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Keep It Cheap, Keep It Local, and Keep It Coming

Standards-Based Accountability Reform in Wisconsin

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Through a multiple perspectives model that incorporates the normative, symbolic, and political perspectives, the author analyzes the emergence of standards-based accountability reform in the state of Wisconsin. His analysis offers insight into the effectiveness of various political actors' attempts to alter the state's education systems. Through this case study, the author contends that these policy makers' attempts to reform Wisconsin's systems of education are kept in check by the principles of cheap and local reform. Thus, to achieve change, these principles of cheap and local reform create a policy environment in which stakeholders must offer a continuous series of reform initiatives in hope that some of their policies might slip through an open policy window.

Keywords: *education reform; politics; education policy; standards*

> We put them in robes, hold grand graduation ceremonies, play "Pomp and Circumstance." Yet, the only thing we are guaranteeing is that they completed at least a minimum number of high school courses. We don't know what went into their heads. If you can't read and write, if you can't calculate, you're not going to get a diploma in the state of Wisconsin. And if a school district is failing to teach those skills, the taxpayers and parents deserve to know about it.
>
> —Former Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson, cited in Harp (1996).

Former Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson's statement represents one of the many arguments he put forward to change Wisconsin's education

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system. During his tenure, Thompson, like many recent governors across the United States, proposed and implemented several reform measures that altered the structure of Wisconsin's education system as means to improve student performance.

In this quote, Thompson argues that the education a student receives in Wisconsin has lost its value and that high standards must be put in place to ensure the student and the educators within the district are held accountable for his or her learning. Moreover, implementing a system of accountability will reassure the taxpayers that the state's schools are not wasting *their* money.

Former Governor Thompson's proposals to alter Wisconsin's public education system had two primary goals—a policy goal and a political goal (Stone, 2002, p. 2). From a policy perspective, Thompson (1996) supported reforms that fostered "a proactive government designed around conservative values" that "try new solutions, even when it mean[s] directly confronting the philosophy of government that had dominated the state for a generation" (pp. 4-5). In education, that meant pursuing a range of policies that infused the system with accountability measures to ensure that the state's students were performing at a high academic level. Politically, as governor, Thompson used numerous rational, symbolic, and political tools to alter the trajectory of the state's education system to gain state and national attention as an education reformer. As a Republican senator on the Senate Committee on Education noted, "Education was the issue that he [Thompson] was very motivated by what people were saying nationally. He always wanted to be a leader and be ahead of the curve in Wisconsin. And Wisconsin's education is at the top, but he wanted it to be even better." Yet many of his policy solutions to alter Wisconsin's system of education failed to remain a part of the state's education legislation. For instance, the high school graduation test that Thompson made the case for in the speech that I cite from in the above, which was initially passed by the state legislature in the 1997, was eliminated in the state's 2003-2005 biennial budget.

I contend that this failed proposal for high-stakes education reform and many of the failed policy solutions[1] that former Governor Thompson; the two former state superintendents, Herbert Grover and John Benson; the legislature; and the state's Department of Public Instruction (DPI) proposed to restructure Wisconsin's system of public education could not succeed because they violated two basic principles of education reform in Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, education reform must be cheap, and it must be local. Such principles make achieving any type of system-wide reform in Wisconsin difficult, which raises the question as to whether states similar to Wisconsin can alter their education practices at a system-wide level, which is the goal of many

standards-based reforms (e.g., the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, typically referred to as No Child Left Behind). Moreover, this resistance to centralized control creates a policy environment in which those who attempt to implement change must continually propose policy measures to achieve their education goals. In essence, these principles of cheap and local reform foster a political environment of never-ending reform.

In this article, I use a multiple perspectives approach (Malen & Knapp, 1997) to analyze the collective ripples of policy change (Cuban, 1990) that led to Wisconsin's standards-based reforms. I examine this rise of standards-based accountability (SBA) reforms in Wisconsin from the late 1980s to the elimination of the state's High School Graduation Test (HSGT) in the 2003-2005 biannual budget. I center my analysis on the normative (Majone, 1989), symbolic (M. L. Smith, Miller-Kahn, Heinecke, & Jarvis, 2004), and political (e.g., Mazzoni, 1991) issues that arise in the reform process to consider "targets and strategies" education stakeholders might consider to influence policy change (Malen & Knapp, 1997, p. 421). Although each perspective offers an explanatory view of the political process of reform, I argue that the success or failure for educational change in Wisconsin can be reduced to the principles of cheap and local reform. Such principles create the need for a constant policy push by stakeholders if they are to achieve their reform agenda.

A Multiple Perspectives Approach

Achieving any change in a system of education is a difficult process. For instance, Wilson (2003)[2] documents the failure by numerous policy actors to achieve systemic reform in math education in California. Rather than alter the practice of teachers to improve student performance, Wilson found that policy makers merely destabilized the political discourse of education reform. Wilson's work exemplifies Cuban's (1990) notion that reforms constantly reappear because the institutional structure of reform decouples classroom teaching from policy making (p. 11).

Confounding this issue of whether reform leads to change is the fact that once a "change" occurs, it is difficult to determine its success (Elmore, 1996, 1997). Numerous educational policy analysts have argued that this complex climate of education policy is an inherent part of the politics of education reform (e.g., Elmore, 2004; Firestone, 1989; Hess, 1999; Pincus, 1974). Given the conflicting nature of education policy reform, Malen and Knapp (1997) proposed combining multiple perspectives of education reform to create "a heuristic devise that invites broader and deeper examination of education policy patterns and possibilities" (p. 420). They contended that a multiple

perspectives approach draws "attention to different elements of policy-practice story and offers alternative ways of understanding its main events" (p. 435). Applying multiple perspectives offers the opportunity to "uncover how policy may serve many purposes simultaneously" and "amplify interpretations of policy activity" (pp. 437-438).

For the case study in this article, I use the normative, symbolic, and political perspectives of reform to analyze the emergence of SBA reform in Wisconsin. This framing of reform illuminates the ways in which various stakeholders attempt to alter the practice of education in the state of Wisconsin. Although each perspective highlights important processes in policy formulation and implementation, the principles of cheap and local reform emerge as the ballast for the state's education systems as the various political waves of system-wide change wash across the state.

To understand the "values" that stakeholders promote as they attempt to amend Wisconsin's education system, I link Majone's (1989) vision of the policy change as an "evolutionary" process with Bakhtin's (1986) construct of the dialogic relationship. This link highlights how education reform evolves out of the interaction between particular conceptual framings of the policy problem, the possible policy solutions that exist at that time, and the relationships that exist among stakeholders within that particular community. Policy change is the result of the mediated dialogic interaction of the policy community, the political arena, and the electorate (Bakhtin, 1986; Majone, 1989). To understand the process of policy development, one must pay attention to the "ideas, theories, and arguments as well as technology, economics, and politics" (Majone, 1989, p. 166). For Majone (1989), policy making is not an objective process. Rather, stakeholders base their policy arguments on value judgments that they use to persuade the electorate to pursue policy initiatives that alter the core of a policy issue. Majone (1989) pointed out that "a policy idea will not be adopted unless it is communicated persuasively and meets the demands of the political environment" (p. 165). Moreover,

> To have one's ideas and values incorporated in the policymaking process, state policy actors must alter the values and preferences of the people they represent. They must, in effect, be translated so that they will be recognized, included, and heard in the policy culture. (Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1986, p. 375)

For policy makers to be successful in promoting change, "policy actors must rephrase, create, and change the image, symbols, content, and goals of policy preferences if they are to maintain power and have a chance of seeing their needs met" (Marshall et al., 1986, p. 376). To unpack the symbols used

by policy makers to alter the construction of education within Wisconsin, I incorporate M. L. Smith et al.'s (2004) construction of education reform as a political spectacle.

Applying Ellwein's (1987), Ellwein and Glass's (1989),[3] Stone's (2002),[4] and Edelman's (1985, 1988)[5] interpretations of the policy process, M. L. Smith et al. (2004), through five case studies, demonstrated how current educational policy and issues are spectacles in which particular groups of individuals retain or gain political power within education systems in the United States. For example, they use their previous work with authors such as Nolen, Haladyna, and Haas (1992); Noble and Smith (1994); and M. L. Smith, Heinecke, and Noble (1999) on SBA reform in Arizona to analyze the political spectacle of testing in education policy. Through the case of Arizona, M. L. Smith et al. (2004) illustrated how identifying poor student performance as the "problem" with Arizona's education system led to the call for accountability and the instruction of basic skills as the political solution. They argued that the spectacle of this process of revamping the state's student testing program led to an unstable system of education reform within Arizona. This instability created a continuous struggle by various actors and groups to define what it means to be educated within the state. The use of the spectacle in Arizona exemplifies how dominant groups create education problems and propose solutions that inscribe and reinforce the relations of power within the education system. Contrarily, in my case study, stakeholders invoke particular spectacles to alter rather than maintain power. Nevertheless, political actors use many of the elements described by M. L. Smith et al. (2004) in their attempts to take charge of the direction of Wisconsin's public schools.

To give this article structure, I use Mazzonni's (1991) arena model (Fowler, 1994) to define Wisconsin's political environment and the political actors, bureaucrats, and constituency groups that shaped Wisconsin's SBA reforms. Mazzoni (1991) identified four primary arenas: the subsystem, the macro, the leadership, and the commission. Mazzoni originally hypothesized that the educational policy emerged from the stable subsystem arena, which consists of small and stable groups of committee-based legislators, bureaucrats, and interest groups whose primary interest is fostering relationships that maintain the status quo through pluralistic bargaining rather than implementing major policy changes. Thus, major policy change occurs outside this arena and in the macro arena. The macro arena, which Mazzoni (1991) viewed as unstable and dynamic, includes various leaders, the media, and individuals not part of the subsystem arena. These actors engage in more visible, ideological, and accessible dynamics of politics. External pressure or the influx of revenue at the macro level can influence change at the subsystem level.

