Faculty in Educational Policy Research and/or Teaching

Dorothea Anagnostopoulos, Associate Professor
Teacher Education

David Arsen, Professor
K-12 Administration

Anita Chudgar, Assistant Professor
K-12 Administration and Educational Psychology

Philip A. Cusick, Professor
K-12 Administration

Brian DeLany, Associate Professor
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Christopher Dunbar, Associate Professor
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James S. Fairweather, Professor
Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education

Robert E. Floden, University Distinguished Professor
Teacher Education, Measurement and Quantitative Methods, and Educational Psychology

Kenneth A. Frank, Professor
Measurement and Quantitative Methods

Cassandra Guarino, Assistant Professor
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Rebecca Jacobsen, Assistant Professor
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Mark D. Reckase, Professor
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Edward D. Reehor, Professor
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William H. Schmidt, University Distinguished Professor
Measurement and Quantitative Methods, Co-director, Education Policy Center

Barbara Schneider, John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor
Education and Sociology

John (Jack) R. Schwille, Professor
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“We just have so many smart, smart people here in education policy. They really challenge you to think deeply about policy – exploring what we mean when we invoke the term as well as understanding the roles of the various actors who help shape it.”

- Timothy G. Ford
  fourth-year doctoral student in curriculum, teaching and educational policy
A former top official on educational testing for the state and federal governments, Sharif Shakrani now serves as an MSU resident expert on high-stakes testing and accountability systems such as No Child Left Behind. He also co-directs the university’s Education Policy Center and, through that role, disseminates research intended to publicly identify how a variety of educational policies impact or could impact student performance. Shakrani’s own recent studies explore controversial graduation rates of urban Michigan high schools, prospects of smaller learning communities for improved high school outcomes and possible solutions for high teacher turnover. Meanwhile, nations including the United States and Saudi Arabia seek Shakrani’s service as a consultant on effective large-scale assessments; he and fellow measurement and quantitative methods expert William Schmidt are now assisting China with its version of a national achievement test.

The political perspective
Jacobsen looks at public opinion, “comprehensive equity”

Rebecca Jacobsen brings to her work a background in political science and a passion for social justice. She worries that, as a nation, we are “losing the public-ness of public education.” An assistant professor of teacher education, Jacobsen’s particular interest is in what can be learned from public opinion data on local, state and national education priorities. In her research, she has found that urban and lower-income people have a different and wider range of goals for the nation’s schools than those who are more affluent. They also count on the schools to provide more comprehensive wellness services – including but not limited to academic preparation – than do middle- and upper-class families who have access to health, recreational and other enrichment opportunities in the private sector. Jacobsen asks of society, “What are our goals, really?” and examines how these goals are manifested in education policy. She and colleagues are finishing a manuscript on what they call comprehensive equity and the current racial gaps in youth outcomes in the United States.

An authority on teacher quality
Wilson works on preparation, support issues at national level

The next presidential administration’s take on teacher quality will be informed by a joint effort of the National Academy of Education and the National Research Council. At the forefront is MSU Teacher Education Chairperson Suzanne M. Wilson, who leads the panel charged with drafting a white paper on the topic for President Bush’s successor. “Teacher quality and the programs that we create to prepare teachers and support their ongoing professional learning are an essential piece of the school reform picture,” said Wilson, whose research has explored connections between educational policy and teachers’ practices. She is a co-author of a national report on teacher preparation policies and practices, also from the NRC, expected in winter 2008. “We need better policies to attract and keep good teachers, better preparation and development programs, tighter connections between teacher preparation programs and the public schools and better ways to monitor teacher quality and improvement.”

Assessing the scene
Shakrani keeps pulse on accountability, all education policy
If research can lead to important policy, policy can also lead to important research. For example, the published findings on teacher induction and mentoring have led many states to establish policies requiring districts to provide new teachers with mentors — but have these policies made a difference? Two MSU faculty members intend to find out.

Assistant professor of teacher education Peter Youngs and professor of measurement and quantitative methods Kenneth Frank are studying the effect of induction and mentoring practices on beginning teachers in 11 urban districts in Michigan and Indiana. Youngs, whose primary research interest is in teacher quality, and Frank, an expert in social networks, are investigating how the early experiences of new teachers affect them and their students. Specifically, they want to know how mentors, colleagues, and school organizational conditions influence the instruction, commitment, and retention of early career teachers, as well as the learning of their students. Compared to previous research, Youngs and Frank designed this study to provide much more detailed information about the characteristics of mentors and support colleagues, and about the nature and frequency of their interactions with new general education and special education teachers.

