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It's Not Education by Zip Code Anymore – But What is It? Conceptions of Equity under the Common Core

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Abstract: The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a standards-based reform in which 45 U.S. states and the District of Columbia have agreed to participate. The reform seeks to anchor primary and secondary education across these states in one set of demanding, internationally benchmarked standards. Thereby, all students will be prepared for further learning and work in a competitive global economy regardless of the sociodemographic variation associated with their “zip code,” that is, the location of their neighborhood or school. This article examines the role and meaning of equity within the Common Core at a level beyond “zip code.” It does so using data from interviews with Common Core policy entrepreneurs and qualitative analysis of interview data. Findings are considered against a conceptual framework of equal, equalizing, and expansive views of equity. The findings indicate that policy entrepreneurs hold primarily an equal view of equity, in accord with meritocratic and functional purposes of schooling, more so than equalizing or expansive views. The latter views emphasize compensatory purposes that focus on narrowing achievement gaps. From this analysis, we identify the paradox of equity in education policy: The successful launch

of a policy that relies on existing paradigms of standards-based reform and an equal conception of equity helps tether educational outcomes to student background.

Keywords: equity; educational opportunities; education reform; education policy; standards

No es más el tipo de educación según el código postal - pero ¿qué es? Las concepciones de la equidad en el marco de los estándares *Common Core*

Resumen: La Iniciativa de estándares *Common Core* es una reforma basada en estándares en la que 45 estados de Estados Unidos y el Distrito de Columbia han aceptado participar. La reforma busca anclar la educación primaria y secundaria a través de estos estados en un solo conjunto de normas exigentes, como punto de referencia a nivel internacional. De este modo, todos los estudiantes estarán preparados para el aprendizaje y el trabajo en una economía global competitiva, independientemente de la variación sociodemográfica asociada con el "código postal", es decir, la ubicación de su vecindario o la escuela. En este artículo se analiza el papel y el significado de la equidad dentro del *Common Core* a un nivel más allá de "código postal". Lo hace a partir de datos de las entrevistas con personas que implementaron estas políticas y análisis cualitativo de datos de la entrevista. Los resultados se interpretan usando un marco conceptual de puntos de vista igualitarios, de equidad, usando una noción expansiva de la equidad. Los resultados indican que los que implementaron las políticas tienen sobre todo una visión igualitaria de la equidad, de acuerdo con propósitos meritocráticos y funcionales de la educación, más que de equidad u opiniones expansivas. Los últimos puntos de vista enfatizan los propósitos compensatorios que se centran en reducir la brecha de rendimiento. A partir de este análisis, identificamos la paradoja de la equidad en la política de educación: El éxito de una política que se basa en los paradigmas existentes de la reforma basada en estándares y una concepción igualitaria de la equidad de los resultados educativos depende de los conocimientos previos de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: equidad; oportunidades educativas; reforma de la educación; política de la educación; las normas

Não é mais o tipo de educação segundo o "código postal" -, mas o que é? Concepções de equidade conforme os padrões do *Common Core*

Resumo: A iniciativa do núcleo *Common Core* é uma reforma baseada em padrões, em 45 estados americanos e no Distrito de Columbia concordaram em participar. A reforma visa ancorar a educação primária e secundária por esses estados em um único conjunto de padrões elevados, de referência internacional. Assim, todos os alunos serão preparados para aprender e trabalhar em uma economia global competitiva, independentemente da variação sociodemográficos associados ao "código postal", ou seja, a localização do seu bairro ou na escola. Este artigo discute o papel da importância do *Common Core* dentro do núcleo comum para um nível além do "código postal" é analisada. Ele faz isso usando dados de entrevistas com pessoas que implementaram essas políticas e análise qualitativa dos dados das entrevistas. Os resultados são interpretados por intermédio de pontos de vista de enquadramento conceptual igualitária do patrimônio líquido, utilizando uma noção ampla de patrimônio líquido. Os resultados indicam que essas políticas são implementadas principalmente uma visão igualitária do patrimônio líquido, de acordo com as finalidades meritocráticos e funcionais de educação, em vez de vista de equidade ou expansivo. Visualizações recentes enfatizam fins compensatórias que visam reduzir as disparidades de resultados. A partir dessa análise, identificamos o paradoxo da equidade na política de educação: O sucesso de uma política baseada em paradigmas existentes de reforma baseada em padrões e concepção igualitária da equidade dos resultados educacionais depende conhecimento prévio dos alunos.

Palavras-chave: capital; oportunidade educacional; reforma da educação; políticas educacionais; normas

Introduction

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (Common Core) is a state-based effort to anchor U.S. public education in a shared set of high academic standards. The Common Core initiative took shape between 2006 and 2010, as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) came up for reauthorization and problems with its academic and performance standards became increasingly clear (e.g., National Research Council, 2008; Quay, 2010; Rothman, 2011). During this period, researchers surfaced the variability in states' standards (National Research Council, 2008; Porter, Polikoff, & Smithson, 2009). Leaders from education policy groups began promoting the need for a common set of rigorous standards both to advance equity and to help prepare students for an economy that was blind to state and international borders. In 2009, 48 states' education policy leaders agreed to work together under the auspices of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association to develop common standards and support common assessments of them (Rothman, 2011). The resulting Common Core English Language Arts and Math Standards were released in June, 2010. They are described as "fewer, clearer, and higher," than most state standards under NCLB (Common Core State Standards Initiative, *About the Standards*, n.d.; Gates Foundation, 2010; Rothman, 2011). The Common Core State Standards have now been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia.

The leaders of the Common Core hold several aims. By grounding education in the reform's rigorous, internationally benchmarked standards, students and the nation will be prepared to compete in the global economy. The standards will also enable students to graduate high school ready to pursue college or career education without need of remedial coursework. In addition, the Common Core standards will provide teachers and parents a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, no matter where students live or what school they attend. Materials from the Common Core State Standards Initiative, the National Governors Association, and the Council of Chief State School Officers state the reform "[e]nsures consistent expectations regardless of a student's zip code" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, n.d.; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012.; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

On one hand, the Common Core represents a potential sea change in the highly fragmented, decentralized system of U.S. education. On the other, the Common Core continues a line of systemic reform detailed in the early 1990s by Marshall Smith and Jennifer O'Day (O'Day & Smith, 1993; Smith & O'Day, 1991; Rothman, 2011). These reforms seek to improve teaching, learning, and equity by making the education system more coherent (O'Day & Smith, 1993). Central to such systemic reform, now commonly called standards-based reform, is a theory of action that begins with the articulation of standards for what students should know and be able to do. The standards provide a foundation upon which to align curriculum materials, instruction, assessment, and professional development. Alongside articulated standards and alignment, O'Day and Smith (1993) said schools needed resources, flexibility, and responsibility to enable students to meet higher standards. They noted that schools serving high-needs populations may require different instructional, curriculum, or personnel resources to educate their students and prepare them to perform well on the assessments. These, in turn, may depend on "different dollar resources" (p. 266).