However, after applying this theoretical model, Mazzoni revised his work to include a leadership arena and commission arena. For Mazzoni, the leadership arena consists of a state's top legislative and executive office holders who forge alliances to achieve change. Mazzoni (1991) contended that top officials, though having limits, "are in a unique position to exercise sustained leverage on the process and outcomes of arena politics, with a strategically placed 'idea champion' being a vital force for innovative change" (pp. 131-132). Although these individuals are not the only policy innovators within this model and are constrained by numerous factors, they do make a difference. For this case study, two particular individuals, former Governor Thompson and former Superintendent Benson, attempt to push numerous issues on to the state's policy agenda, and in the end, an alliance between the two drives the majority of Wisconsin's standards-based reforms through the state's opened policy windows (Kingdon, 2003).

In terms of the commission arena, Mazzoni (1991) described these fixed groups of individuals, who represent diverse interests and are convened to address particular policy issues, are typically able to push particular structural change to the "discussion agenda." However, Fowler (1994), who used Mazzoni's model to analyze education policy innovation in Ohio, added national leaders and business elites to this arena. Unlike Mazzoni's examination of two education policies in Minnesota, Fowler (1994) found that the commission arena, which is a temporary appointed group of prominent people with diverse interests and typically has provisional power to recommend policy action, is not necessarily an independent arena that can influence change at the micro level. Nonetheless, Mazzoni found that arenas must compete with one another, and there are policy games played between the areas to achieve policy change (p. 133).

Mazzoni's (1991) reference to Firestone's (1989) construction of the politics of reform as a set of competing games aligns this political perspective with the symbolic perspective. Firestone argues that these competing games create a fragmented context that make achieving a uniform or systemic response to change public education improbable. Moreover, these games foster a spectacle of reform (Edelman, 1988) that creates winners and losers at each level of reform. For instance, at the state level of governance, which is the focus of this article, the winners get their programs enacted and either keep or move on to positions that are more powerful. Working in such an environment entices policy makers to select reforms that provide maximum political payoff and can be easily identified with their tenure (Firestone, 1989; Fullan, 1991). This political need for immediate and maximum payoff contradicts the long-term nature of education reform to affect change (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Firestone, 1989; Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1991; Wilson, 2003).

For the purpose of this article, Mazzoni's (1991) arenas provide structure to the politics of change and offer a schematic to understand the politics of education reform. Furthermore, my perspective of the politics of reform, which views the arena model through a series of competing games, aligns well with the normative and symbolic perspectives I use to analyze the reform process in Wisconsin.

Method

The Case

The research presented in this article is part of a larger instrumental case study[6] that examined the formulation and implementation of a high-stakes SBA policy at the state and school district level (Stake, 1995, 2000). Instrumental case studies "provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case is a secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else" (Stake, 2000, p. 437).

For this article, I center my investigation on the emergence of standards-based reform in Wisconsin in the late 1980s through the elimination of the High School Graduation Test in the 2003-2005 biennial budget. In particular, I examine the political process from which these policies surfaced, and in doing so, I provide insight into the characteristics of education policies that policy makers in states like Wisconsin are likely to implement.

SBA reforms emerged in Wisconsin over a series of events that mimic the trends of education reform at the national level from the late 1980s through the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act—for example, Goals 2000, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), and so on. However, the state of Wisconsin itself is unique in terms of what entities formulate and approve statewide education legislation. Wisconsin is the only state within the United States that does not have a state school board. Rather, the state legislature introduces education legislation, typically through appropriation bills. Then, the governor, using his or her veto power, which includes the line-item veto, can approve or reject the state's education legislation. To be clear, in Wisconsin, the governor's line-item veto, first approved in 1974, encourages "creative writing by the Governor" (Gosling, 1986, p. 293). This law not only allows the governor to veto appropriations within a spending bill but also allows him or her to partially veto statutory or session law language within an appropriations bill (Gosling, 1986, p. 293). The Wisconsin State Supreme Court, in 1978, found it reasonable for the governor to be able to strike any word or letter within an appropriations bill as long as appropriation

amounts are struck in their entirety and whatever remains after the veto is a feasible law (Gosling, 1986, p. 293).[7]

In terms of state-mandated instructional resources, Wisconsin does not have state-mandated textbooks or curricula; instead, local school districts decide on textbook and curricular requirements. This history of loose coupling between the state and the local school districts creates a unique situation where elected politicians provide guidance to school districts through legislative policy. Therefore, to implement statewide standards-based reform, state policy makers must move beyond a deep history of local control.

Typically, the state's education legislation appears as part of the biennium budget. Thus, outside of the governor and actions of the Senate and Assembly's Education and Education Reform Committees, identifying a particular policy maker's position on specific education legislation is very difficult.

Data Generation

Data generation for this instrumental case study occurred through interviews and the analysis of political documents (Stake, 1995, 2000). Recognizing that I would be unable to identify all the key informants prior to undertaking this case study, informant selection at the beginning of the study was intentionally incomplete. However, embedded in my study was a snowball sampling system (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 1990) for the identification of additional informants to ensure that I interviewed key stakeholders who were active in the formulation and implementation of the state's education reforms. Interviews of these state stakeholders ($N = 23$) occurred between the years of 2002 and 2004.

A difficulty that exists in researching the political process of education reform is the ethical issue of confidentiality (Christians, 2000; Datnow & Sutherland, 2002). For this study, I assured my participants that I would mask their identity in any of the documents that I generated for this research. Although I did interview policy makers, state administrators, government advisers, university faculty, and representatives from state-based political organizations to ensure a valid and reliable case study, I am unable to provide an exact list of who did or did not participate in this study (see Table 1 to gain a general sense of who participated in the study and the documents that I analyzed).

Three criteria directed my selection of documents for this study. First, the documents had to be public, so that I would not compromise any participant or nonparticipant's rights. The second requirement was that the documents provided insight into the development of SBA reform in the state of Wisconsin. This included documents that referred to the formulation and

Table 1
Data Sources

Informants for this article represent:	Artifacts analyzed for this article include:
Current and former legislators from the State Senate and State Assembly, including members of the Senate and the assembly's Education Committees and Committee on Education Reform Current and former Department of Public Instruction (DPI) administrators and employees Members of Governor Thompson's Blue Ribbon Education Panel Administrators and lawyers from Wisconsin's Department of Administration, the Joint Legislative Council, and the Legislative Reference Bureau Representatives from state-based political organizations, including an organization that represented the various teachers' unions an organization that represented the state's manufacturers and business associations an organization that represented the state's superintendents and principals an organization that was an alliance of the state's school administrators Representatives from district-based advocacy groups in education that spearheaded the call to reform Wisconsin's promotion and graduation policies	The *NSP* and *HSGT* legislation from both the 1997-1998 and 1999 legislative sessions Documents generated by DPI that focus on these policies (e.g., DPI's [2000] Suggestions for local school boards in approaching the development of high grade advancement policies: Implementing the provisions of 1999 Wisconsin Act 9) and the Wisconsin Student Assessment System The federal policies of 1994 (IASA) and 2001 (NCLB) under the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act, which require the documentation of student performance in reading and math Position papers put forward by state agencies, such as the Legislative Fiscal Bureau Position papers put forward by 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 rewriting the *NSP* statutes, and newspaper articles that examined the formulation and implementation of these policies

Note: NSP = *No Social Promotion*; HSGT = High School Graduation Test; IASA = Improving America's Schools Act; NCLB = No Child Left Behind.

implementation of state-based education reforms from 1988 through 2004, documents that provided insight into the views of education stakeholders throughout Wisconsin (e.g., editorials by civic or organizational leaders, state organizations' position papers, etc.), and federal legislation that required the formulation and implementation of SBA reforms (e.g., IASA). Finally, I selected additional documents on the basis of interviewee recommendations, for example, the testimonies of the Senate and Assembly Education Committee hearings on rewriting the state's *No Social Promotion* statutes. Documents included in this analysis are also listed in Table 1.

Data Analysis

My analysis of the data followed traditional qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Erikson, 1986; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Strauss, 1996; Wolcott, 1994). I read and reread the policy documents and interview transcripts to identify relevant themes in the data, which I then coded using both external and internal codes (Graue & Walsh, 1998). I developed themes from the relevant data, and I read them against the text in search of contradictory evidence (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Wolcott, 1994; Strauss, 1996). 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; Graue & Walsh, 1998). Finally, I transformed this research text into this interpretive document that represents my understanding of the political interactions that shaped Wisconsin's education policy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Results

Beginning to Systematically Change Public Education in Wisconsin

Historically, researchers have viewed Wisconsin's policy makers as leaders in social, political, and economic reforms. Their collective acts have fostered a "laboratory of policy change" (Marshall et al., 1986; Wirt, Mitchell, & Marshall, 1988). Wirt et al. (1988) made the case that the state's constituents believe "political power has been used positively to improve citizens' lives within a web of democratic control" (p. 277). This creates a political environment in which constituents expect their policy makers to use their authority to serve the common good of the state.

In terms of education policy, prior to 1988, Wisconsin's independent school districts had to meet very few state regulations. This fragmented system produced high-performing students on most national education markers—for example, the American College Testing, or 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 (see, e.g., Henry, 1993; Wisconsin Education Association Council [WEAC], 2005).

Nevertheless, in 1988, the legislature issued Wisconsin's 20 Educational Standards and required DPI to audit 10% of the schools throughout the state to ensure that districts were in compliance with these standards. The program standards strived for a horizontal alignment of inputs across the state by

requiring districts to implement such measures as ensuring that students received 180 days of face-to-face instruction, a student testing system, a performance reporting system, and so forth.[8]

During the 1988-1989 school year, the state legislature required the implementation of the first mandated statewide testing requirement, the Third Grade Reading Test program. In fact, the first statewide testing program did not begin in Wisconsin until 1975 with the implementation of the Wisconsin Pupil Assessment Program (WPAP; 1975-1987). As the call by policy makers for standardizing education systems and holding students and educators accountable for academic performance materialize at the national level during the 1980s (e.g., National Governors Association, 1988, 1989), the educational system in Wisconsin exemplifies a fractured system of education that offers little instructional guidance to local classrooms (Cohen & Spillane, 1992).

Key Stakeholders in Wisconsin's Education Reforms

The primary change agent in this era of SBA reform in Wisconsin is former Governor Tommy Thompson (Republican). First elected governor in 1986, Thompson served four successive terms until he left office in 2001 to become the Secretary of Health and Human Services under President George W. Bush. Prior to being elected governor, Thompson was a member of the State Assembly from 1967 to 1987 (see Table 2 for a brief description of each arena).

