive for actors to formally affiliate with the college completion movement, an affiliation requiring the adoption of particular policy tools. This pressure to be a "Complete College America Alliance" member created interests above and beyond (although affiliated with) grant dollars, to adopt and sustain funders' policy preferences.[xxv] In both of these examples, funders helped create constituencies and "rules for engagement" that would outlive their investment by instantiating new standards and actor categories to carry on the policy work.[xxvi]

These two brief examples highlight how durable changes to highly relevant education policy issues can be achieved through a combination of advocacy strategies. These successful cases funded ideas and initiatives that outlast any one grant, or even any single policy change, and create new long-

term policy pressures. Of course, these successes cannot be divorced from their particular political and social moments. Moves to advance the role of charter schools in public education or to push the college completion agenda in community colleges were successful in part because they capitalized on particular *policy windows* and circumstances.[xxvii] Funders themselves do not create these policy windows. A policy window is considered "open" when a particular problem is recognized as salient and agenda-worthy in the political sphere, when viable policy solutions exist (or can be proposed), and political will exists to entertain solutions. In other words, these successes reflect the convergence of multiple strategies and an open policy window (e.g., decreasing faith in public schools, recession-era concerns about college degrees). The critical question then is, how can grantmakers "know" which strategies to employ to ultimately *reshape* a particular policy issue?

Predicting Impactful Change Projects

A primary theme in this literature is that philanthropy as a collective set of actors can attend to multiple sources of persistence and change—both top-down and bottom-up— at once, including issues of thought leadership, policy diffusion, testing effective programs, and capacity or coalition building.[xxviii] This is a stark contrast to the policy tools frequently employed in the American state, which are largely limited to underfunded mandates or maintenance projects embedded within a highly decentralized system of policy administration. Put another way, the big educational problems of our day are "stuck" or entrenched at multiple nodes and levels within a vast web of actors, influences, and resources. Grantmakers have the freedom to employ their resources— be that financial and/or their legitimacy and public platforms—to attend holistically to the pressures that both prevent and create change. However, in the context of *limited* resources, the remaining puzzle then is how can philanthropic actors identify and invest in the optimal mix for effective advocacy?

In the sections that follow, I provide some key examples of the studies that came up in my review to provide a detailed picture of what we know and do not know in this domain. In summary, while descriptive research indicates that the philanthropic tools I described in Part 1 of this brief are all potentially useful, the pathway to finding the optimal strategy mix remains a puzzle. I will then provide an outline of the types of studies education philanthropists could fund given the known scope of grantmaking work in this domain. In other words, if grantmakers were to fund research on policy advocacy tactics, what is it we would want to know? And finally, in an effort to provide guideposts for advancing the evaluation of policy advocacy strategies, I will pull from the mature field of organizational science to offer some suggestions about which strategies would *most likely* result in a *reshaping* of policy pressures and outcomes.

The Limitations of Causal Evidence on Educational Policy Advocacy

Existing literature cannot adequately answer the question: "what specific advocacy strategies causally affect the spread or stick of particular education policy outcomes?" To gauge existing evidence to this effect, I conducted searches using key terms (e.g., "education," "policy," "advocacy," "causal") in several databases including ERIC, PRIAS, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, and the complete histories of Educational Policy and Journal of Policy Analysis and Management (JPAM). Ultimately, I did not identify any studies that speak directly to this issue using causal methods. I did find several studies that either attend to this topic descriptively or uncover a causal relationship of interest in another domain. For example, in the journal *Educational Policy*, out of 15 results, all but two were descriptive, theory-building studies in which the cases of interest were selected based on the outcome: the successful adoption of a new educational policy. A similar search in JPAM yielded 46 results. Only two causal papers emerged, one of which had no connection to education and one with tangential

connections. The rest of the results were a mix of descriptive and causal studies on the effects of advocacy research and/or the effectiveness of specific intervention models *not* related to advocacy.