Given this lineage, and its aim to provide all students with the same high standards and graduate them without need for remediation, the Common Core's goals encompass equity. Yet, compared to No Child Left Behind, the role and meaning of equity within this reform are less sharply defined. NCLB, on its face and through its accountability system, emphasized the relationship between achievement and socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, or disability. Unlike NCLB, the Common Core is not bound to an accountability system that requires districts and schools to attend to such sociodemographic variation. Materials produced by the Common Core, as well statements by participants in this study, speak instead about ensuring consistent expectations regardless of zip code and graduating all students college and career ready (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, n.d., Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Expectations, while important (Ferguson, 2003; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992), do not entail material resources that O'Day and Smith (1993) indicated may be needed. Moreover, graduating all students "college and career ready" spans outcomes from cashier trainee to Ivy League matriculant. Such disparate postsecondary destinations are associated with student background.

This article draws on interview data to explicate the role and meaning of equity within the Common Core according to its policy entrepreneurs – those who helped shape the reform as a response to NCLB, place it on policymakers' agendas, and promote its adoption in states (see Kingdon, 1995). It begins by building a conceptual framework that draws on the literature. This is followed by analyses of the role and meaning of equity within the Common Core. Understanding equity at a level deeper than "zip code" and "college and career ready" is important. First, while those who shape and promote new policies do not determine policy outcomes, they do influence actions undertaken in the name of the policy (see McLaughlin, 1987). Second, if the Common Core's equity results are ultimately to be evaluated, it is useful to have a clearer understanding of what its equity claims comprise.

Conceptualizing Educational Equity

The first question that arises in such a study as that requested by the Civil Rights Act in Section 402 is to determine precisely what the request means, and how it can be best fulfilled. In this case, the difficulty was especially great because the very concept of 'equality of educational opportunity' is one that is presently undergoing change, and various members of government and of society have different conceptions of what such equality consists of. – James S. Coleman, 1972, p. 147

[T]he enduring popularity of equal educational opportunity probably derives from the fact that we can all define it in different ways without realizing how profound our differences really are. – Christopher Jencks, 1988, p. 518

Over the last several decades, many efforts have been made to clarify "equality of educational opportunity," "equal educational opportunity," "educational opportunity," "educational equity," and related terms (see e.g., Coleman, 1968, 1972; Hallinan, 1988; Jencks, 1988; Koski & Reich, 1997; McDonnell, 1995; Murphy, 1988; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Rebell, 2012). In this article, we use "educational equity" for concerns about disparities in educational resources and achievement that are linked to demographic variables, particularly those emphasized under NCLB: socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, or disability. Through a review of the literature, we have clustered conceptions of educational equity in three ways.

Under the equal conception of educational equity, policies and programs are designed to provide equal educational resources for all students. Given equal resources, differences in achievement across different student populations represent influences beyond the purview of the education system. Under the equalizing conception, policies and programs are meant to afford compensatory educational resources to address different populations of learners. The equalizing conception seeks to foster more equal school outcomes. The expansive conception of educational equity also seeks to create more equal school outcomes. However, it emphasizes the need for comprehensive resources both within and beyond schools to attain such outcomes. We explore these three conceptions below and summarize them thereafter in Table 1.

The Equal Conception

The central concern of the equal conception is providing all learners with equal educational resources (see, e.g., Coleman, 1968; Hallinan, 1988; Jencks, 1988). Because such equal treatment appeals to Americans' Constitutional right to equal protection under the law, Jencks (1988) called this conception "democratic equality" (p. 520). Given equal resources, differences in students' achievement are said to reflect unequal ability, motivation, effort, parental inputs, family income, and other influences. Variations in such influences are viewed as inevitable and largely outside the scope of the education system.

Coleman (1968) noted that "equality of educational opportunity" might initially be seen as exposure to a common curriculum for different children within the same community. This notion has a long history, beginning with communities' common schools (Coleman, 1968), manifesting itself in standards promulgated by most states in the 1980s, and required of all states by federal mandate under the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the "Improving America's School Act of 1994" [P.L. 103-382; 108 Stat. 3518]), and its successor, NCLB.

The equal conception remains salient among both policymakers and researchers. For instance, Schmidt and Maier (2009) hold that curriculum of equal "focus, rigor and coherence" is fundamental to educational equity (p. 541) and serves as the "most central" and clearest notion of "opportunity to learn" (p. 542). Findings that curriculum varied markedly across states despite NCLB (Porter, Polikoff, & Smithson, 2009) have influenced policy discussions about the Common Core (National Research Council, 2008). The equal conception of equity is evident in the adoption of the Common Core's "fewer, higher, clearer standards" across 45 states and the District of Columbia. The reform's shared standards offer a common basis for generating curriculum (v. common curriculum itself) to a community that is nearly national in scope.

Although common curriculum remains central to the equal conception, it has long been seen as insufficient (Coleman, 1968; Murphy, 1988). U.S. courts have found it wanting since the mid-20th Century (Coleman, 1968). For example, in a higher education case, the Supreme Court held that an African American student's rights were violated when he had access to the same lectures but was relegated to spaces that impeded his interactions with fellow students (*McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, 339 U.S. 637 [1950]). Similarly, equal material resources were not sufficient for educational equity according to the Supreme Court in *Brown*: "Segregation ... deprives children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 [1954]). These decisions reveal that the equal conception extends beyond curriculum or other material support. Their influence may be seen in resources called for in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. IDEA requires that students with disabilities are educated in the "least restrictive environment." "To the maximum

extent appropriate, children with disabilities... are educated with children who are not disabled..." (U.S. Department of Education, Building the Legacy: Idea 2004, Statute TITLE I/B/612/a/5, n.d.).

Under the equal conception, high teacher expectations constitute another intangible resource (Coleman, 1968). Advocates of standards-based reforms have argued that such systems will generate equally high expectations for all students. Thus, in 2004, George W. Bush famously decried "the soft bigotry of low expectations" and said this would be countered by No Child Left Behind (The White House, President George W. Bush, President's Remarks in Minneapolis, Minnesota, n.d.).