Other stakeholders within the leadership arena were the nonpartisan State Superintendents of Public Instruction, Herbert Grover (1980-1992), who served in the state legislature with Thompson; John Benson (1993-2001); and John Haney, the president of the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, a business organization.

The state legislature and DPI fall inside the subsystem arena, and the macro arena includes other members of the business community; political organizations representing the educational establishment and conservative think tanks, and parents' organizations (see Table 3 for summary of the political composition of the Wisconsin legislature during this era of reform).

The commission arena does exist within Wisconsin, and in most instances, these commissions either arise from an Executive Order from the governor or through the acts of the superintendent of public instruction. As Fowler (1994) pointed out, these commissions tend to operate as a subsystem of the leadership arena rather than as a "bona fide" arena (p. 344).

For the time line that I investigate in this article, I center my attention on the leadership arena. Specifically, I emphasize the acts of former Governor

Table 2
Wisconsin's Political Arenas

The Leadership Arena

Former Governor Tommy Thompson: First elected governor in 1986; was reelected four times and left office in 2001 to serve as the Secretary of Health and Human Services under President George W. Bush. Prior to being elected governor, Thompson was a member of the State Assembly from 1967 to 1987.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction: Superintendent Herbert Grover (1980-1992) and Superintendent John Benson (1993-2001); the state superintendent, a constitutional recognized elected position, has no legislative power within the education process.

James Haney, President, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC; 1985-present): According to the WMC Web site, WMC is the state's largest and most influential business and industrial organization, representing more than 4,000 members statewide.

The Subsystem Arena

The state legislature: Played a significant role in formulating and implementing the state's SBA policies. Their collective actions within these reforms represent their reading of the political problem at hand. Their role within Wisconsin's SBA reform process is one of interpreter—enacting or rejecting particular policy solutions on the basis of their understanding of the political problem and their allegiance to particular constituencies.

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI): The administrators within DPI are to support the implementation of state policy, researching the implementation of such efforts, and to advise the state's policy makers on education policy. The department's powers are dependent on legislative action.

The Macro Arena

Political organizations: Typically, there were organizations that supported the education establishment, for example, the Education Association Council, the Wisconsin Association of State School Boards, the Wisconsin PTA, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families; and those that challenged the education establishment: the WMC, the American Legislative Exchange Council, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Hudson Institute, and the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute Foundation.

Local constituency groups: There were two key organizations: (a) Parents Raising Educational Standards in Schools (PRESS) supported the implementation of clear content and performance standards and school choice but opposed such measures as a statewide performance-based assessment, and (b) Advocates for the Education of Whitefish Bay opposed Thompson's push for the use of a standardized test scores to determine whether to promote a student to the next grade level or whether a student graduated from high school.

The Commission Arena

Commission on Schools for the 21st Century: Established in 1990 to develop a road map for education reform and then have the legislature commit the funding and policies to develop dramatically different schools by the end of the century.

Educational Goals Committee: Established in 1992 to establish state education goals and create a comprehensive means of measuring student progress in meeting those goals.

State Superintendent Assessment Advisory Committee: Established in 1993 to advise the state superintendent on using the educational goals developed by the Commission on Schools.

Governor's Advisory Taskforce on Education and Learning: Established in 1996 by the governor to address policies surrounding educational standards, assessment, and accountability.

Governor's Council on Model Academic Standards: Established in 1997 to develop the state's academic standards for all pupils in English language, arts, mathematics, science, and social studies at Grades 4, 8, and 12.

Note: SBA = standards-based accountability.

Table 3
Political Composition of the Wisconsin Legislature (1987-2003)

	Senate			Assembly	
	Democrat	Republican	Vacant	Democrat	Republican
1987	19	11	3	54	45
1989	20	13		56	43
1991	19	14		58	41
1993[a]	15	15	3	52	47
1995[b]	16	17		48	51
1997[c]	17	16		47	52
1999	17	16		44	55
2001	18	15		43	56
2003	15	18		41	58

a. The majority control of the Senate changed during the session. On April 20, 1993, the vacancies were filled, which resulted in a total of 16 Democrats and 17 Republicans.
b. The majority control of the Senate changed during the session. On June 16, 1996, the vacancies were filled, which resulted in a total of 17 Democrats and 16 Republicans.
c. The majority control of the Senate changed during the session. On April 19, 1998, the vacancies were filled, which resulted in a total of 16 Democrats and 17 Republicans.

Thompson; the two state superintendents, Grover and Benson; and the actions by the leaders of the Senate and Assembly's Education Committees.

The Emergence of Standards-Based Reform in Wisconsin

Following the implementation of Wisconsin's 20 Educational Standards and the Third Grade Reading Test, Wisconsin's progression toward SBA reform mimics the actions of other states across the country. For instance, at the end of the 1980s, governors across the United States through organizations such as the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Southern Regional Educational Board identified education reform as a key ingredient for political success. Governors promoted education policies to attract corporate investment to their states. By emphasizing high student performance through the implementation of systemic reforms, they hoped to create symbolic appeal to lure political support and to increase economic investment in their states.

In Wisconsin, Thompson's attempts to reform the state's system of public education goes through four distinct phases,[9] and in each phase, different actors take on a more prominent role within the policy process. The first phase materializes out Thompson's work with the NGA—the emergence of legislation that promotes statewide goals and assessment measures. The second

phase begins with the election of John Benson as superintendent of public instruction. It is under Benson's tenure as state superintendent that DPI and Thompson begin to formulate and implement the state's SBA system. The third is the response from the education establishment and various constituent groups to the implementation of the content and performance standards that emerge from the second phase of reform. Thompson's departure to Washington, D.C. to become the secretary of the United States' Department of Health and Human Services marks the final phase.

Phase 1: Thompson's Initial Steps Toward Education Reform

Early in his career, Thompson focused on specific education issues rather than the state's entire system. For instance, Thompson (1996) proposed what he termed a *school choice program* in 1988 for low-income families because he believed the private schools were doing a better job educating Milwaukee's students. Thompson (1996) linked this program to his welfare initiatives such as Learnfare, which tied welfare payments to families with a high school student's (ages 13-19) attendance record. He believed that his reforms would not work "without changing the public school system. Unless low-income families had good, solid educational opportunities, the welfare rolls could only go up" (p. 92).

This solution to the poor performance of Milwaukee's public schools, as well as other initiatives such as welfare reform, emerged from what Thompson (1996) termed a "grocery store standard" to government solutions (p. 7)—Thompson's parents ran a small grocery store in Elroy, Wisconsin—meaning that "if it [the policy] won't make sense in the small-town grocery store, it probably won't work. If ordinary people don't understand what government is doing, then what government is doing probably isn't right" (p. 7).

Initially, Thompson's choice reforms failed, which included a proposal for Wisconsin families to enroll their children in any public school they chose. After these initial setbacks, Thompson (1996) centered his efforts only on Milwaukee and began to build a coalition of support with particular members of Milwaukee's African American community (e.g., the Milwaukee chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People opposed the original voucher legislation). By fostering a positive relationship with State Representative Annette "Polly" Williams, who sponsored what became the state's voucher legislation, and other leaders within the community, Thompson's goal of school choice in Milwaukee eventually succeeded.

Along with these African American coalitions, Thompson (1996), fighting what he termed the *education establishment*, which included Superintendent

Grover, garnered political and financial support from organizations outside of the education system.[10]

Not only did the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) change the structure of education in Milwaukee, its legal success put in motion a series of voucher and choice plans across the nation. How successful this program is in improving student performance in Milwaukee is open to debate because of the fact that those students who do receive vouchers to attend parochial or private schools do not participate in the state's current testing system (Kava, 2005). Nonetheless, this change in the structure of education in Wisconsin is important because it clearly delineates particular actions taken by Thompson to ensure the success of this policy.

To begin, the MPCP, unlike Thompson's original choice proposals, targeted a particular population in a specific school district. Second, this program did not seek additional funding from the legislature, and rather, the state actually provides less funding per student for vouchers than it does for students who attend Milwaukee's public schools. Third, by establishing means for students to use public monies for private education, Thompson diminished the public and political value of Milwaukee's public education system. Fourth, Thompson recognized the importance in forming coalitions to reform this system of education (Apple, 2001). Tied with this is the fact that the leadership arena was dependent on members of the macro arena to promote this structural change in public education. Not only did the conservative think tanks consistently promote this idea of reform, which assisted political leaders in developing a critical mass of voices to push through change; these organizations also funded the defense of the system when the state government no longer wanted to participate in this change. Finally, Thompson began to establish himself as an "anti-establishment" education reformer. Thompson (1996) made it a goal of his to break up the public and private monopolies to create competition (p. 7). To take on the status quo, Thompson had to position himself as a leader in education who was not afraid to take on the bureaucratic education establishment. These actions also allowed Thompson to create a reform structure that legitimized his authority to change the education system by symbolically positioning himself outside of the problem (Apple, 2001; Elmore, 2003; M. L. Smith et al., 2004).

Although Thompson's interest in statewide education reform does not pique until the mid-1990s, this example of educational change in Milwaukee exemplifies Thompson's drive to alter the status quo within Wisconsin's education system, and his willingness to coalesce with particular groups, be it in or outside the education establishment, to achieve his goals for policy change.

Before going forward, I want to be clear that education reform in Wisconsin is not simply a narrative of Thompson versus the education establishment. Education reform emerged out of the actions of all the stakeholders cited in Table 2. However, Wisconsin is the only state in this nation that does not have a state school board, and tied with this, the state superintendent has no legislative power. In addition, Thompson taking a leadership role in education mirrors a trend of state leaders using strategies "to acquire legislative influence, gain positional advantage, attract campaign funding, and advanc[ing] political careers" (Mazzoni, 1993, p. 372).

Putting a Vision of a Common Set of Knowledge and Assessment in Motion

The first efforts by state policy makers to streamline "learning" in the state's 426 independent school districts took place shortly after the nation's governors met with President Bush in Charlottesville in 1989. Thompson and former State Superintendent Herbert J. Grover jointly appointed a 76-member Commission on Schools for the 21st Century in 1990 (Quick, 1992). Its mission was to develop a road map for education reform and then have the legislature commit the funding and policies to develop dramatically different schools by the end of the century. The $91 million 2-year proposal that emerged from this commission's work called for a process for setting state education goals and creating a comprehensive means of measuring student progress in meeting those goals (Quick, 1992; Viadero, 1992). The testing proposal called for performance-based tests for students in Grades 8 and 10 and student portfolios in Grades 4, 8, and 10.