Youngs notes that “this is the first empirical study to employ social network data to examine the supports and pressures experienced by new teachers.” Preliminary findings indicate that the degree of social-psychological fit between beginning teachers and their colleagues and the level of relational trust in their schools have greater effects on commitment and retention of novices than either the expertise of their mentors or the nature of their interactions with mentors and colleagues.

The two scholars are well-versed in education policy research. Youngs has recently published on how the experiences of new elementary teachers can be enhanced by the beliefs and actions of their principals, and on the tradeoffs high-stakes testing produces with regards to educational opportunities and outcomes for low-income and racial-minority students.

Frank was co-lead investigator of a recent study on the effects of National Board Certified teachers on other teachers in their buildings. (See “Eye on effective instruction.”) An expert in social network analysis, he has also published on student course-taking patterns in high school mathematics.

Educated as a labor economist, Cassandra Guarino believes policy evaluation is among the most important research there is.

“Some people differentiate between basic research and policy evaluation, but I don’t make that distinction,” says Guarino, who spent eight years at the RAND Corporation (with incoming MSU faculty member Ron Zimmer) before coming to MSU as an assistant professor.

Using the tools of an economist, Guarino has researched and written on school choice and charter schools, teacher quality and teacher labor markets. She was the lead author of a 2006 report for the National Center for Education Statistics on teacher qualifications, instructional practices and reading and mathematics gain in kindergarteners. This report exemplifies her belief in “working on good, cutting-edge research that addresses major policy issues.”

Also, her review of the research evidence on policies and factors influencing teacher recruitment and retention has been widely cited and highlighted by the American Educational Research Association. Published in the Review of Educational Research in 2006, the study provides scholars and policymakers alike with a guide as to what works and what doesn’t to retain teachers and attract them to the profession.

Guarino recently received a prestigious grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to pursue research on the impact of teacher qualifications and instructional practices on young children.
On the (global) math front

Schmidt studies curriculum, teacher preparation gaps in U.S.

University Distinguished Professor William H. Schmidt collects large-scale math and science data, and his work has mounted a platform for one of education’s touchiest topics: national standards.

Relying on emerging insights from the 60-school district PROM/SE project (Promoting Rigorous Outcomes in Mathematics and Science Education) and the findings of TIMSS (the Third International Mathematics and Science Study), Schmidt often illustrates what he calls the “ridiculous proliferation” of incoherent math courses in the United States. He has documented a two-year lag in content exposure, rigor notwithstanding, for U.S. eighth-graders compared to those in high-achieving nations.

This curriculum gap, he argues, not only limits students’ opportunity to learn, “it reveals a fragmented system that has no equality to it.” Schmidt continues to explore the collective implications of these inequalities, and plans to publish a book – tentatively titled “Inequality for All” – in 2009.

Schmidt focuses on following international comparative data that holds value for educators and policymakers in the U.S. “The international context is just a wonderful way to get past your own blinders,” he says.

He illuminated another math-related “gap,” this time regarding teacher preparation, with the Mathematics Teaching for the 21st Century (or MT21) study. Next up is the U.S. portion of the Teacher Education and Development Study in Mathematics (U.S. TEDS-M), which surveys a random sampling of 100 public or private institutions that prepare math teachers.

The TEDS-M work – led internationally by fellow MSU researchers Teresa Tatro, John Schwille and Sharon Senk – comes while No Child Left Behind and other policies place more emphasis on the role of teacher qualifications in student achievement. “We want to inform that debate with some real data,” he said, arguing that standards and teacher quality – in that order – are the two biggest issues in education policy now. “If we can figure out those two, we’ll go a long way in reforming math and science education.” ■

International and all-inclusive

Chudgar champions broad policies to meet multiple challenges

Amita Chudgar likes to think big – as in big data sets and big policy issues. An economist with background in development studies, she brings her quantitative expertise to bear on policy issues that affect whole nations and even generations of students.

“My time at Cambridge (University) studying the challenges facing developing countries was instrumental in shaping my interest in educational issues,” explains the assistant professor of educational administration and educational psychology. “Developing countries are far more strapped for resources, and their needs are multiple and pressing.”