How might education proceed under an equal conception of educational equity? To model this, Jencks (1988) offered the fictional "Ms. Higgins" and her decisions about distributing time and attention among her third graders. Under the equal, or "democratic equality" conception, Ms. Higgins gives her students the same time and attention regardless of differences in their experience or behavior. School finance scholars have described the equal conception as "one scholar, one dollar" or driven by a distributional principle of "horizontal equity" (Koski & Reich, 2006, p. 553). Using the "playing field" metaphor, the equal conception provides everyone access to the same equipment, same rules, same stadium, and equally qualified coaches. As in any competition requiring knowledge and skill, winners and losers might be predicted in advance based on many factors in and beyond the game (e.g., injuries, prior training, physical attributes), but at least the game itself isn't rigged. Moreover, the prizes for winning are seen as meritocratically allotted. Thus, under the equal conception, schooling serves a utilitarian or functional role in ultimately distributing students into a range of social benefits and social roles (Jencks, 1988; Lucas & Beresford, 2010; Metz, 1990).

The equal conception of educational equity, and the values and policies linked to it, may be the most well-established. Yet, material and intangible resources continue to be unequally distributed: Only two jurisdictions, Washington, D.C. and Hawaii, have equal per pupil expenditures (New America Foundation, Federal Education Budget Project, School Finance Inequity Among Districts, n.d.). Teacher quality, a key influence on student achievement, varies systematically with student demographics across schools (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2007, 2010; Jackson, 2009; Sunderman & Kim, 2005). Peer groups also vary markedly across and within schools and across school districts (Gamoran, 2009; Oakes, 1985; Orfield & Lee, 2007; Smrekar & Goldring, 2010). Infrastructure and equipment differ across schools serving high- and low-poverty student populations (Crampton & Thompson, 2008; Kozol, 1992). Consequently, an equal conception of equity, the most straightforward of the conceptions, remains elusive in reality.

The Equalizing Conception

The equalizing conception of educational equity undergirds school-based efforts to create more equal education outcomes. Ideally, under this conception students from disparate backgrounds would have equal chances of school success (Jencks, 1988), and thereby achievement gaps would close. To generate more equal outcomes, it is not enough that classrooms and schools have equal resources and are open to all students, as *Brown* and *McLaurin* set forth. Instead, policies and practices within the education system need to distribute resources in a compensatory way.

Per Jencks (1988), compensatory approaches to educational equity rest on "the moral premise of humane justice ... that educational resources should go disproportionately to the disadvantaged" (p. 527). This complicates Ms. Higgins' decision making, since she must now allocate her time and attention in ways that counteract the array of student differences (Jencks, 1988). In school finance, compensatory approaches have been described as "vertical equity." This "target[s] resources based on student need such that each student has an equal opportunity for an equal outcome" (Koski & Reich, 2006, p. 553). Using the playing field metaphor, the game now entails modifying or distributing equipment, rules, and coaches to offset uneven physical attributes,

experiences, and prior training – whether due to ability, motivation, effort, health, or other causes – so that everyone has an equal likelihood to hit home runs.

An equalizing conception is evident in court decisions and legislation. In *Lau v. Nichols* (414 U.S. 563[1974]), the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that those lacking English language skills needed compensatory, not equal, resources. It was inadequate for the San Francisco Unified School District to provide “the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum, for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.” The Court required the school district to adhere to Title VI of Civil Rights Act of 1964: “No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Under a consent decree, the San Francisco Unified School District has continued to provide students with instruction in their native language as well as promoting English language development (San Francisco Unified Public Schools Basis for English Learner Programs, n.d.).

IDEA legislation incorporates an equalizing conception, as well as an equal conception noted above. Students with disabilities must be given accommodations to enable them to participate meaningfully in regular classrooms. Clearly, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act is the largest piece of legislation that encompasses an equalizing conception. Under NCLB, Title I was called “Improving The Academic Achievement of The Disadvantaged” [sic] (NCLB, P.L. 107-110, sec. 101). It sought to reduce achievement gaps not only through increased accountability but also by “meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance” (Ed.gov. U.S. Department of Education Elementary & Secondary Education. Title I, n.d.).

While the equalizing conception comports with the value of humane justice and also with federal policies, there are clearly obstacles to its realization. For example, in the early 1990s, a number of researchers and policymakers called for the adoption of both academic standards and “school delivery standards” (National Center on Educational Standards and Testing, 1992; Porter, 1993). Such standards, later termed opportunity-to-learn standards, would delineate the resources, practices, and conditions needed to enable students to learn content standards. Opportunity-to-learn standards could then be used to target resources within and across schools to improve teaching and learning before the consequences of accountability systems could be applied (Dougherty, 1996; Heise, 1994; McDonnell, 1995; McPartland & Schneider, 1996; Murphy, 1998; Porter, 1993, 1995). However, opportunity-to-learn standards were defeated by their politically unpalatable implications: redistribution of resources, funding lawsuits, and higher taxes (McDonnell, 1995).

Indeed, cost estimates to close achievement gaps are steep. For example, analyses by Betts and Roemer (2005) indicate that eliminating the wage gap between black and white men would require education spending for black students that is 9 to 18 times greater than for white students. They concluded, “Implementing such reforms ... is a remote possibility in a society that has not yet fully implemented the more moderate 'equal resource' policy” (Roemer & Betts, 2005, p. 36-7). Alongside economic obstacles, the differential treatment of individuals – even humane, compensatory efforts to boost disadvantaged students’ achievement – conflicts with the principle of equality under the law. As a result, political and legal battles over reforms associated with the equalizing conception, including bilingual education, redistribution of school funding, or school integration, have been ongoing for decades (e.g., Gándara & Rumberger, 2009; García, 2002; Hakuta, 2011; Koski & Reich, 2006; Orfield & Lee, 2005, 2007; Parents Involved, 551 U.S. 701 [2007]; Yee, 2012).

The Expansive Conception

The expansive conception of educational equity shares the equalizing conception's goal of narrowing disparities in learning and enabling more equal chances of school success. It also recognizes that this aim requires compensatory education resources. However, the expansive view builds on what social science has long revealed: disparate student achievement is strongly associated with influences outside schools' purview. Therefore, the expansive conception provides for compensatory resources within and beyond the education system to close achievement gaps. It is both compensatory and comprehensive.

Had Jencks (1988) included the expansive conception, Ms. Higgins' neediest students would receive extra time and attention from her and from health, social service, and other providers beyond the classroom. In the realm of economics, the expansive conception might be termed human capital investment equity, which focuses on ensuring comprehensive services for young children from disadvantaged circumstances. These offer strong returns for educational attainment and life chances relative to later investments (Heckman, 2008, 2010). Under the playing field metaphor, an expansive conception's game allows equipment, rules, and coaches to vary, and for players to be positioned anywhere on or off the field if doing so enables them to hit home runs at a roughly equivalent rate.