To set these academic goals, the legislature passed Senate Bill 483 in May 1992, establishing the Educational Goals Committee.[11] This committee submitted a final list of 28 goals to Superintendent Benson, who served after Grover, and Governor Thompson in September 1993. Yet, Thompson and Benson only presented *Wisconsin's Educational Goals*[12] to the legislature and did not request the legislators to implement these goals and alter Wisconsin's statutory education law. According to Sowinski (1996a), the goals became too political and were linked with the federal government's *Goals 2000* legislation, which legislators saw as an act by the federal government to take away local control over education issues.

Although the legislature did not implement *Wisconsin Educational Goals,* the proposal for a statewide assessment program put forward by the Commission on Schools for the 21st Century did lead to the development of the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) under Act 269 (1991).

However, the legislature eliminated $800,000 in the 1993-1995 biennial budget for funding this statewide testing program. The majority of legislators were uncomfortable with the state dictating what local school districts must do. Granting a request made by Superintendent Grover and James Haney, president of Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, Thompson line-item vetoed the funding cuts to reinstate the testing program (Mayers, 1992). This testing program began for 8th and 10th grades during the 1993-1994 school year and for 4th grade during the 1996-1997 school year.

Thompson's interactions throughout this process of setting statewide goals for content and performance were quite interesting. To begin, he understood the lack of political interest in having the state "tell" local districts what to teach and to be tested. Yet, with the support of Superintendent Grover and the business community, Thompson continued to support the establishment of a statewide assessment system. The logic behind such alliances centered on the belief that the statewide assessment system would provide educators and the business community with a more informed understanding of how the state's students were performing.

For example, *Mr. Miller,*[13] the president of one of the trade associations that represent Wisconsin businesses, the *Business Action Committee* (*BAC*), saw measuring student performance as the means to improve Wisconsin's public schools.

> This is an era where in the business world the basic tenet is if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Continuous quality improvement is essential. You've got to benchmark it against the best, constantly becoming better with your end product and more efficient in the delivery of that end product. And so the light bulb kind of went on, now why doesn't that work in education delivery as well? So, we pushed this very hard.

According to *Mr. Miller,* continuous quality improvement, a basic tenet of the business community, is necessary to identify what areas of the state's education system need improvement.

Historically, seeking education solutions from the business community was common across the United States (Firestone & Schorr, 2004; McDaniel & Miskel, 2002), but what is unique about this in Wisconsin is that this need to improve student performance in many ways contradicts the success that the state's students were having on many other national indicators of performance.[14] In contrast to the high marks Wisconsin's students received on these national indicators, *Mr. Miller* stated that Wisconsin's high schools were not preparing their graduates for the workforce.

> Employers came to us and said we're just not getting kids with basic skills. It's just basic skills, and they just weren't seeing this stuff. And this is in a state where we pride ourselves on being so academically superior to most states around us.

In addition, in November 1994, the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC) organization surveyed executives from 276 Wisconsin companies and found that 61% of these executives did not believe that the state's primary and secondary schools were adequately preparing children for work after high school (Bergquist, 1994). These narratives and the WMC's numbers (Stone, 2002) carried an immense amount of political capital among these state's political leaders. They represented the concerns of the sector of constituents that hire Wisconsin's public school graduates. Through their leaders, these business organizations funneled this concern into support for policies that emphasized accountability, and in this case, accountability through a statewide testing program.

Act 269 demonstrates how Thompson and Grover incorporated this basic tenet of continuous quality improvement into the policy proposals that emerged in the early 1990s. DPI requested funding in its 1993-1995 biennial budget request to develop the WSAS to fulfill Act 269. With the passage of Act 269, State Superintendent Grover initiated the State Superintendent Assessment Advisory Committee (SSAAC), which advised the state superintendent on using the educational goals developed by the Commission on Schools. The committee included teachers, parents, and other interested persons appointed by the state superintendent. The SSAAC report recommended a three-pronged system of assessment that would test students in Grades 4, 8, and 10 using a knowledge and content assessment (the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam—WKCE), a performance assessment (developed by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research), and a standardized student portfolio system to be developed in partnership with the New Standards Project at the University of Pittsburgh and the National Center on Education and the Economy in Rochester, New York (Merrifield, 2003).

However, the process to develop a comprehensive statewide assessment system failed because of concerns raised by members of the legislature and a parent's group titled Parents Raising Educational Standards in Schools (PRESS). Legislators and members of PRESS expressed opposition to the use of a performance-based statewide assessment to measure student performance. They questioned the system's cost and the subjectivity of the assessment measures (Sowinski, 1996a). Although Thompson supported the program, the legislature eventually eliminated funding for the implementation

of the program in the 1995-1997 biennium budget (it had provided $1.6 million for developing the test from 1992 to 1994), and it eliminated funding for a portfolio system.

This tenuous beginning for the state's student assessment system exemplifies hesitancy by legislators to fund education reforms that cost large sums of money and take control away form local school districts. In this case, legislators rejected many of the central arguments put forward by the NGA and other educational stakeholders to create a "world-class" education system that pursued rigorous academic standards that prepared students for the "new" economy. Tied with this content were to be new assessment measures that would provide information about how students enacted their classroom knowledge in real-life situations, that is, performance and portfolio assessments (Popham, 1993). These tools depend on the professional judgment of teachers and cost more money to implement than multiple-choice standardized tests. Although cost is an important issue in deciding to implement such reforms, the hesitancy of legislators and parents' groups to trust a teacher's professional judgment gets at a deeper political issue. Teachers were framed as part of the problem (e.g., they are the ones who are "socially" promoting their students—promoting students to the next grade level even though they have not mastered the requirements of that grade level). Teachers could not be trusted to use a tool that evaluates their effectiveness as educators to make an unbiased evaluation of a student's performance. This resistance to fund a complex system of statewide student assessment exemplifies how local control means control in the hands of the members of the local community, not the local school or classroom.

At the end of this first phase of reform, Wisconsin's slow start toward system-wide change in many ways resembles a national trend of misdirected state-level policy change (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Firestone et al., 1991). For example, the state legislature rejected any form of statewide content goals or standards—local control trumped a statewide system. However, Thompson's veto reversal in the 1993-1995 budget led to the evolution of the statewide Wisconsin's System of Student Assessment, which was reduced from an *expensive* and *subjective* authentic assessment system that measures students' ability to apply their knowledge to real-world situations to an inexpensive multiple-choice test. This push for change to Wisconsin's education system was occurring in the leadership arena, where Thompson, the business community, and the education establishment saw the value of the system being determined by how well the state's students were performing on a norm-referenced exam. Having a high level of performance on these exams would provide these stakeholders with a symbol of high performance to use to maintain and lure

jobs to the state, or having a low level of performance would provide these policy makers and stakeholders with the political capital needed to reform the state's education system.

Phase 2: The Election of John Benson as State Superintendent

John Benson's tenure[15] as State Superintendent of Public Instruction began in 1993 and ended when he left office in 2001. One of his first acts as superintendent was the formulation the Urban Initiative Task Force in 1993. Benson, an outspoken critic of the state's voucher program, and his task force's other 34 committee members examined ways to improve education in Wisconsin's urban communities, which included cities such as Madison, Milwaukee,[16] Racine, Kenosha, Beloit, and Superior (Bice, 1994). Concerns central to the committee included violence, absenteeism, education inequity, drop-out rates, family involvement, and early childhood programs.

A key initiative that emerged from this task force's work was the concept of reducing individual class sizes to a ratio of 15 students to one teacher in Grades K-8 and coordinating school services through a lighted schoolhouse concept (a school that remains open throughout the day provides additional student and family services in one location). This suggestion soon became state legislation and created the Student Guarantee in Education Program (SAGE) in 1995, which funded class size reduction in 30 high-poverty schools across 21 school districts (7 districts in Milwaukee) in kindergarten and first grade costing the state $4.5 million. Each SAGE school received an additional $2,000 per student for students in SAGE classroom to cover the cost of the program. As of the 2004-2005 school year, the SAGE program serves 98,000 students in 524 schools in Grades K-3 costing the state $97.6 million.

I highlight this program because it, like Thompson's voucher program, possessed specific principles for successful education reform in Wisconsin. First, SAGE began as a local program designed to serve a specific issue—improving the performance of students who attend high-poverty schools. Second, it, like vouchers, possessed a clear theory of action for reform (Elmore, 2003). Third, a large coalition of support existed for the program. This support existed within an already defined base, the education establishment, and it expanded easily through the families and schools who benefited from these new services. Both successful campaigns for change highlight the need for members of the leadership arena to have some sort of organizational support at the macro level to promote their reform agendas (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998).

The significant difference that did exist between SAGE and MPCP is cost. SAGE increases education spending by $2,000 per pupil. However, the

program's ability to increase academic achievement (e.g., P. Smith, Molnar, & Zahorik, 2003) and garner a large amount of support from families who participate in the program has led to its expansion across the state. Part of this support rests in the fact that SAGE, like MPCP, met Thompson's (1996) "grocery store standard." It is a reform that is easy to explain, and the families who participate see tangible evidence that something has changed (Stone, 2002). Although this reform is not cheap, it started small and local, and because of the early academic and anecdotal success of this program, support from individuals in the macro area grew—making it very difficult for those who oppose the program to eliminate it (Cuban, 1992).

Politically, these ideologically different approaches taken by Thompson and Benson to improve student performance in Milwaukee and other urban areas exemplify the rifts that emerge between them as Benson takes on the role of state superintendent. These policy makers had different ideas about how to improve student performance in Milwaukee, and these visions of reform carry over into their attempts to implement standards-based reforms across the state.

A critical incident that marks this tension between the two occurred after the November 1994 elections. The elections gave the Republican Party control of the state Senate, which made the Republicans the ruling party of the legislative and executive branches of government. Similar to what occurred at the national level of government in 1994 with the Republicans taking control of Congress and many within their party calling for the elimination of the U. S. Department of Education, Thompson submitted legislation to eliminate the position of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Furthermore, he persuaded the legislature to slash funding for DPI and to approve funding for his own Education Cabinet, which allowed Thompson to appoint his own officials to advise him on education policy.