What fuels Chudgar’s interest in education is the crucial role it plays in a nation’s growth. A part of her current research concerns the international commitment to provide primary education to all children – the “Education for All” initiative. Given the complex relationships between different educational challenges in developing countries, Chudgar’s analysis has shown that efforts in just one area – access to primary education – may bring limited rewards if other challenges such as adult illiteracy are ignored. Her work also shows that “one of the major factors in whether a child gets to or stays in school is the literacy level of the parents,” says Chudgar, “so focusing too much on a single policy initiative may not be the ideal strategy for developing nations.”

Another area of Chudgar’s research concerns learning achievement in the international context. Chudgar and a colleague (Thomas Luschei, Florida State University) have analyzed international student test-score data and found that, in terms of learning achievement, schools matter more in poorer countries and in countries with greater inequality of income distribution. They plan to apply the same analytical framework to student test-score data across all U.S. states to see if schools matter more in some states than in others. ■
When it comes to effective and equitable instructional practices, Gary Sykes has studied—and his work has helped shape—education policy from local classrooms to legislative chambers. A noted scholar of the professionalization of teaching, Sykes and several MSU colleagues recently published results of research showing the positive effects National Board Certified teachers have on their schools and colleagues.

“Our paper has dual significance,” explains Sykes, a professor of teacher education. “Our findings have important implications in terms of policy incentives, showing that this kind of investment (in teachers with National Board Certification) is valuable.” The study also represents “a good example of the use of propensity score matching,” a sophisticated technique just recommended by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) that enables researchers to derive causal inferences from non-experimental data. Accordingly, Sykes is co-editor of the forthcoming AERA Handbook on Educational Policy Research (see below), which illustrates many research methods and directions throughout the field.

Even highly effective teachers need to work in a supportive environment. This is why Sykes is also working with colleagues in North Carolina and Texas on a book that attempts to describe what makes certain school districts instructionally effective.

“The first round of accountability and standards policy tried to link the statehouse to the schoolhouse,” observes Sykes. “That policy theory didn’t work. There are still high levels of variation from school to school and not enough change in low-performing schools.”

Some policymakers and scholars now recognize the school district as an important intermediary to create capacity within whole systems of schools. Sykes and his colleagues are trying to uncover, in his words, “if school-based reform is too diffuse a strategy to bring to scale, are there districtwide reform models that can teach us how to mobilize resources and focus efforts in ways that truly improve outcomes for all students?”

Michigan State University’s broad influences on education policy will be particularly evident with the upcoming release of an ambitious publication from the American Educational Research Association. The AERA Handbook on Educational Policy Research, expected to be available for the association’s April 2009 meeting in San Diego, was proposed by College of Education researchers in 2006 to define the current state and future directions of this diverse, evolving field.

“This is the first time people have tried to survey the field of education policy research and pull together a synthetic volume” that covers the waterfront, said Gary Sykes. He is co-editing the handbook with MSU colleague Barbara Schneider and David Plank, who helped launch the project with Sykes while he was at MSU.

Spanning 63 chapters and 14 commentaries from more than 100 authors, the handbook has chapters and/or commentary contributions from MSU’s Rebecca Jacobsen, William Schmidt, Yong Zhao, Robert Floden and Lisa Rosen, who joins the faculty in fall 2009.

Along with five graduate student co-authors,* they explore research and methodologies related to today’s most pressing policy issues, from unequal opportunities to learn and the increase in centralized accountability to new technologies and changes in early childhood education.

The volume has been reviewed by more than 100 peers (nine from MSU) as well as the AERA Editorial Advisory Board. AERA also will present a session in conjunction with the handbook’s release at its 2009 annual meeting. Check www.aera.net for more information or to place an order.

*Michigan State University graduate student Timothy G. Ford is the lead graduate student editor of the AERA Handbook on Educational Policy Research, working with fellow MSU students who co-author chapters: Rachel Fulcher-Dawson, Nathan D. Jones, Vanessa A. Keesler and Adam Maier.
Well-known for her studies on adolescents and families, Barbara Schneider's current efforts to improve youth learning opportunities reach from the state capital to the core debates of educational research.