While equal conceptions draw upon democratic equality and the Constitution, and equalizing approaches rest on humane justice (Jencks, 1988) and laws impelled by the civil rights movement, the expansive conception was initially seen as beyond reasonable values and laws. Writing in 1967, Coleman claimed conceptions that sought equality of results across students from varying home language or experience were "extreme" (1967, p. 15; 1968, p. 17). Yet, policies promoting such ends were developed during the same historical era. In his Howard University commencement address, President Lyndon Johnson (1965) said:

[E]qual opportunity is essential, but not enough, not enough. Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in — by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man.... We are trying to attack these evils through our poverty program, through our education program, through our medical care and our other health programs, and a dozen more of the Great Society programs that are aimed at the root causes of this poverty.

The Head Start program initiated under Johnson embodies an expansive conception of equity. The program addresses the health, nutrition, social, and emotional needs of disadvantaged preschoolers to position them better for school learning. With its reauthorization in 2007, Head Start placed an increasing emphasis on literacy and cognitive development (Administration for Children and Families, History of Head Start, n.d.). Yet, recent research shows that 3- and 4-year-olds' achievement gains from Head Start fade by the end of first grade (Head Start Impact Study, 2010). Similar findings pertain to the Perry Preschool Program (Schweinhardt, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). Heckman (2008) and Currie and Thomas (2005) argue that early enriched interventions must be followed up in order to show continuing academic effects. Typically when Head Start ends, children then contend with disadvantaged environments both in and outside of school.

At the same time, achievement gains may not be the best indicator to evaluate whether an expansive approach to educational equity is valuable. Expansive approaches undertaken in early childhood have produced lasting benefits in other crucial areas: stable employment and families,

better health, higher earnings, and fewer encounters with the justice system (Heckman, 2008, 2010; Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron & Shonkoff, 2006; Schweinhart, et al., 2005; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000). Thus, even if such interventions don't boost test scores (see Jensen, 1969), they have measurably improved life chances.

Proponents of expansive policies and programs assert that these produce important benefits while also ultimately being more cost effective than equalizing efforts (Heckman, 2008; Heckman 2010; Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron & Shonkoff, 2006; Rothstein, Wilder, & Allgood, 2011). For example, Rothstein et al. (2011) estimate comprehensive services, beginning with prenatal care and ending at age 18, for high poverty youth would cost \$13,900/year per child in New York State. However, some of these expenses are already being provided by other social services and special needs budgets at the state and federal level. Moreover, comprehensive services will reduce later expenditures for special education and enhance economic productivity, creating more tax payers (Heckman, 2008, 2010; Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron & Shonkoff, 2006; National Research Council 2000; Rothstein, Wilder, & Allgood, 2011).Thus, an expansive view of educational equity amounts to a pragmatic embrace between the principles of humane justice and return on investment (ROI).

Yet, policies attuned to comprehensive conceptions of educational equity have not been broadly adopted. It may be that the shifts in economics and demographics have been too rapid and recent to see such policies as pragmatic rather than radical. Relatedly, equal and equalizing conceptions of educational equity have been supported through varied court decisions and legislative actions. In contrast, the legal bases to shoulder an expansive conception of educational equity are only now taking shape. Rebell and Wolff (2012) assert one potential basis is implicit in NCLB's promise to provide all students with a "fair and substantial" educational opportunity, mirroring similar language in various states' law. Another basis is that many high-poverty children are not served by Head Start or other comprehensive services. This "creates 'two tiers' of citizens, a pattern that strongly offends the concept of equal protection" (Rebell & Wolff, 2012, p. 48).

As the foregoing details, there are varied conceptions of educational equity. These differ with regard to resources, expected results, philosophical and legal bases, spheres of action, and funding. (See Table 1.) They also have different implications for policy and practice.

Table 1
Conceptions of Equity

Conception of Equity → Features ↓	EQUAL	EQUALIZING	EXPANSIVE
Resources	More equal educational resources	Compensatory educational resources	Compensatory resources in and beyond the educational system
Results	Variable, predictable gaps linked to student background	More equal chances of school success, narrowed gaps	More equal chances of school success, narrowed gaps
Sphere of Action	Public education	Public education	Public education, social and health services, prenatal – grade 12
Philosophical/ Legal Basis	Democratic equality/ Constitutional equal protections	Humane justice/ Civil rights laws	Humane justice + ROI/ Still in formation
Funding	Horizontal equity	Vertical equity	Human capital investment equity

The Common Core’s aims of “college and career readiness” and consistent expectations for students across zip code encompass equity – but what sort? Through the research that follows, we explicate the role and meaning of equity according to the reform’s policy entrepreneurs.

Methods

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with 11 policy entrepreneurs conducted in late summer and early fall of 2011, at the start of the Common Core’s implementation process. This sample was gleaned from 16 initial emails to individuals who helped shape the Common Core as a response to NCLB, place it on policymakers’ agendas, and advance its adoption. Eight interviews were with policy entrepreneurs associated with eight national organizations. Of these, five served as their organization’s head or vice president. Three others held positions central to their organization’s Common Core policy effort. Another interview entailed a policy entrepreneur who acted as consultant to those seeking to launch common standards. We also conducted a joint interview with two senior staff, self-described as policy entrepreneurs, from the department of education in a reform-oriented state. These individuals promoted the reform’s adoption with state policymakers and were advancing its implementation in school districts. This interview offered a best case scenario: It allowed us to compare national-level policy entrepreneurs’ perspectives on equity and the Common Core with state-level leaders who strongly support the Common Core and its implementation (see Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Our interview protocol included ten questions that asked participants to describe how the Common Core might serve diverse students and schools and what educational equity meant to them. The protocol was semi-structured, enabling us to address our research questions while providing flexibility to follow avenues opened by the interview participants. Interviews ranged from 55 to 70 minutes and typically lasted 60 minutes. They were conducted by phone, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. To protect participants' confidentiality, as required under our institutional review board approval, all audio recordings and transcriptions were saved using interviewee pseudonyms on a password-protected computer. Pseudonyms were used in all subsequent analyses and writing.