Politically, this act benefited Thompson in numerous ways. First, this spectacle fostered an image of Thompson as the leader over the state's education issues. The state superintendent, unlike the governor, cannot implement or reform legislation put forward by the legislature. Thompson's actions demonstrated for the electorate that only those stakeholders who possess political capital and legislative power are able to push through such system-wide changes. Second, according to Murphy (1998), by eliminating the superintendent and slashing DPI's funds, Thompson could dismantle a key power base for the state's teachers' union, being the largest donor to Democratic politicians' campaign funds. Finally, Thompson's attempts to rid the state of the superintendent and DPI pitted educational stakeholders against one another by forcing them to choose sides. However, in the spring of 1996, the Wisconsin

Supreme Court struck down (7-0) Thompson's attempt to divert control of public education from the state superintendent to his newly appointed education cabinet. Thompson remained defiant, arguing that the "there was no need" to restore funding to the state superintendent and DPI (Jones, 1996).

Another significant incident that occurs at this time is the release of student performance results in 1994 from the 8th- and 10th-grade WKCE. On the WKCE, students were performing at the average range in all content areas except writing when compared to a national sample, where state students performed below the average (Bougie, 1994). These scores raised concerns about the state's education system across the three primary arenas.

Outside of the concerns raised by the business community, these worries were somewhat new to the state. Wisconsin's students, on the whole,[17] have performed quite well on most national education markers—e.g., the ACT (a college entrance exam), the SAT, the NAEP, and a high school graduation rate above the national average (see, e.g., Henry, 1993; WEAC, 2005). The interaction of the release of these "particular indicators," which provided feedback about how the state system was performing, tied with the struggle by specific political actors over the direction of Wisconsin's public schools fueled a sense of doubt about the ability of the state's education system (Kingdon, 2003).

Both Thompson and Benson speak to this doubt over the effectiveness of the state's education system as they begin to answer the demands of the federal government's IASA. This act, which went into effect in 1994, required the state to develop detailed content and performance standards (by the 1997-1998 school year) that were tied to standards-based assessments in reading and math—the state had until the 2000-2001 school year to adopt a new system of assessment.

The proposed elimination of his position and the publishing of weaker-than-expected test scores put Benson on the offensive to promote a vision of education reform that improves student performance and necessitates his and DPI's role in the process. For instance, Benson responded to these critiques against DPI and his role by issuing a statement titled "Education or Catastrophe" in January 1995. In this statement, Benson contends that he would counter the educational "myths" that the state's schools are failing with educational truths. One suggestion he offers to improve student performance was to implement a high school graduation test. Mayers (1995) cites Benson as stating,

> Being number one on the ACT is good, but it is not good enough; it shows that we continue to prepare most college-bound students well. We must have high standards and expectations for all children—no exceptions, no excuses—and we must reallocate resources to ensure that no child is left behind. (p. B1)

Concurrently, Thompson was continuing to pursue and lead the state toward SBA reforms. Politically, Thompson believed that education reform would be the next "hot issue" the country would focus on after welfare reform (C. Miller, 1996). He saw high-stakes SBA reforms as "the next step in laying a clear plan for greater performance and accountability measures for students and schools" (Mayers, 1996).

At the national level, Thompson, with Louis Gerstner, CEO of IBM, convened the National Education Summit in 1996—Benson was not invited to this event. The primary theme that emerged from this conference was that the nation's public schools fail to provide an educated workforce for America's corporations. For instance, James Haney, the president of WMC, attended the conference as a guest of Thompson and was quoted as stating that "it's really tough to hire a quality work force and that's a direct byproduct of the education system" (Lawrence, 1996). This spectacle provided a stage for these stakeholders to promote a vision for education change that linked academic success with the job market. These leaders made the case that the system was broken and needed dramatic changes, including increased accountability, to improve student performance. For instance, a byproduct of this conference was the establishment of a national clearinghouse on education standards known as Achieve (www.achieve.org). Thompson contended that this organization was necessary so that stakeholders and the business community would know which states and districts have the best schools, which would "put pressure on the states that are not doing the job" (C. Miller, 1996).

Simultaneously, at the state level, Thompson and Benson/DPI each led to two different collections of stakeholders to develop the state's systems of SBA reforms. In fact, from his politically weakened position, Benson and DPI, using a federal grant to meet the requirements put forward by IASA, struck first by developing and releasing what was intended to be the first of three drafts of content and performance standards[18] in the fall of 1996.

At the same time, Thompson used his Governor's Advisory Taskforce on Education and Learning to pursue SBA reform in the state (Pommer, 1995). Although Benson was not a member of this task force, he publicly claimed to support their work to improve education in Wisconsin (Benson, 1997). The task force established a committee on standards and assessment, chaired by Professor Allan Odden of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. This committee presented a draft report to the full committee on June 11, 1996 that outlined how the state should set content standards, what an assessment system to measure student performance could look like, and how the public could become engaged in the process (Sowinski, 1996b).

According to Greg Doyle, DPI's spokesperson, the first draft of standards released by DPI left enough ambiguity to avoid the drawn-out battles over

wording (Brinkman, 1996). Yet, this lack of specificity left the department open to critiques by opponents of standards as well as from the governor. For instance, former Lieutenant Governor Scott McCallum[19] led the charge in the Thompson administration's opposition to what McCallum termed "vague, fuzzy, feel-good concepts" (Wideman, 1996). McCallum[20] proposed that the state issue standards similar to Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOLs), which he claimed to be rigorous, academically oriented, and content based.

An additional political voice that opposed DPI's standards came from PRESS. Leah Vukmir, the president of PRESS (who eventually became a Republican assemblyperson in 2002), evoked a critique similar to McCallum by stating that the standards were too vague (Wideman, 1996).

In response to the critiques put forward by McCallum and groups such as PRESS, Steve Dold, assistant superintendent for public instruction, stated, "They [the standards] are broad to allow local school districts to operate their own curriculum" (Wideman, 1996, p. A1). Dold criticized McCallum for wanting to establish standards similar to Virginia's content-specific SOLs because such specificity goes against the concept of local control.

Reflecting on this change to the structure of education in Wisconsin, an adviser from Thompson's Advisory Taskforce on Education and Learning argued that it was a mistake for Benson to pursue standards without the support of the governor. This adviser stated,

> By developing content standards and a state test, you are changing the political culture of the state. That's a political act, not an educational act. Politicians change political culture and not educators. Not to include the governor was a strategic political error of large proportions.

Although these comments reflect Labaree's (1997) point that the process of setting standards is a political and not technical problem, they also offer a glimpse into the numerous reactions that emerged as these two leaders attempted to alter the structure of education in Wisconsin. For instance, the Eau Claire Leader-Telegram (Editor, 1996) warned the state policy makers not to become too involved in the work of the local school boards. On the other hand, Louis Karraker (1996), representing the conservative viewpoint in the *Racine Journal Times*, supported the governor's critique of Benson's work. He wrote,

> The battle lines are clearly drawn in the state of Wisconsin, State Superintendent John T. Benson, a bureaucrat of bureaucrats, is the embodiment of everything wrong with public school education in our state. A tool of the teachers' union, he has resolutely opposed meaningful education reform. (p. A1)

He, like McCallum, argued that the state needs to develop standards similar to Virginia's SOLs.

Although constituency groups, which included WMC (see Lawrence, 1996; Morgan, 1996) questioned the vagueness of DPI's standards, the release of *Education Week*'s "Quality Counts" report in January 1997 was a critical incident in defining the rigor of Wisconsin's education system. The report's authors gave Wisconsin's public schools a series of low marks. In terms of standards and assessments, the report stated that "Wisconsin is no pacesetter in developing academic standards" and gave the state a B– for standards and assessments (Associated Press, 1997).[21] Although Thompson and Benson both questioned the validity of the report, the press surrounding this document instilled a level of questioning about the effectiveness of Wisconsin's schools across all of the arenas involved in the education reform process. This document bolstered Thompson's and Benson's claims that Wisconsin's public schools needed to change.

Soon after the publication of "Quality Counts," Thompson,[22] in his 1997 State of the State message, unveiled a specific set of standards for five core subject areas (math, science, English/language arts, geography, and history) and reemphasized a high school graduation test—a topic he introduced in his 1996 State of the State (Walters, 1997c).[23] After members of the press and education establishment questioned the origin of Thompson's standards, Matthews, Thompson's press secretary, admitted that about 90% of Thompson's standards originated from the Hudson Institute's *Modern Red Schoolhouse Standards* (Mayers, 1997). The Hudson Institute, a conservative Indianapolis-based think tank that has an office in Madison and is supported by the Bradley Foundation, had a history of assisting Thompson with his proposing reforms—for example, the institute assisted Thompson in developing his welfare-to-work plan titled W-2. Similar to his work with the MPCP program, Thompson again looked outside the education establishment to assist him in altering the state's education system.

Tied with Thompson's history of looking outside the education bureaucracy for new solutions is an underlying theme/belief that government programs fail to work because of an inherent lack of motivation that exists within a bureaucratic system. Thompson (1996), using his own upbringing as an example, believed that by creating a system that possessed "natural consequences" for those actors who fail to achieve the goal of that government program or service, these acts of "tough love" would improve individual performance. With Thompson's system of high-stakes standards-based reform, failure to achieve the educational goals outlined in these standards would result in the "natural consequence" of denying the student a high school diploma.

Although DPI's proposal and the governor's proposal for content and performance standards reflected different ideologies of reform, a director of curriculum at DPI noted that the release of standards by DPI and the governor put the state at a critical "juncture" on the road toward SBA reform.

> We [the state] were at a juncture where it could have been very possible to have a set of standards issued by the State Superintendent and another set of standards issued by the Governor. It was at that point when people kind of got together with advisors, underneath [the public discussions] and said okay, now let's think about how this is going to play out in a local school district. It was at that point that was a compromise, the Governor's council for standards. That's where you begin to get that collision of law and policy, and that's how we ended up with our standards.

Once the two parties reached this compromise, Thompson, on January 24, 1997, created the Governor's Council on Model Academic Standards by executive order. This compromise is significant, and the process of healing that occurs between the governor and superintendent is dramatic (e.g., Thompson and Benson went on an eight-stop tour in the fall of 1997 to promote the council's content standards and to receive feedback from the public).