Most of these studies selected a policy area or issue that already succeeded and retrospectively examined the factors that appeared to lead to this end.[xxix] For example, these studies examined how watershed moments (e.g., the release of *A Nation at Risk*) redefined educational coalitions in a way that likely led to conservative, free-market moves towards school accountability, charter schools and vouchers, and movements like Teach for America (TFA).[xxx] Or how a funder-initiated brokering body— the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)—created a node within policy networks by which new policy entrepreneurs could advance their agendas and policy templates.[xxxi] While ALEC's initiatives certainly appear to have been effective in multiple areas including regressive voter identification laws or stand-your-ground laws, the methodological nature of this study cannot speak conclusively to whether the laws could have been passed without ALEC's creation. Across these studies, we see empirical, descriptive evidence that particular strategies like the creation of ALEC, TFA, or the introduction of new policy paradigms played important roles in policy change, but given their design we know little about these strategies as specific interventions or about in which contexts they would be most effective. For example, the creation of a coalition like ALEC was positively associated with the passage of particular, regressive legislation, but we don't know what would have been likely to happen without ALEC, which elements or features present in this case were important for leading to the outcomes, or how similar elements or features would likely play out in another context.

Instead of isolating strategies and testing them causally, the studies in this domain more typically strive to build theory using comparative cases – theory that can later be applied and tested in quasi-experimental studies. For example, through comparative analysis, one study argues that grass-roots groups may be more successful in achieving education policy change when two criteria are met: they are active enough to agitate to a level that cannot be ignored by policy makers, and they are careful to remain legitimate (rather than radical) in the eyes of policymakers and the general public.[xxxii] Another set of studies demonstrates how changing policy paradigms can shift the politics of an issue to mobilize previously immobile education policy areas.[xxxiii] Similarly, specific studies also offer taxonomies of the actions of successful policy entrepreneurs, such as articulating clear and understandable policy goals strategically framed to appeal to resistant audiences, capitalize on moments of political opportunity, bear the risks of pursuing actions with uncertain consequences, or bring together networks and talents to enact change.[xxxiv] These theories of action align with the categories described in Part 1 of this brief, or point foundations to advocacy strategies like endorsing grass roots activity. However, this body of literature offers suggestions, rather than proven outcomes, for two reasons: 1) these are small-scale case studies so we cannot isolate the factors that matter, and 2) they are largely developed by sampling on the dependent variable: instances of successful policy change.

Turning only to studies using causal methods, the evidence is too limited to synthesize a set of advocacy recommendations. For example, in one study outside of education, there is causal evidence that more community-based involvement in policy implementation is a critical factor to producing greater community benefits in policy. However, this study focuses on implementation, not on the processes required to reach the point of adoption.[xxxv] In another study outside of education, there is evidence that social intervention experiments can have a causal effect on policy adoption in general, but that the institutional match or conditions of these experiments do not seem to affect adoption.[xxxvi] In another quasi-experimental study, we see evidence that sustained interest group activity may be the strongest predictor (above and beyond public or elite perception) that policy changes (like the introduction of charter schools) will be sustained.[xxxvii] On the other hand, some experimental and quasi-experimental evidence suggests that public information campaigns have very mixed effects in terms of policy advocacy dependent on contexts and that key opinions are dictated not by new information but by race and partisan commitments.[xxxviii] While all of these studies have contributed a body of knowledge

about different *mechanisms* that matter in advocacy, and likely form the basis upon which the primary assumptions of today's philanthropic advocacy have been built, taken together they do not provide a cohesive set of recommendations across contexts. In this area, the field is in need of more well-designed research on the topic of education policy advocacy, particularly in peer-reviewed journals.

Using Theory to Build and Test Predictions

While the literature in the previous sections provides a view of the potential mechanisms for and ends of policy advocacy, the current research and findings in this field do not provide a framework for predicting when and what mix of the above strategies would be more or less likely to result in the ultimate goal: sustainable and systemic change. Rather than straining the limited conclusions produced in this domain, in this section I pull from the mature field of organizational science and theory to offer a framework for predicting impactful mixes of strategic advocacy.

Readers should think of this section as producing empirically grounded hypotheses that philanthropic actors can test in their advocacy investments in different contexts. Philanthropy is well positioned to build knowledge in the area of educational policy advocacy and change through the evaluation of their own advocacy tactics. For example, it would be valuable to know: is there a causal effect of information campaigns targeting policymakers about educational equity? And if so, are there key moderating factors, like the ideological frame employed? In order to grow our knowledge base in the domain of education policy advocacy, grantmakers should consider funding either lab-based experiments to this effect or design their campaigns to deliver, in a controlled capacity, their advocacy tactics to certain districts and not others to examine empirical impacts over time. Philanthropic actors are already funding work across all major strategy categories—thinking, engineering, brokering, and building—and could introduce causal evaluations of the effects of these efforts by identifying ways to model the "counterfactual" outcome either through random assignment or quasi-experimental protocols.