Data Analysis

We employed an inductive, basic interpretive approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) in our data analysis. This is appropriate for qualitative inquiries that seek to surface others' sensemaking. Sensemaking has been described as a process to resolve issues and move forward that draws in a non-deliberative way from existing institutional and cultural frameworks. It is "instrumental, subtle, swift, social, and easily taken for granted" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). Within education research, sensemaking has been employed typically in studies of policy implementation to examine how a policy is interpreted in light of social and cultural contexts and therefore how it is enacted (See, e.g., Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 2004). In this case, sensemaking was applied to illuminate how Common Core policy entrepreneurs interpret the role and meaning of equity within the reform they are championing. Because sensemaking is a "way station" for coordinated action (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 275 cited in Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), our study will help both to elucidate the policy entrepreneurs' conceptions of equity and clarify how plans to advance equity may unfold within the reform.

Data analysis was continuous with data collection. Immediately following each interview, brief memos were written to capture salient points and new questions generated by the participants' responses. In the process of transcribing, bracketed observer comments were added to the transcript texts and additional memos were drafted.

To develop the coding scheme, each of the three researchers independently read and generated open codes for three of the interview transcripts. We then discussed our initial open codes, refined their meanings and labels, eliminated redundancies and clustered the remaining codes. Following this, we individually piloted the resulting code scheme on a fourth transcript and thereafter together further refined the codes. This series of steps reduced 164 initial open codes to 12 major coding categories. We then independently recoded all ten transcripts. During the coding process, we drafted and discussed memos that synthesized meanings and raised issues within and across coded data.

After independently coding all the transcripts, we reviewed and discussed together all data under each code. This process surfaced additional understandings and questions that were recorded in memos. It also resolved any coding disparities and ultimately yielded full agreement about the coding of each piece of data across the three researchers. This, together with the reiteration/saturation of responses across participants, strengthens the trustworthiness of our findings.

Findings: The Role and Meaning of Educational Equity in the Common Core

Common Core policy entrepreneurs said educational equity played an important role in the formation and goals of the reform. They often linked equity to economic arguments for the reform.

Policy entrepreneurs applied primarily an equal conception of equity to the Common Core. We elaborate on these findings below.

Equity has a Central Role

All participants voiced a clear desire for the Common Core to improve education especially for students from educationally challenging circumstances. The policy entrepreneurs argued that students from lower-performing states, poverty, urban or rural environments, minority backgrounds, lower tracks, transient situations, and those who were English language learners should not confront educational disadvantage in school. According to Lee Harmon, concern for equity generated broad backing for the Common Core. Equity was central to:

bringing in La Raza and all the groups that are associated with La Raza, and getting their support for the standards, and the NAACP, getting students with disabilities' groups on board, military coalitions, child coalitions. I think it was equity more than purely economic arguments – which is what everybody pushes – which I think are oversold. But in terms of actually bringing people to the table, the equity is what brought them to the table.

Equity is Conjoined with Economic Messages

Even as equity was important, it was rarely a stand-alone message. As Lee Harmon indicated above, economic arguments were promoted to gain support for the Common Core. Unlike Harmon, many participants saw integral links between the economic and equity justifications for the reform. For example, Chris Young said:

Up until about 20 years ago, I think there were two things that drove educational reform and drove the standards movement as well. On the one hand, it was traditional civil rights equity: the moral imperative. On the other, was the economic imperative that affect[s] another group of people [e.g., employers]. Today, they're joined.... [For] the first time in our history, all of our children – or almost all – have to do well if our economy is going to truly thrive.

Other policy entrepreneurs indicated that educational equity was vital to economic well-being at the individual, national, and/or international level. Jan Davidson illustrated this in holding that a key purpose of the standards was to give all young people a foundation for managing global competition: “[T]hese are standards that all kids need to meet in order to be prepared to have a future in an increasingly competitive environment and a world where being born in the U.S. may not give you the advantages it used to.”

Equity in the Common Core was also linked to “economies of scale.” It was expected that the Common Standards would increase the education system’s efficiency, and, in turn, make educational resources more widely available. Terry Thomas’ organization supported the Common Core standards due to:

concerns around low student performance, both on state tests, the NAEP, and on international assessments; the implications of that for economic development and economic success; and some concerns around comparability and the opportunity to create economies of scale. You have a situation where you have each state is going it alone, and sinking in resources, both staff time and financial, on processes that could potentially be done collaboratively.

Similarly, other participants held that the Common Core standards would spur economies of scale by enabling collaborations across states and districts. Such collaborations could produce aligned curriculum and professional development materials. In turn, because individual districts and states did not have to develop these resources, such resources might be more affordable and more

accessible across disparate schools. A policy entrepreneur from State A highlighted that economies of scale would advance equity through more equal resource distribution:

If you look at everything else that comes with those standards that are not available in the State of A, that's where the power of the standards come from. It's building up economies of scale. Now we can have a more level playing field across the nation.

Some participants also indicated that economies of scale were especially important given the economic recession. Cost-savings were necessary, and the Common Core was seen as a way of potentially lowering costs, particularly of professional development and curriculum materials, while still enhancing equity.

Yet, participants recognized that equity would still be challenged by uneven resources. Even as the Common Core was expected to foster better education resources and distribute them in more cost-effective ways, access to these resources would remain unequal across states and districts. Lee Harmon stated that economies of scale for the “development of materials and training, I think that's going to be a huge cost savings. As far as other money for implementation, I think states are in trouble.” Harmon noted one state in the Northeast lacked a state-level math curriculum specialist to support implementation. Other policy entrepreneurs pointed to states in the West and Midwest where resources for implementation were problematic.

School districts would also be differentially capable of accessing the better resources expected to arise from the Common Core. For example, local districts in State A make their own choices about textbooks and professional development. State A puts out guidance about the former and lacked capacity to monitor the latter. In addition, a State A policy entrepreneur said communities and their student populations differed. Therefore, they might not view the same materials as equally appropriate: “[W]hat's good in [the state's biggest urban district] may not be good in [Town X], which is a rural community of 100 kids.”

District budgets and expertise also vary, and this influences their ability to act on “what's good,” even when the knowledge is available. For example, Mel Nolan described how several districts within one state had received foundation support to develop curriculum materials for the Common Core that will eventually be made public. In the meantime, the funded districts were labeled “the Magnificent Seven” by a leader in one of the unfunded districts that cannot participate in the curriculum development process or get early access to the materials.

In sum, policy entrepreneurs said that equity was vital to the formation and aims of the Common Core. Equity shared the stage with economic justifications for the reform. Participants believed the Common Core would provide better and more equal workforce preparation for students, and it would improve U.S. competitiveness in the global marketplace. Via economies of scale, the reform would enable better resources to be efficiently developed and distributed across diverse schools. At the same time, policy entrepreneurs noted states and districts had unequal capacity to implement the Common Core and secure resources spurred by it.