Within a year after the formulation of the Governor's Council on Model Academic Standards, Thompson, on January 13, 1998, signed Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards[24] into law. Under this executive order, local school boards were to adopt academic standards that outline the academic and performance expectations of students at Grades 4, 8, and 10 by August 1, 1998. The governor's order provided districts with a choice to implement their own standards or the state's standards.

Selecting the state's content and performance standards provided school districts access to the state's assessment system at no cost to the local district. If a school district decided to implement its own content and performance standards, it would have to create its own standardized assessment system, which included the cost of developing the test, printing it, and scoring it. The state's structure of school finance made it difficult for school district policy makers to create such a testing system. To implement such a system would cost a large sum of money, and because Thompson persuaded the state legislature in 1996 to implement a school funding formula where the state paid for two thirds of every school district's funding and restricted the school board's ability to raise additional revenue, a district could not raise such funds without holding a series of voter referendums.

Soon after this Executive Order, the state legislature delivered the 1997-1999 biennial budget. It included Wisconsin Act 237, which put in place

Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards (WMAS), the WKCE requirement, the HSGT, the state's *No Social Promotion* (NSP) statutes, and a within-district open enrollment provision. The NSP statutes required all Wisconsin school districts, starting in the 2002-2003 academic school year, to retain students in Grades 4 and 8 if they did not score at least a basic score on the state's WKCE,[25] and HSGT was to become the sole determinant for high school graduation (DPI, 2000).

Although this phase began with the governor's administration publicly questioning the ability of the state superintendent and DPI to improve Wisconsin's schools, the parties did resolve their quarreling and implemented a plan to standardize the state's education system and to hold students accountable.

Symbolic (e.g., the National Education Summit) and bureaucratic acts (e.g., IASA), as well as the role of media (e.g., "Quality Counts") and the publication of the first WKCE exams scores, established the need for these changes. Thus, the leadership and the macro arena were influencing the subsystem to act for change. Financially, these changes cost the local school districts very little, but in return, district administrators had to give up their local political power to determine what it means for a student to be educated. How these weakened stakeholder groups responded to the state's new SBA reforms begins phase 3.

Phase 3: Answers to the Reforms

WMAS (the content standards) eventually garnered a large amount of support at the state and local levels. Policy makers cited the changing needs in their local communities and across the state as a primary reason for implementing these SBA reforms. As a former Democratic senator who sat on the Senate's Committee on Education stated,

> Part of it [the call for SBA reform] was recognizing the fact that we have a more mobile student population, and recognizing that mobile population that students who went from one school district to the next need to have some continuity within the curriculum.

Tied with this idea of continuity in content was the desire for accountability. A Republican assemblyperson who sits on the assembly's Committee on Education stated,

> We spend a lot on K-12 education, plus we have probably the easiest population in the country to educate. We're the Heartland of America, which means

> people live in a community for a long time. It's getting away from that. In some areas, they don't know anybody, and there's no continuity and people move in and out and they have a lot more multi-cultured populations. Wisconsin has always done well, and we should. We should probably do better than we are because of the amount of money we spend, [and through these policies] we're saying Wisconsin takes education seriously.

This assemblyperson's statement nests the need for SBA reform in the fact that the "Heartland" is changing. The state needs to ensure that its more "mobile" students receive a consistent education across the state. Although this mobility is linked to the state's changing economy, this legislator's comments illuminate the tension that exists in demanding local reform. The local is no longer an unchanging and homogeneous community, and thus, legislators are grappling with the demands of a range of new voices within their districts. In terms of accountability, the changing economy, which under the Thompson administration promoted less government spending and reduced taxes, requires the state to be more vigilant about where and how its education dollars are spent.

Whereas the representative in the above emphasizes the issue fiscal accountability, a former lobbyist for alliance of the state's school administrators centers on the need for academic accountability.

> We had tests, but there was a feeling that there was a disconnect between the test and making sure schools were actually teaching to the standards. It was the legislature's way of trying to ensure that there was some kind of accountability to the schools.

Stakeholders linked accountability with transparency. For instance, *Mr. Harley,* an administrator from *Business Action Committee* who oversees education reform, stated,

> I think it was the first time that anybody had ever actually looked at the curriculum and decided, Are we really teaching what people think we ought to be teaching? And there was a lot of the school districts who were, but for other ones, I think it was a long hard look in the mirror that said, "Holy smokes."

According to *Mr. Harley,* these SBA reforms made local school districts examine what it is they were teaching their students and to evaluate how effectively were they doing.

Although these quotes frame the need for statewide SBA reform in Wisconsin around change and accountability, there is another issue present

in these stakeholders' words. This dialogic interaction between the need for change and the assurance of accountability justifies the role of the policy maker and new policy solutions—change and accountability require leadership and new ideas. In this case, the changing Heartland requires a responsive politician to standardize the curriculum and hold students accountable for their learning.

However, it was how these policy makers demonstrated to their constituents that there would be educational accountability that caused local stakeholders to rebuff their high-stakes reforms—particularly the use of a single test score (the WKCE) to make these high-stakes decisions.

A clear delineation between political parties or organizations that favored or opposed the use of high-stakes tests did not exist. For example, Ken Cole, executive director of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB), urged his members to support the *No Social Promotion* statutes (Brinkman, 1998). On the other hand, the editorial boards of the *Wisconsin State Journal*, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, *Racine Journal Times*, and *La Crosse Tribune* did not support these statutes. The *Wisconsin State Journal* editorial board cited the work of researchers who demonstrate that retention harms rather helps students, and the board argued that social promotion is a local control issue, not a state issue (Editor, 1998).

Statewide organizations, such as the Port Washington-Saukville School Board, Janesville School Board, and the Advocates for the Education of Whitefish Bay, also published editorials in various state-based newspapers that spoke out against the statutes, and these groups sent letters to their state legislators arguing against the statutes.

The comments from a former administrator in the Office of Accountability at DPI and current policy consultant for an organization that represents various teachers' unions summarizes the concerns raised by many who opposed the implementation of high-stakes tests. The consultant stated,

> I think it's a good idea to have core standards and subjects that every kid within the state would have to be familiar with. For example, if people out there are teaching a geography course, here's the 15 or 20 things that your colleagues think that you should address in this course as a teacher. That's a good message to kids. They know what they're expected to do. It's a way to communicate with parents. The problem is when you keep cranking the stakes up, and you make the consequences for not doing well so severe. Then all sorts of problems begin to kick in.

This consultant's comments highlight the fine line for support that existed in Wisconsin's shift toward SBA reform. Most stakeholders were comfortable

with defining a basic set of knowledge that all students should possess, but once the stakes were proposed, many constituency groups were opposed to what Jay Miller (1999), the president of the Advocates of Whitefish Bay, termed a "one-size-fits-all" approach to measuring academic performance.

What is interesting is that Thompson, as governor, repeatedly raised the same concerns about "one-size-fits-all brand of government handed down from Washington" (Thompson, 1996, p. 4). In this debate over education reform, it appears that Thompson's (1996) belief in "tough love" trumped his disdain for the "one-size-fits-all brand of government." In fact, he saw the local district's ability to decide on the content standards it wanted to use breaking this one-size-fits-all approach (Thompson, 1997). Thompson's actions throughout this phase typify Firestone et al.'s (1991) point that many politicians fall prey to the belief that a specific policy response, for example, linking the HSGT to the state's Model Academic Standards, can improve the academic performance of all students. In this case, Thompson's belief in the natural consequences of success or failure that arises from the HSGT trumped his concerns with a one-size-fits-all approach.

In response to the state's new high-stakes demands for grade promotion and high school graduation, community-based and school-based organizations rallied their constituents and lobbied various state legislators to eliminate or alter the statutes.

An example of this resistance to change can be seen in a 1998 survey conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center in Madison, which found that 78.2% of the 1,043 households polled were against the use of the HSGT as the sole determinant of who received a diploma and 19.8% favored it.

Furthermore, officials from DPI raised many concerns about the promotion statutes for students in Grades 4 and 8. For instance, DPI administrators had representatives from California Testing Bureau (CTB) McGraw testify in front of legislators that they did not design the WKCE tests to make a decision about the promotion of a student.

These various responses from members of the macro arena signified their recognition that a massive political shift in control over Wisconsin's public schools was at hand, and such a shift made various constituency groups uncomfortable.

Kevin Keane, a spokesperson for Thompson, replied to these macro arena concerns by stating, "It's a matter of common sense of accountability. It makes sure that our children are learning as they grow, not just cramming for the final in high school" (Davis, 1998a, p. B1). Moreover, John Matthews, Thompson's chief aide, stated, "We believe if there are consequences for failure there will

be more effort to achieve success" (Brinkman, 1998, p. C3). The governor's administration continued to link improving student performance with instilling accountability and tough love into the education system. Both are central tenets of Thompson various reforms (e.g., Thompson's, 1996, welfare reform initiative that expected individuals to act responsibly if they were to receive assistance).

In the November 1998 election, the Democrats took control of the state Senate, ending the Republican Party's control of the legislative and executive branch of state government. As the voices of dissent over the HSGT and the NSP statutes mounted, legislators decided to reexamine the legislation.

With this change in Senate leadership, Senator Richard Grobschmidt (D-South Milwaukee), the incoming Senate Education Committee chair, stated that the legislation "didn't have the type of scrutiny it should have when it passed the Legislature" (Davis, 1998b, p. A1). Representative Luther Olsen (R-Berlin), a member of the Assembly Education Committee, claimed to be drafting a new proposal. He stated that "no one wants social promotion. It's just what do you determine the criteria to be. I think it's pretty much up to the local school districts" (Davis, 1998b, p. A1).

As these legislators held committee hearings to examine rewriting the NSP legislation, Kevin Keane, spokesperson for the governor's office, stated, "The governor is strongly committed to an end to social promotion. He believes it's the right thing to do. This governor is always willing to look at ways to strengthen a program" (Davis, 1998b, p. A1).

On October 4, 1999, the state legislature in response to the increasing outcry from a coalition of school districts, education organizations, and parents groups passed a budget repair bill, which Thompson signed it into law, that amended Statute 118.30 under Wisconsin Act 9. This amended statute changed Wisconsin's accountability system from a single-indicator system to a multiple-indicator system. School districts were to determine grade promotion to the fifth and ninth 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).