Most actors in the field of education—from classroom teachers to college presidents—know that change projects are frequent and ubiquitous at multiple levels.[xxxix] These projects include waves of K-12 education standards reforms, performance-based funding models affecting the P-20 pipeline, curricular and pedagogical reform movements, accreditation standard reforms and many more. The unrelenting nature of change work has led some to coin a new syndrome in the field: "initiative fatigue."[xl] And yet, in this swirl of so-called change, very little that *matters* seems to change at all. This is emphasized by the decades of policy scholarship demonstrating that changes in policy *on paper* do not always produce corresponding changes in practice.[xli] Teachers are still underpaid, college pedagogy is still largely lecture based, standardized test scores still lag behind national goals, and racial and economic inequities persist by most measures. How do we explain this paradox?

Of course, not everything stays the same. Some educational change initiatives, no matter how fatiguing, do ultimately "stick." In K-12, the most transformative example of a change that "stuck" is the emergence of the accountability regime.[xlii] Similarly, we see other "sticky" change across the P-20 pipeline in policy shifts in favor of universal pre-K[xliii] and the instantiation of the "data driven" movement in community colleges exemplified by the work of Achieving the Dream.[xliv] However, even when change sticks, it can often fail to produce advocates' intended outcomes. For example, K-12 accountability has largely failed to close achievement gaps or raise achievement averages to desired levels.[xlv] Similarly, the community college data movement has increased technical capacity on campuses but has had limited effects on college completion rates.[xlvi]

How can funders interested in achieving meaningful policy change select strategies that do more than exacerbate initiative fatigue? To answer this question, I pull from scholarship on what makes policies or practices in a given domain persist and what makes them change.[xlvii] Decades worth of

studies in this area have demonstrated that when policies, practices, or beliefs in a domain remain in place over time or spread across organizations, they are being constantly supported by social forces based in durable beliefs and structures.[xlviii] Actors in a particular domain like education, including grantmakers, draw on and contribute to the constant reenactment of these beliefs and structures creating a persistent social order or pattern that is "chronically reproduced" by "self-activating social processes."[xlix] This chronically reproduced social order is the status quo in education policy that advocates like grantmakers seek to change. However, these durable orders are difficult to change precisely because they reproduce themselves by determining the rules, norms, and standards deemed legitimate in a field.[l]

For example, in the college context, a considerable set of grant-based projects since the 1970s have tried to dislodge the credit hour as the basis for awarding funding and determining credentials. The credit hour in higher education is the primary, legitimate unit of educational delivery, and is defined by time in classroom seats, rather than achievement. This unit became the taken-for-granted measure among elite universities for awarding credentials and is used as a key metric across all provider types (even those without seats at all), despite the fact that this measure is not rational nor is it particularly efficient.[li] The credit hour does not carry with it any objective demonstration of value-added skills or abilities and is therefore easily coopted by assumptions of how high quality that unit is based on the organizational type from which it originated. Nonetheless, because it was once a formal measure for accreditors (a regulation that has since been loosened), it has material rewards built in as the unit by which tuition can be charged and federal student aid may be awarded and paid. It remains self-reproducing because it is built into course management software, into the ideas people have about how to measure progress, its association with "legitimate" institutional types, and into systems of payment and reward. The credit hour is thus legitimate, complicit in stratification, and solidly "stuck" as a matter of policy in the domain.

The discussion in this section thus far has focused on why existing policies or practices persist. The counterpart in these studies is the process by which change is achieved and a once-persistent policy comes to an end with a new policy taking its place. As most grantmakers have experienced firsthand, changes introduced via specific grants or campaigns often last only for a limited time.[lii] For example, a three-year grant may support the implementation of an alternative disciplinary program in a school by providing the resources for development and staffing.[liii] However, once the grant ends, if the structures have not changed to make the program self-reproducing, it will likely end there. In order for lasting policy change to occur, advocacy must tap into or alter existing embedded supports or creating new supports that will reshape beliefs, structures, and the terms of practice going forward.[liv] A successful advocacy project aimed at modifying disciplinary policies in schools may still offer a pilot grant as a form of *engineering* but would also need to simultaneously address the extant beliefs that reproduce traditional disciplinary practices, the modes of incentive and reward, and the professional pressures on teachers that make the status quo the path of least resistance.