The Meaning of Equity within the Common Core

Given that equity has an important role in the Common Core, what forms of equity do policy entrepreneurs have in mind? Our analysis shows that all the participants expressed an equal conception: Diverse students and schools needed more equal educational resources. The majority of policy entrepreneurs concurrently held an equalizing conception of educational equity. That is, for all students to have a more equal outcome (“college and career readiness”), some schools and some groups of students needed compensatory resources. One participant referred explicitly to an expansive conception of equity. That is, for young people to attain more equal school outcomes,

resources beyond the education system were needed. The expansive conception was not linked to educational equity within the Common Core.

Equal Conceptions in the Common Core: Prevalent

Policy entrepreneurs' conception of equity emphasized equal educational resources. In addition to equal, high standards – a central tenet of the reform – they highlighted equality in other intangible resources, including equal opportunity, expectations, and truth about what is needed for college and career readiness. They also held that the Common Core would foster equality in material resources, especially curriculum and teachers.

Equal opportunity. Four participants described educational equity as “opportunity to learn.” Mel Nolan said most policy entrepreneurs would hold this view and described it as, “Basically you’re giving students an equal opportunity to be exposed, you know, to the content they need to develop knowledge and skills.” For Noel Dornan, equity in the context of the Common Core was “opportunity to learn” in the sense of being exposed to important knowledge, skills, and expectations regardless of school setting. Terry Thomas said that educational equity meant all students get the “opportunity to have equal access to a high-quality educational experience. What students do with that is their decision.” These views are akin to Coleman’s equality of educational opportunity as the same curriculum within a community or the fundamental notion of equity held by Schmidt and Maier (2009). Thomas’ elaboration on equity aligns with Jencks’ democratic equality: Differences in individual motivation, effort, or other influences will make for unequal outcomes, even when students are provided with equal opportunity.

Same expectations. Policy entrepreneurs consistently held that high, common standards would enable all students to be held to the same high expectations. Such expectations are important for student achievement (Ferguson, 2003; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). In several instances “standards” and “expectations” were used interchangeably. For example, Jan Davidson said: “... the great merit and benefit of these standards rests in their high expectations for all kids, and that was one of the main arguments that we used.” Similarly, Noel Dornan linked equity to equal, high expectations. The Common Core provided the:

Same high, rigorous, challenging expectations for all kids. Since one of the things that has historically depressed the performance of low income and minority students was low expectations we had for them, having the same expectations for everybody is really an equity issue.

The centrality of providing the same expectations is captured by Terry Thomas. In response to the means by which Common Core might foster more equitable education, Thomas said, “All students will be held to the same high expectations. That is the most obvious one.”

Same truths. McDonnell & Weatherly (2012) stated that the policy entrepreneurs’ push for the Common Core lacked exhortatory moral tropes. Yet, several participants in our study said the Common Core made for a more truthful, and therefore fairer, education system. They held that some students were lied to about what they needed to learn in order to succeed. For example, Chris Young emphasized, “We’ve got to make sure when these students leave, they’ve got the education they need and that we’re not lying to them and lying to ourselves.” Lee Harmon argued that students are set up to fail “when you lie to kids in poor and minority schools about what’s necessary to succeed in college and the workplace, and we dumb down what’s expected of them.” Harmon added that truth didn’t address “the huge resource issue. That’s, I think, a bigger part of equity for me. But it’s something.”

Curriculum materials. In the realm of material resources, participants said that the Common Core would replace haphazard and scattered approaches to curriculum development. In turn, better

curriculum materials and content would become more equally available across schools serving disparate students. Leslie Isherwood stated:

So this time it seems that most state leaders get, for example, that you can't leave curriculum to individual school districts, or teachers for that matter, to make up; that as long as we continue to do that, some people will make up good stuff, some will make up bad stuff. And that when you're talking about a typical school district in this country that has like a half a person in the curriculum office, and that person also drives the school bus, the likelihood that this person can generate really high quality curriculum for teachers is nuts.

Another national-level policy entrepreneur said that digital dissemination will make high-quality curriculum spurred by the Common Core more equally available. Such technology will make it possible for teachers and students in high-poverty schools to gain access to the "best content anywhere in the world."

Curriculum materials under the Common Core will also foster equality by embedding the same, high standards. Jan Davidson said that an underappreciated aspect of the Common Core standards is how "text dependent they are – which is another equity issue." Davidson stated that, "by grounding the Common Core in instruction on those standards in the texts itself ... you neutralize the effect of family background variables in ways that have not been done before. It doesn't mean that it eliminates it. Conceptually it creates a more level playing field."

At the time of the interviews, participants knew that publishers had begun labelling their products as "aligned with the Common Core." More recently, the Common Core has sought to support educators in evaluating whether curriculum materials are appropriate, but it does not certify that commercial products are aligned to the standards (CCSSO, 2012).

Improved instruction across schools. Most participants held that the Common Core would enhance teaching quality across schools through better preservice education and professional development. The Common Core was expected to improve teacher preparation, because preservice education programs could now prepare future teachers to address rigorous academic standards that applied across the nation. Teacher education programs no longer had to operate without knowledge of what standards their graduates would be expected to draw on across different states.

State A policy entrepreneurs said their state's preservice programs would be aligned to the Common Core standards. Not only would this prepare teachers to work with the higher standards wherever they began their careers; it would also benefit students who were more mobile, including high-poverty students and military families.

Participants held that the Common Core would boost professional development by enabling educators to exchange ideas across districts and states. Kelly Swanson highlighted a collaboration among 34 teams of educators from various states. Terry Thomas and Lee Harmon surfaced the possibility of national approaches to professional development. The latter held that while a national approach would be difficult, "obviously it needed to be done, because there's another huge cost savings right there."

The centrality of instructional quality to the reform was underscored by a State A participant. The Common Core "helps teachers to focus more on what they need to teach and what students need to learn. But if you don't have any effective instruction, it doesn't matter what the expectations [i.e., standards] are." While State A participants expected the Common Core to improve instruction, variability across districts would likely remain. As already noted, professional development was in the hands of districts in State A. This was said to be responsive and empowering to local districts. At the same time, at the state level, "We simply just don't have the capacity or even probably the desire to evaluate the quality of professional development."

In sum, regarding the equal view, policy entrepreneurs expected the Common Core would foster equality in both intangible and material resources. The former included opportunity to learn (in a sense akin to Coleman's common curriculum within a community), standards, expectations, and equal access to the truth about what is needed for academic success. Material resources included improvements in curriculum materials and instruction.