As Phase 3 ends, a coalition among various constituent organizations from the macro arena and the education establishment convinced the state legislature and its leaders to amend a central tenet within the theory of action of standards-based reform that Thompson promoted at the state and national level—using high-stakes tests to improve student performance (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Weiss, 1995). The basic premise that emerged from these acts is that members

of the local school district should be the ones determining how to define academic proficiency rather state policy makers. Moreover, these acts devalued the WKCE's test scores as a measure of student performance and increased the value of teacher recommendations and evaluations on report cards.

Phase 4: The departure of Thompson for the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services

While the HSGT was in a position to remain a part of the state's system of accountability, the departure of Thompson in 2001 and the high cost of the tests in a time of state budget deficits led to its eventual demise. The price tag for the HSGT in the 2001-2003 biennium was $14.2 million. Senator Brian Burke (D-Milwaukee) noted that it is hard to justify the cost of the test when the state already paid for tests in Grades 4, 8, and 10. Luther Olsen hoped that the HSGT was not lost. He saw it as "the main impetus for school improvement in this state's history" (Borsuk, 2001). Representative Olsen, now the chair of the assembly's Education Committee, stated that Wisconsin spends $150,000 to send children from kindergarten to Grade 12 and "people are worried that we don't have $48 [the cost per student to take the test] at the end of the process to see how well he's done" (Borsuk, 2001). With the projected budget shortfalls rising, the legislature, through the 2001-2003 biennium budget, voted to delay the implementation of the HSGT until the class of 2004. This did not affect the state's requirements for school districts to implement their 4th- and 8th-grade promotion statutes during the 2002-2003 school year.

In 2001, Wisconsin Act 109 (a budget repair bill) pushed the implementation of HSGT back further, to the class of 2006. The election of Jim Doyle (Democrat) as governor in 2002 combined with a $3.5 billion budget deficit resulted in the elimination of the HSGT in the 2003-2005 biennium budget.

What remains of Wisconsin's standards-based reforms[26] are the WMAS, the Wisconsin system of student assessment to measure 4th-, 8th-, and 10th-grade students' performance and achievement in reading, language applications, mathematics, science, and social studies using the WKCE. In addition, the 3rd-grade Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test continues to be funded, and the state's *No Social Promotion* statutes are still in place, which require students to meet a set of district-approved criteria to advance to Grades 5 and 9.

Funding issues, the absence of Thompson, and lack of support from constituents, Superintendent Burmaster (elected in 2001), DPI, and elected politicians eliminated the HSGT. The only SBA reforms that survive at the state level are those that cost the state little additional money, meet the federal government's requirements for Title 1 funding, and impose the fewest requirements on school districts.

Discussion

This narrative of reform can be read in multiple ways. The normative, symbolic, and political lenses each offer the opportunity to "enhanc[e] our understanding of education policy choices and generating insights regarding points of leverage and genres of strategies that may constitute avenues for influencing policy developments" (Malen & Knapp, 1997, p. 439).

From a normative perspective, Thompson (1996), as governor, attempted to instill conservative values into the education system through a series of reform measures that addressed such issues as naming academic content, implementing a student assessment system, instituting performance expectations, and altering school funding (Odden, 1993). At the local level, specifically Milwaukee, Thompson (1996) successfully instilled the market-based policy instrument of vouchers to "shake up" the education establishment by "inject[ing] competition into the school system and let[ting] the market work by empowering parents as consumers" (p. 91). However, at the state level, the courts, legislators, other political leaders, and various local communities rebuffed many of his various attempts to alter the state's education leadership and to implement high-stakes SBA reforms. In fact, Thompson eventually had to renegotiate his relationship with Benson, the leader of the education establishment, to instill his standards-based changes across the state, and a rise in conflict with his own constituency groups and a lack of support within the education establishment for a single-indicator promotion system caused him to accept a multiple-indicator promotion system. As Cuban (1990) pointed out, value conflicts "are dilemmas that require political negotiation and compromises" (p. 8).

These acts of compromise by leaders within Wisconsin's education system led to policy change within the state education arena (Fowler, 1994; Mazzoni, 1991). For instance, the state's testing system evolved through the persistent leadership of Thompson and the support of the education establishment and business leaders. In addition, the WMAS eventually emerged through a combination of pressures from the federal government tied with the act of negotiation among the governor and Benson and DPI.

These compromises, both from a leadership perspective and a policy perspective, exemplify the difficulty that exists in altering the core of public education policy (Majone, 1989). The core of a policy is just that, the center, the center of ideas as to what the policy wants to achieve, and when the core changes, it is a "revolution rather than evolution" (Majone, 1989, p. 150). This evolutionary process toward SBA reform in Wisconsin highlights the difficulty

that exists for members of the leadership arena to convince the macro arena that the state's education system required dramatic change.

While Smith et al.'s work (2004) is effective at identifying how leaders in Arizona use the spectacle of change to inscribe and reinforce the relations of power within that education system, their model does not directly translate onto this case study of standards-based reform in Wisconsin. Specifically, the leadership arena in Wisconsin wanted to alter the status quo rather than maintain it. One might read Thompson and the business community's attempts at change as a political spectacle that uses the image of student failure to expand the state's voucher program or to gain more control over the state's public school systems. However, after a close reading of these data, much of this need for change as well as the ideas for changing Wisconsin's education system came from the education establishment itself. For instance, Superintendents Grover and Benson supported the need for a statewide assessment system to gather data on student performance (the WKCE). In fact, their support for such a testing program led to the publication of the state's 8th- and 10th-grade students' average test scores in 1994. These average test scores increased the level of doubt among the state's constituents as to the ability of the state's education establishment to instruct its students. This tangible evidence, which *Education Week*'s (1997) "Quality Counts" report reinforced, provided a need for education reform. Moreover, DPI was the first institutional entity within the state to propose the idea for a high school graduation test, which the results from it own survey of stakeholders across the state demonstrated that most members of the education establishment supported such a system (see note 23). These numbers and symbols provided Governor Thompson with numerous opportunities to link his conservative ideology to the education establishment's education reform programs and ideas. Although many of the policy solutions that Thompson settled for did not directly align with his conservative intentions to alter Wisconsin's public school systems, these borrowed or repackaged education reforms opened many windows for change within the policy-making arenas (Kingdon, 2003; Mazzoni, 1991).

In looking at this history of SBA reform in Wisconsin, it is difficult to identify a clear pattern for successful policy implementation beyond the principles of cheap and local reform. In some instances, members of the subsystem arena of education policy were willing to implement change, but resistance occurred within the macro arena (e.g., the HSGT and NSP statutes). Other times, the leadership arena promoted changed, but the subsystem and macro arena resisted (e.g., Wisconsin's Educational Goals). Part of these policy rejections and reversals (Hess, 1999) are due to both the inherent tension that subsists between intraparty conflicts and the friction that exists between state and local

governments (Berman, 1986; Cohen, 1995; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990). This process of "muddling through" (McLaughlin, 1987) various education reforms by Wisconsin's education stakeholders to alter the "core" of public education offers insight into the process of statewide change (Majone, 1989).

For instance, the political acts by the state's leaders to change Wisconsin's education system were more than simply playing "the game" of reform (Firestone, 1989) that generates policy spin or churn to garner political support (Elmore, 2003; Hess 1999). Thompson and the education establishment's acts demonstrate a commitment to long-term change, and both parties consistently promoted agendas that they thought would improve student performance. In numerous instances, these leaders' agendas were not quick fixes; rather, they promoted policies that had the potential to change the state's education system dramatically. I am not stating that policy churn did not exist. Rather, the need for churn was fundamentally different.

In essence, these principles of cheap and local education reform created the need for policy churn in Wisconsin. Wisconsin's resistance to systemic changes forces policy makers to reduce their agendas from *dramatic* changes to *gentle* nudges. Such reduction requires policy makers and education stakeholders to propose further reforms to nudge the education system toward their goals.

The failure of the three-pronged student assessment system proposed by the State Superintendent Assessment Advisory Committee and supported by Thompson and DPI in the early 1990s exemplifies this need for churn. The cost of this assessment system and its ability to redefine how and who defines a child as educated doomed its fate. To implement a statewide assessment system, Thompson and DPI had to readdress this issue by proposing a less costly standardized assessment system that did not affect the local district's ability to determine who was and was not educated. These core principles of cheap and local reform create a difficult hurdle for policy makers to surmount when attempting to change the practice and purpose of education in the state.

Such resistance to altering the core of public education creates a scenario in which state policy makers address education issues through a series of peripheral rather than core policies (Majone, 1989). This environment of churn for change within education reform reveals the kudzu-like nature of the system-wide reform process in states such as Wisconsin. Kudzu is a Japanese vine that the federal government introduced during the New Deal era to prevent soil erosion. It grew so well that kudzu now covers more than 7 million acres of the southeastern United States and is identified as a weed.[27] Similarly, SBA reform originated out of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence

in Education, 1984), and the authors of that document wanted to implement reforms that mirrored Japan's education system to alter the core of public education so that this nation could compete economically with that nation. This shift toward systemic changes to improve the nation's education system has provided policy makers with the opportunity to propose a prolific amount of reforms. Such reforms are not only attractive through their use of the symbols of standards, accountability, and improved student performance; they also provide policy makers with a means to garner attention as concerned politicians and to mediate a public institution that attracts attention of the business community (e.g., Hess, 1999; Smith et al., 2004). The success of this reform kudzu, both politically and symbolically, creates an overgrown policy environment that impairs the ability of education stakeholders to distinguish whether a reform idea is a tool for churn or change. Nevertheless, the majority of stakeholders within Wisconsin either rejected or altered many of their education leaders' and policy makers' proposed SBA reforms, which highlights their attraction to cheap and local reform.

Educational change did occur in Wisconsin. The legislature approved legislation that named content and skill expectations for students and linked these with an assessment system. As Malen and Muncey (2000) pointed out, there may be variation as to how local district, schools, and teachers respond to these reforms, but these acts by state policy makers narrowed the conception of schooling in Wisconsin and limited the choices local actors can make when putting forward an education agenda. Thus, this SBA reform kudzu continues to encroach on the local community.