Using this framework, we can interpret the myriad advocacy initiatives that produce fatigue among practitioners or policymakers but little meaningful or lasting change as the result of one of two advocacy errors. First, many funded advocacy initiatives produce immediate changes and for good reason: they temporarily change conditions by producing special attention or effort toward a given problem. But as soon as these temporary advocacy pressures subside, so too do the altered outcomes because the new structure has not been *made self-reproducing.* Second, an advocate may accomplish their target goal—for example, a state legislature passes a new bill—but this policy does not disrupt old or create new sources of ongoing reproduction. In other words, while something changed —for example, community colleges in a state are now required to publicly report racially disaggregated completion data—this change may not interrupt the processes by which inequitable college completion outcomes are continually reproduced. We can think of this as a two-tiered problem. First, how do policy

advocates *reshape* the domain so that their changes *stick*? And second, how can advocates attend to whether their *reshaping strategies* are well aligned to the policy problem? While this problem is split across tiers—does it stick and is it a good solution anyway?—I argue for a united, analytic solution.

Thinking about policy change as a matter of *reshaping* pressures, a policy advocate seeking lasting change would need to carefully analyze the mechanisms supporting the status quo and create "shocks" or strategies that will repurpose these pressures to new ends.[lv] These supports, which are often referred to in the literature as "modes of reproduction," are the beliefs, day-to-day processes, or incentives that persistently create and recreate educational policy outcomes.[lvi] I will refer to these modes of reproduction as *embedded structures* for the remainder of this paper. Embedded structures need no outside intervention to self-perpetuate indefinitely. For example, government provision of student aid and GI Bill benefits in an environment lacking significant policy regulation created an embedded set of structures that provide self-activating incentives to profit colleges for predatory veteran recruiting practices. For an advocacy strategy to disrupt the status quo, it must diminish existing structures and introduce new self-activating beliefs, incentives, rewards, or routines.

Creating persistent, systemic change requires careful analytic attention to these *embedded structures* (what they are, where they occur), the level of desired intervention and change (e.g., local or national scope), and the potential for alignment between the two (e.g., if a local foundation desires to change something that is fundamentally national in scope). In the realm of policy advocacy, the embedded structures that require disruption could reside within the training and habits of individual teachers (e.g., reducing educator bias that leads to inequitable disciplinary outcomes in schools) all the way up through formal federal policy. Figure 2 illustrates the potential relationships between the four primary strategies for policy advocacy available to philanthropic actors and various types of embedded structures.

Figure 2: Embedded Structures and Modes of Disruption

Types of Embedded Structures	Example(s)	Aligned Advocacy Strategy for Disruption
Taken-for-granted **beliefs, metrics, or attitudes about what matters**	Resonant policy frames, student identity categories, professional norms	Thinking
Taken-for-granted **beliefs or knowledge about what works and for who**	Unsubstantiated or outdated "best practices"	Engineering
Taken-for-granted **structures, incentives, or policies**	Existing performance metrics, formal policies, funding streams	Brokering
Knowledge, skillsets, stakeholder interest groups, or infrastructures aligned to the status quo	Professional training programs, teacher or faculty unions, accreditation agencies	Building

In order to make this discussion of "embedded structures" more concrete, I offer comparative a example in a K-12 policy context. In this domain Greene,[lvii] writing about processes of systemic change, noted a stark contrast between two movements: one targeting policies to promote merit-based teacher pay and the other at policies to promote school choice through charter schools. Both solutions are ideologically similar in their neoliberal market orientation. However, as charter schools have become near ubiquitous in the U.S. context, merit-based pay has largely failed to take hold. How do we understand these different outcomes? In the case of charter schools, policy advocates were able to build up embedded structures in the field including the expansion of and ease of access to state funds for charter development, the creation of groups and associations of professionals dedicated to the long-term political viability of charters, and the dissemination of pro-charter "choice" discourse that positioned the lack of market competition among traditional public schools as a primary problem for

student achievement.[lviii] Ultimately, even if all philanthropic investment in charter schools ended today, the discursive, political, and professional changes to the field have become self-reproducing and durable. In other words, the political domain has been *reshaped.* In stark contrast, merit-based pay movements, while based squarely in similar market logics, never tapped into a coalitional base that could carry on this policy design beyond early stages.[lix] While some lawmakers or policy advocates could espouse this policy solution, given the strength of existing social beliefs particularly on the left (i.e. that teachers are important and underpaid, or the political coalitions within unions that protect pay structures), this movement never changed the fundamental processes by which teacher pay models are reproduced. Even as policy ideas and template circulated, the political domain was never reshaped.