The policy entrepreneurs recognized challenges to the equal provision of resources, especially material resources. The development of preservice training aligned to the Common Core standards was hampered by the fractured nature of higher education and a lack of research on which to build strong teacher preparation programs. In addition, some noted the longstanding problem of the unequal distribution of strong teachers. Chris Young was uncertain whether the Common Core would influence that distribution. "I think it's a wash between the old system and whatever this will be." The cost and flurry of products being stamped as aligned to the Common Core also raised problems. Mel Nolan wondered whether schools and districts would be able to secure appropriate resources: "[A]re you buying the right stuff, if you can afford to buy it?" Policy entrepreneurs noted that states with and without federal Race to the Top Grants were differently positioned to develop and implement Common Core curriculum materials.

Thus, even as they stated the Common Core standards would foster equal resources, the policy entrepreneurs were realistic in seeing challenges and limits to that vision. Jan Davidson said, "[W]e thought that the Common Core would be one step in resolving all of that [unequal expectations]. We're very clear that now that they're in place that there are other equity issues to be raised."

Equalizing Conceptions: Ambivalence

While the policy entrepreneurs universally held that equity entailed providing more equal resources, the majority also said that equity involved fostering more similar outcomes across learners from disparate backgrounds through the targeting of resources. This equalizing conception is illustrated by Leslie Isherwood:

[W]hat equity is to us is both equity of opportunity ... to be taught well, be well taught, the exact same sort of high level stuff. And equity of results. So any gap I see – in whether it's between poor kids and middle class kids or kids of color and white kids – tells me that something is going wrong in the system. And so we have opportunity problems that we have to fix until we get results that we don't see differences by zip code or race.

In line with Jencks' humane justice, an equalizing conception directs compensatory resources to students, schools, or districts with greater needs. For all students to have access to the best education, Kelly Swanson said, "We have to understand that additional supports may be needed for kids, for some kids." Swanson noted it might be difficult to target resources in a compensatory way. "So everybody's just got to grow up and get beyond, 'What's good for me?' ... It's usually, 'What's there for me? What's in it for me?' And deep down inside, they don't think about these kids. That's alive and well in this country. You know it is."

Several policy entrepreneurs struggled to embrace an equalizing view within the Common Core. For instance, Lynn Quincy recognized the need to target resources to students, schools, and districts that were struggling. Yet, Quincy's remarks show ambivalence about providing such compensatory resources without also providing compensatory resources for affluent or gifted students.

[T]he purpose of standards is to set a floor, you know, certainly not a ceiling. It's to say: here's a minimum standard to which all students should be held accountable. And obviously, just as we expect the students with disabilities receive additional

funding for various resources that are needed and accommodations that are needed, so is the case with districts and schools. I mean, that said, obviously affluent – we care equally about students at the top, and we certainly would not advocate for something that would lose sight of the gifted and talented, for lack of a better term.

Similarly, Noel Dornan initially rejected the view that equity entailed providing all students with opportunity to learn, because that term's varied meanings generated a long and problematic political history. Instead, Dornan stated at first that equity meant:

breaking, or at least minimizing, the relationship between family background factors, poverty, income, parental education, and the like. You'd like to see as close to zero as possible between those background factors and achievement. I guess I'd argue that this is still a pretty good goal to be aiming for.

However, when Dornan considered equity specifically within the context of the Common Core reform, the emphasis was no longer on minimizing the relationship between student background and achievement. Instead, Dornan focused on providing equal inputs across disparate schools, in line with the equal view:

[T]he role standards play in equity – this may depart from my answer before about how I think about equity. In this case it is an opportunity to learn issue. What the Common Core standards did, ah, a couple points here. First and foremost at one level, to use all- too-easy rhetoric, it means that the expectations that a kid confronts no longer depends upon zip code, right?

The ambivalence over compensatory resources central to an equalizing conception of equity may be built into the Common Core reform itself. Mel Nolan said that at the start of the Common Core, the excitement over generating high national standards was coupled with an acknowledgement that standards were necessary, “but they ain't sufficient.” Yet, “One of the things that some of the policy entrepreneurs were very concerned about was, if you went to common standards, would that be a basis for having some kind of school finance lawsuit?” If states were to become more vulnerable to such lawsuits, they would be more reluctant to participate in the reform. Nolan said, “everybody breathed a sigh of relief” after a prominent legal scholar reported that the courts would not use common standards in school finance suits. Nolan knew past efforts at voluntary national standards had been felled by fears of adequacy lawsuits. Thus, national policy entrepreneurs launched the Common Core both with concerns about disparities across schools and districts and with the assurance that the reform would not provide a legal basis for generating material resources to address those disparities.

Ambivalence in targeting resources to needier schools or districts also played out in Chris Young's comments. The Common Core enables parents:

to determine whether or not their child is getting the education they're supposed to receive. It's the first time – and while there's still no federal right of action, litigation, under this [Common Core reform] – it's the first time that, for most students at least, there is a common determination at least in these two critical subject areas.

Yet, later Young claimed what the Common Core “says to teachers, wherever they're teaching, or educators particularly in low-performing schools, is: ‘This is what we expect of all of our students.’ And you have a right to demand, both the students and the teachers, the support that's necessary to get them there.”

To summarize, participants stated that high standards do not ensure high performance across students. In line with the equalizing view, most recognized that compensatory resource would be needed for some students, schools, and districts. Yet, the potential for the Common Core to serve as a legal lever for obtaining additional resources represented an existential threat to the

reform. In line with this threat, rather than advancing an equalizing conception of equity for the reform, participants tended to re-emphasize that the Common Core would create equal standards, expectations, and opportunities and more equal access to better teachers and curriculum materials.

Expansive Conception of Equity: Limited

The expansive conception of equity, like the equalizing conception, is aimed at fostering more equal educational outcomes through targeting resources. However, because the majority of variance in school outcomes is linked to influences beyond school, an expansive conception entails providing a range of comprehensive interventions. Among these may be early childhood education, health care, after-school and summer enrichment programs, and anti-poverty measures, in addition to compensatory resources within the school (Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron & Shonkoff, 2006; Heckman, 2008, 2010; Ladd, 2012; National Research Council, 2000; Rothstein, Wilder, & Algood, 2011; Rebell, 2012.) .

One participant touched briefly on this view. In response to what equity meant, Kelly Swanson said, “Oh man, I mean in the larger universe it’s – I mean we’re right into the social realm.” Swanson then returned to focus on education, and advanced an equalizing view: “[A]ll kids regardless of SES, geography, anything else, really have access to the absolute best education,” including educational resources targeted to advance the learning of varied groups of students.