Although notion of local control in Wisconsin is being redefined by these reforms, it is not being "hollowed out" (Fowler, 2000). This case reveals that there is a tipping point to this encroachment of state control (Gladwell, 2000). In Wisconsin, local school districts and constituency groups eventually became comfortable with the state's leaders naming a set standardized content and skills, but these groups were uncomfortable with the state policy makers defining who is and is not educated. As policy makers at the state and national level continue to promote standards-based changes that alter the structure of power in education, this case demonstrates that it is going to be more difficult than one might expect to take the power of labeling a child, a school, or a district as a success or failure away from the local school district and the community it serves. Consequently, one must wonder whether policies such as No Child Left Behind, which violate these principles of cheap and local reform, will be able to survive in states such as Wisconsin, unless the federal government renegotiates the power it holds over the ability

to name members of a local or state education community as a success or failure.

Finally, when reviewing the effectiveness of the various actors among the policy arenas and their ability to affect change in Wisconsin using particular cultural tools, symbols, and spectacles, this case study is somewhat disconcerting. The principles of cheap and local reform did prevent the state's local school districts from going through a series of SBA changes that lack a consistent empirical link to improved instruction and student performance (e.g., Amrein-Beardsley & Berliner, 2003; Braun, 2004; Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Marchant & Paulson, 2005; Powers, 2003, 2004; Rosenshine, 2003). However, moving beyond the notion of standards-based reform, these principles raise the question as to whether policy makers can enact any type of systemic or system-wide reform in states such as Wisconsin. By inscribing the status quo, these principles of cheap and local reform fail to encourage state policy makers to enact any type of change that alters the "conditions" that created the low-performing or failing students[28] in the first place—for example, changing what happens at the school site (Elmore, 2003; Fuhrman, 2003; O'Day, 2002) or providing funding to address the inequalities that already exist in the state's education system (Apple, 2001).

The political success of the SAGE and MPCP programs do offer hope for the opportunity to implement change through state policy. Political opposition exists for both programs, with each side questioning the effectiveness of these programs in improving student performance, but the programs continue to exist and attempt to address the issue of inequity and poor student performance through their different theories of action (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Weiss, 1995). Although both programs are no longer cheap, they remain part of Wisconsin's educational policies because of the support they receive in their local communities. Part of their success resides in the fact that these programs nest their solutions in empowering their local community. As Clune (1993) and Firestone (1989) pointed out, there is opportunity for successful change at the local level, but the state's stakeholders must be willing to support educational changes politically and financially to allow these individual reforms to flourish. Yet these local policies arose from an the extreme need for change to improve student performance, particularly in Milwaukee, and thus, the question arises as to whether system-wide failure at the state level is necessary for stakeholders in states such as Wisconsin to surmount the principles of cheap and local reform and successfully implement sustainable statewide change.

Notes

1. I am not focusing on the failed aspects of education reform in Wisconsin to criticize a particular politician or governmental agency. Rather, as Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1986) pointed out, the "richest data are from stories of mistakes, violations of rules, and failures to act and think within the assumed parameters of a particular policy culture" (p. 374).

2. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for recommending this text as an example of analysis of systemic reform.

3. Through an analysis of the implementation of promotion policies for a particular school district, Ellwein (1987) and Ellwein and Glass (1989) showed how district administrators, principals, and teachers made their promotion decisions for students asymmetrically. Although the practices of the district employees were inconsistent, the creation of promotion policies demonstrated to the local community that the district had eliminated social promotion and that it held all of its students accountable for meeting its promotion policies (Ellwein & Glass, 1989). These authors label this a *symbolic gesture*.

4. Stone (2002) argued against a "rational" model of policy making and instead framed the policy-making process as the struggle over ideas. Stone critiqued the rationalist approach of identifying a goal, defining the problem (the difference between the goal and reality), seeking a solution to eliminate this difference through carefully examining the key concepts that frame each stage of the rationalist approach to policy—goals, problems, and solutions.

5. Edelman's (1985, 1988) work examines politics and policy as a symbolic form. Edelman (1985) examined how political groups achieve power and attain concrete goals within society through abstract means. By critically analyzing the spectacle of politics, Edelman (1988) exemplified how this construction of social problems and solutions (the spectacle) reinforces established inequities and strengthens dominant political organizations.

6. Part of my larger study was funded through the Wisconsin/Spencer Doctoral Research Program, and I would like to thank that program for its assistance.

7. To learn more about the ability of the governor to alter legislation through his or her veto power, go to http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/gw/gw_5.pdf

8. Auditing school districts ended in 1995 with Wisconsin Act 27, s. 121.02(2).

9. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the use of phases of reform to make my case.

10. Many of these conservative think tanks and policy institutes had financial ties with the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. For instance, from 1991 to 1993, the Bradley Foundation provided $238,961 to Polly William's now defunct Milwaukee Parental Assistance Center; from 1990 to 1992, it provided $2.9 million to the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute; and from 1992 to 1993, it provided $165,000 to the Center for Parental Freedom in Education, which closed its doors in 1999. These organizations issued numerous papers and offered political pundits to assist Thompson in promoting these ideas of choice and competition as means to reform Milwaukee's public schools (Diegmueller, 1993; Leverich, 1998; Molnar, 1996, 1997; Viadero, 1992). Moreover, when the law was challenged in court, the Bradley Foundation provided a majority of the $150,000 needed for Thompson's privately funded legal defense of the law (Bice, 1995).

11. This committee consisted of 12 members including the governor, state superintendent, president of the University of Wisconsin System, director of the Wisconsin Technical College System, and members appointed jointly by Thompson and Grover. It held 12 regional conferences (one at each of the state's 12 Cooperative Educational Service Agencies) and one statewide conference to allow school boards and the public to submit their recommendations.

12. The goals are divided into three categories: (a) learner goals, which indicate expectations of students; (b) institutional goals, which refer to school staff and environment; and (c) societal goals, which focus on conditions outside of the educational community.

13. All names of individuals and organizations in italics are pseudonyms. Names of individuals and organizations in plain text are from public documents.

14. The state's universities did not participate in this process of questioning the preparedness of Wisconsin's high school graduates (e.g., Durhams, 2000; Henry, 1993). For instance, the scores of the state's high school students who took the American College Testing ranked first or second in the nation between the years 1989 and 2005 (see http://www.act.org/news/data/05/index.html).

15. Benson's primary opponent in the election was Linda Cross, a former high school teacher. Both candidates were Republicans. However, Cross's views on public education aligned more with Thompson's conservative values—for example, supporting school choice and school uniform policies. Furthermore, Governor Thompson's wife, Sue Ann Thompson, sat on her election committee in 1994, and in 1998, when Cross challenged Benson for the position again, Sue Ann was the cochairperson of her campaign. Moreover, in 1998, Thompson publicly supported Cross' campaign (Heinen, 1997).

16. Through this period of standards-based reform in Wisconsin, there were numerous ideas circulating about how best to "fix" Milwaukee's public schools (Viadero, 1992). For instance, the governor proposed moving the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) from the "ivory tower" of Madison to Milwaukee to shake up the "educrats" in the department (Heinen, 1997). Others proposed dividing the district into four smaller districts. To this day, the debate continues as to how to improve student performance in Milwaukee (e.g., Carr, 2006).

17. A study by Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute using Year 2000 data rated Wisconsin as having the highest disparity in high school graduation rates between Black and White students (Greene, Winters, & Forster, 2003). Only 40% of Black students in Wisconsin graduate, compared to a national average of 56%, whereas 92% of White Wisconsin students graduate, compared to a national average of 78%. (The graduation rate for Latinos [56%] is not much better.) Greene did another analysis of Milwaukee's 2005 graduation data and found that 94 of the 100 largest school districts in the country have higher graduation rates than Milwaukee, and the graduation rate was 45% in 2005 (Carr, 2006).

18. There were 400 standards in 12 subject areas. The goal of the department was to hold eight public forums and to have a final draft given to the legislature by March 1, 1997, for approval.

19. In response to the DPI standards, McCallum circulated a petition that asked for public support to develop knowledge-based standards that are concrete and measurable in the core academic areas of English, mathematics, science, and social studies. McCallum's primary method of circulating this petition was by showing up at DPI's public forums criticizing the department's work and asking for signatures to help him reform the standards.

20. According to Murphy (1998), a Thompson administration strategist told him that McCallum's posturing was a political move to gain support for a possible run at the superintendent's post in 1997. However, McCallum eventually decided not to seek that post.

21. At the state level, the conservative Wisconsin Policy Research Institute released a paper recommending that an independent statewide commission should set the state's standards, and the committee should use Virginia's Standards of Learning as a model (Walters, 1997b).

22. Just prior to this speech, DPI released its second draft of its standards. Thompson found them to be "much improved" (Walters, 1997c), but McCallum continued to criticize DPI's work. He claimed that the standards "still don't let parents and teachers know what knowledge has to be acquired" (Walters, 1997a).

23. The High School Graduation Test originated in DPI's 1997-1999 biennium budget request. The plan was to field-test it during the 1997-1999 biennium and to administer it during the 1999-2000 school year for districts to use as a criterion for graduation. According to an administrator in the Department of Administration who was working with the governor at that time, Governor Thompson noticed this idea and supported it. In his 1996 State of the State address, Thompson put forward his proposal for a high school graduation test, and he pushed for the creation of a system by which local districts would adopt performance standards that their students must master. There was a mixed response to these suggestions. A survey conducted by DPI in 1996 of 1,500 individuals across the state, which included a large majority of school personnel (43% teachers, 8% superintendents, and 2% school board members), showed that 62% of people surveyed were for a graduation test, whereas 33% were opposed (5% undecided) (Russell, 1996).

24. For a detailed copy of these standards, visit DPI's Web site at http://www.dpi.state.wi.us.

25. The Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam reports scores in six content areas—reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and writing. Writing results are reported using a holistic scale, 1 through 6, with 6 as high. The other content area results are reported by the proficiency levels of advanced, proficient, basic, and minimal.

26. No Child Left Behind has altered the Wisconsin Students Assessment System and increased the use of standardizing testing in Grades 3 through 10 to meet Title I's testing requirements.

27. See http://www.maxshores.com/kudzu for more detail on kudzu.

28. For example, the 2002-2003 graduation rate of Wisconsin students who were identified as White (non-Hispanic) was 95.22% compared to a 62.89% graduation rate for students identified as Black (non-Hispanic)—see http://dpi.wi.gov/.

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