Through a program for the Regional Educational Laboratory – Midwest, the John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor is exploring how to harness the policy-directing power of data held by state agencies. Following a survey of all seven states in the REL, Schneider approached the Michigan Department of Education to offer collaborative consulting on crucial questions for the state. Her team conducted intensive data analysis, producing three reports in less than a year, that uncovered connections between Michigan's existing teaching force and its expectations for student achievement. The project directly informs state officials as they attempt to successfully implement rigorous new high school curriculum requirements – implications for school interventions, professional development and technology emerged. “We are working together using state data to help make more informed decisions regarding educational issues in the state,” said Schneider. She says the process itself – a true problem-solving partnership between university and government – “is a model for the other RELs in the United States.”

Nationally, Schneider remains at the forefront in defining scientifically-based education research. Through the federally funded Data Research and Development Center (DRDC), she continues developing methods for widespread implementation of promising educational models and programs. Her books, Scale-Up in Education: Ideas in Principle and Scale-Up in Education: Issues in Practice with Sarah-Kay McDonald, address questions of how confident educators and others can be in two key areas: the quality of evidence upon which school improvement plans and educational reform policies are based, and the effectiveness of implementing particular curricula and other research-proven innovations in different classroom settings.

An economist with extensive policy expertise, David Arsen firmly believes that sound research should inform state education policy. His work on school facilities with former MSU doctoral student Tom Davis, who has just joined the faculty at the University of Maryland, caught the collective ear of Michigan's state lawmakers and a coalition of urban mayors. Arsen and Davis developed an innovative method for measuring school infrastructure assets, using newly available data that districts nationwide are required to report.

Their analysis of all Michigan school districts documented large gaps in the quality of school facilities in low-wealth districts as compared to high-wealth districts, despite the fact that poorer districts are taxing themselves at much higher rates. “We have evidence that facilities really matter,” says Arsen. He and Davis use their data to argue that state investment in the school facilities of low-wealth areas would spur both academic outcomes and community development, as well as provide an immediate economic stimulus that would pay for itself over time.

Arsen, a professor of K-12 educational administration, also is a scholar of school choice policies. His grant-funded review of research on the competitive effect of school choice on surrounding public schools – an effect that has been the primary justification for such policies – was featured in Education Week. Arsen and former graduate student Yongmei Ni, now an assistant professor at the University of Utah, found that the competitive effect rationale for school choice policies has not been borne out by a preponderance of the results from empirical studies. “The evidence just isn’t there,” he says.

Arsen also studies trends in funding for Michigan's K-12 schools, including reductions.
Read their work

Selected relevant publications from faculty engaged in educational policy research

- **Rebecca Jacobsen:**

- **Suzanne M. Wilson:**

- **Sharif M. Shakrani:**

- **Peter Youngs:**

- **Cassandra Guarino:**

- **William H. Schmidt:**


- **Amita Chudgar:**

- **Gary Sykes:**


- **Barbara Schneider:**


- **David Arsen:**
The doctoral program in educational policy is recognized for its distinguished scholarship, innovative reform activities and award-winning faculty and students – including Spencer and Fulbright scholars. Students are prepared to assume professional roles in educational policy analysis and development in local, state, national and international organizations, as well as for faculty positions in higher education. Faculty members from three College of Education departments (Educational Administration, Teacher Education, and Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education) contribute expertise and collaborate with colleagues in the MSU colleges of Social Science and Law. Students are encouraged to share in all facets of the Education Policy Center’s ambitious agenda (see below). Proximity to Michigan’s capital city facilitates access to key members of the educational policy community, in the Legislature and the Executive Branch, and provides students with additional opportunities for field experience, both in and outside state government. The program also reflects the college’s commitment to international work, through continuing policy-related research in other nations and its population of international students. Many concentrations suiting specific study interests are possible.

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Education Policy Center
Growing knowledge and debate in Michigan and beyond

To meet the need for information and analysis and to deepen the education policy debate in Michigan and the nation, the Michigan State University Board of Trustees established the Education Policy Center in 2000. Based in the College of Education, the center actively recruits the participation of faculty with related interests and expertise from across campus, the nation and the world. The EPC builds on the foundation of MSU’s land-grant mission and the college’s national and international reputation for education policy research in its mission to support and inform debates at every level of government. Outreach activities seek to improve the quality of education for students at all levels of the state and nation’s education systems, from early childhood through postsecondary education.

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EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Shaping the foundations for learning