An Applied Framework: Developing Reshaping Strategies

Based on these literatures and examples, in order to produce change, advocacy methods should attend specifically to reducing or replacing the embedded strictures that create persistent conditions. We can think of a coherent set of strategies as a reshaping strategy because it would create pressures that reshape persistent outcomes and practices. For example, if foundations wanted to change the standards for two-year to four-year college transfer, they might attempt to change state-level policies on this topic. However, transfer policies reside and are reproduced on a school-by-school basis and must be approved by faculty via shared governance; they are also restricted in part by federal FERPA guidelines. As such, while a state policy requiring attention to enhancing transfer policy could be passed, it may have little effect on practice if the embedded structures that reproduce existing outcome and practices are kept intact.

Reshaping strategies create substantive changes in educational processes by matching **the policy advocacy tactics** at the right level, to the **embedded structures** that automatically reproduce existing policy outcomes. This requires potential advocates to ask and answer the question: what pressures, rewards, or structures consistently produce the outcome, process, or policy in question?

What would this kind of analytical process look like in applied advocacy work? First, advocates would begin with a series of questions designed to surface reshaping strategies (see prompts below).

Prompts for Identifying Reshaping Strategies

- **Prompt 1: Identify the problematic outcome.** What outcome are you trying to change and for who?
    - *E.g., the negative effects of harsh disciplinary tactics on students' academic experiences*
- **Prompt 2: Identify the known inequities in the problem.** Does this process affect populations differentially? How and why? Does this affect your change target?
    - *E.g., disciplinary actions are disproportionately affecting students of color, boys, and students with disabilities*
- **Prompt 3: Identify the incentives, beliefs, organized interests, or processes that continually reproduce this policy or outcome (i.e., "embedded structures").** How and why is this process persistently reproduced? How do identified inequities show up in this problem?
    - *E.g., teacher training and habit regarding discipline; teacher, parent, and administrator beliefs about students and about justice; designated spaces and procedures for traditional justice practices; district level policy*
- **Prompt 4: Identify a structure or process to target in order to change the outcome.** What process are you targeting that contributes to this outcome and why? How can you use evidence to narrow this target?
    - *E.g., introduce restorative justice teacher trainings and policies at a district-level*
- **Prompt 5: Define the level of your change work.** Are you targeting processes of reproduction that occur at the individual, classroom, state, or national level? Is this a suitable level for the work given the pressures identified?
    - *E.g., school or district level in-service PD, state-level teacher certification programs*

After answering these prompts, advocates can place their strategies in a matrix, as illustrated in Figure 3. This matrix does not speak to what a single grant would accomplish, but a broader strategy for policy advocacy involving multiple grants and potentially multiple funders in collaboration. Figure 3 provides a contrast between a *reshaping* to a temporary advocacy strategy both aimed at advancing restorative justice policies. This matrix demonstrates the potential match and mismatch between different advocacy strategies and embedded structures in education policy that would need to be changed to create a sustained solution.

A *reshaping strategy* would strategically implement advocacy strategies that attend to the identified reproductive pressures, applying them at an appropriate level of intervention. Using the examples given in the series of questions above, we could predict that a grant-funded initiative that asked schools to adopt a restorative justice policy and funded a restorative justice coordinator at each school within a district for a set period of time *would not* result in long-term, meaningful policy change in relation to the identified problematic outcome.[lx] This sort of *building* work would need to be partnered with strategies that attend to the longer list of reproductive pressures identified in Prompt 3.

Figure 3. Example of a Reshaping v. Temporary Strategies

Reshaping Strategy				
(Prompt 1) **Problematic Outcome**	*(Prompt 3)* **Mode of Reproduction**	*(Prompt 4)* **Change Target**	**Advocacy Strategy** (i.e., Mode of Disruption)	*(Prompt 5)* **Level**
Too many students are missing school and seeing negative academic and socioemotional effects from harsh disciplinary tactics	teacher training and habit regarding discipline		Building: Fund a three-year training and coaching program that gets incorporated into a disciplinary coordinator position; Develop restorative justice "certifications" in education schools	School/ Individual/ Societal
	teacher, parent, and administrator beliefs about students and about justice	*Introduce restorative justice teacher trainings and policies at a district-level*	Thinking: Producing and disseminating counternarratives and counter-evidence about "what works" for justice; Encourage the adoption of *metrics* to legitimate practices	Individual/ School
	district and school-level policy		Brokering: Providing incentives and templates to adopt policies that encourage restorative justice practices	District and school
	designated spaces and procedures for traditional justice practices		Building: Fund the repurposing of physical spaces and procedures away from traditional and toward restorative practices	School
(Prompt 2) *Inequities driven by this problem: Disciplinary actions are disproportionately affecting students of color, boys, and students with disabilities*	implicit bias among teachers and administrators within schools		Thinking & Engineering: Fund and disseminate programming for diverting biases	Individual/ Societal
	time and resources available to white, wealthy parents to advocate against harsh treatment		Building: Fund or recognize inclusive coalition building and equitable adoption of practices across districts	School

Temporary Strategy				
(Prompt 1) **Problematic Outcome**	*(Prompt 3)* **Mode of Reproduction**	*(Prompt 4)* **Change Target**	**Advocacy Strategy** (i.e., Mode of Disruption)	*(Prompt 5)* **Level**
Too many students are missing school and seeing negative academic and socioemotional effects from harsh disciplinary tactics	teacher training and habit regarding discipline		Building: Fund a three-year training and coaching program by staffing a "coach" in each district school	School/ Individual
	teacher, parent, and administrator beliefs about students and about justice	*Introduce restorative justice teacher trainings and policies at a district-level*		Individual/ School
	district and school-level policy			District and school
	designated spaces and procedures for traditional justice practices		Brokering: Providing incentives to adopt formal policies that encourage restorative justice practices	School
(Prompt 2) *Inequities driven by this problem: Disciplinary actions are disproportionately affecting students of color, boys, and students with disabilities*	implicit bias among teachers and administrators within schools			Individual/ Societal
	time and resources available to white, wealthy parents to advocate against harsh treatment			School

This example of restorative justice policy is intended only to illustrate the role of alignment and should not be read as a preference for one strategy over another (e.g., more *building* does not

necessarily result in a better strategy) or to argue that *more* tactics are always better. In the *reshaping* strategy, we see how the primary change target is the same as in the temporary strategy, but that multiple advocacy tactics are employed to alter (as shown by the red arrows) the extant modes of reproduction. In contrast, the temporary strategy only shifts the policy environment for the term of the grant (as shown by the yellow arrows) and changes one mode of reproduction, but leave multiple, influential structures, beliefs, and routines unchanged.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Many funders already engaged in policy advocacy routinely attend to the alignment between policy problems, strategies, and solutions (Prompts 1 and 4). This report recommends that funders interested in maximizing the impact of their advocacy look carefully at how their strategies "shock" or disrupt embedded structures that support the status quo (Prompt 3), and which embedded structures lead to inequitable outcomes for particular groups or communities (Prompt 2). The complexity of these embedded structures highlights that a single grant and even a single funder will rarely be able to achieve systemic change unilaterally.

This brief highlights how crucial issues in education will likely require multiple forms of strategic advocacy at various levels to reshape the policy domain. As such, systemic change attending to multiple embedded structures will often require collaboration with the field and amongst funders—particularly those that operate across local, regional, and national levels. Future work in both funding and formal evaluation should leverage and test the efficacy of cross-funder collaborations that employ intentional *reshaping* strategies. Philanthropic actors are already funding work across all major strategy categories—thinking, engineering, brokering, and building—and could introduce causal evaluations of the effects of these efforts through random assignment or quasi-experimental protocols. And finally, as they engage in advocacy work, philanthropy must attend not only to whether or not funders *can* create change, but also to how funders can do this work inclusive of and responsive to the interests and inputs of minoritized communities, sound evidence, and democratic principles.

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