Perhaps Dornan’s initial response encompassed the expansive view. Early in the interview, Dornan said educational equity entailed, “breaking or at least minimizing the relationship between family background factors ... and achievement.” As someone long steeped in education policy, Dornan would know that school interventions would not suffice to break that relationship. However, while the expansive view was likely understood by this policy entrepreneur, it was not stated and not pertinent to the Common Core. Within the reform, equity was “opportunity to learn,” and that meant “first and foremost ... that the expectations that a kid confronts no longer depends upon zip code, right?”

In sum, with one exception, the policy entrepreneurs did not voice an expansive conception of educational equity. When such a view surfaced briefly, it was not applied to the Common Core, a reform that targets the education system.

Discussion

Participants saw equity as important to the formation and goals of the Common Core. They expressed three conceptions of equity: equal, equalizing, and expansive. However, the greatest emphasis was placed on equal views, which all participants saw as operating within the Common Core. Policy entrepreneurs underscored the need to provide students with the same high standards. Their comments reveal that the Common Core would generate equality in intangible resources: standards, opportunity to learn, expectations, and truths. The reform would also foster more equal access to better material resources, particularly curriculum and teachers, although the distribution of high-quality teachers would remain problematic.

A majority of participants also expressed an equalizing conception. Policy entrepreneurs did not believe the standards were sufficient or “a silver bullet.” They held that additional resources should be targeted to disadvantaged schools, districts, and students. At the same time, there was ambivalence about linking the Common Core to an equalizing conception. Fundamental to the Common Core’s formation was reassurance that the reform would not provide a basis for successful adequacy lawsuits and thereby threaten the reform itself.

One policy entrepreneur briefly expressed an expansive conception, in which comprehensive resources are harnessed to close achievement gaps. We believe that by asking participants about

their view of equity, they were free to express an expansive view. However, because the research focused on the Common Core, it is possible that most of the policy entrepreneurs stayed within the frame of school reform more generally and so did not broach more comprehensive approaches.

That policy entrepreneurs emphasized the equal conception is consistent with the broadly held value of democratic equality (Jencks, 1988). When people are offered the same rights and privileges, disparities in outcomes are not viewed as social problems but problems of individual motivation, preparation, effort, or ability. These differences are the basis for meritocratic selection.

An equal view is consistent with standards-based reforms, such as the Common Core. Standards-based reforms rest on a number of assumptions. Equal standards are assumed to be necessary for equal opportunity to learn – in the sense of equal exposure to demanding curriculum. Second, they assume equal standards will promote equal expectations. Third, such reforms assume that equal standards will promote equal opportunities to encounter equally demanding curriculum. More specifically, within the Common Core, it is assumed that economies of scale will make curriculum materials that embed high standards more equally accessible across disparate schools. The Common Core also assumes that more equal preservice education will enable teachers to teach to the standards across varied school settings. Similarly, it assumes professional development will ready existing teachers to teach to the standards across disparate schools. Through this long chain of assumptions, the Common Core will enable all students across diverse settings to enter college or career without need for remedial education. Doubt has been cast on each of these assumptions, sometimes by participants themselves in these interviews, sometimes by those who scrutinize this and other standards-based reforms (e.g., Booher-Jennings, 2005; Loveless, 2012; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez Heilig, 2008; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Ravitch, 2011).

Our point here is not to take apart the assumptions underlying the Common Core or standards-based reforms. It is instead to emphasize that the Common Core is consistent with an equal conception of equity. Given this conception and the performance of standards-based reforms in the U.S., it is reasonable to expect that disparate outcomes will continue to track students' background under the Common Core. What is out of 'alignment' in the Common Core is its reliance on an equal conception alongside its aim to generate an equalizing effect, even in the muted form that all students, regardless of zip code, will graduate college and career ready.

That the policy entrepreneurs understand that "standards aren't a silver bullet" and simultaneously refrain from compensatory or comprehensive approaches has led us to the paradox of equity in education policy: To launch a reform that seeks educational equity, proponents must make their case within the existing two-pronged paradigm of equal conceptions and standards-based reform. Therefore, the successful launch of such a policy guarantees that educational outcomes will remain tethered to student background. Policies that rest on other conceptions have proven largely unsalable since standards-based reforms began taking hold in the 1980s (Darling-Hammond, 2010; McDonnell, 1995; Rothman, 2011).

It is possible to argue that the Common Core promotes more equal inputs and is therefore better than NCLB, which allowed for both disparate inputs and disparate outputs. At the same time, hundreds of millions of dollars have already been spent directly or indirectly on the Common Core, via foundation support and federal funding for the Race to the Top initiative and the Common Core assessment consortia (Ed.gov U.S. Department of Education, Race to the Top—Game-Changing Reforms, n.d.; Phillips & Wong, 2010).

Many billions more may go to support this reform over the course of the next few years. (Accountability Works, 2012; Murphy & Regenstein, 2012; Phillips & Wong, 2010). These dollars will most clearly benefit developers and providers of new materials, trainings, assessments,

technology platforms for assessment, and some groups of policy specialists (see Kingdon, 1995). On the basis of past standards-based reforms, we can anticipate sporadic bright spots for some disadvantaged youngsters, even as the educational experiences and achievement of the vast majority of them remain far behind.

Given the steep costs and distribution of benefits of this, and other, standards-based reforms, we believe a more productive course would be to devise and support policies based on equalizing or expansive views. We see arguments for these developing in both law and social science (Berliner, 2012; Gardner, 1999; Heckman, 2010; Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron, & Shonkoff, 2006; National Research Council, 2000; Rebell, 2012; Rothstein, Wilder, & Allgood, 2011; Schweinhardt, et al., 2005). Policies aligned to an equalizing conception would draw on clear findings that excellent teachers and school leaders are an important resource for improving learning outcomes. Such policies would strongly incentivize those with the best minds and teacher training to make a long-term commitment to work where there is the greatest student need. Policies aligned to an expansive conception would build on increasing understandings of early childhood development and on when and how achievement gaps widen during the school years (e.g., summer downturns, weak instruction, and curriculum). These policies would direct few resources to testing technologies and publishers. Far greater resources would be used to enable the best educators to work in schools with challenged populations. Substantial resources would be directed to providing such populations with needed health care, strong early childhood centers, parent outreach and involvement efforts, and summer- and after-school enrichment programs. Replacing an equal conception with an expansive one would help reverse the pattern now in place: some exceptional schools to belie consistently inequitable outcomes v. many strong programs to foster children's development and thereby yield more equitable chances of success.

Conclusion

Views of equity inform educational policy and therefore inform the actions and resources that shape children's possibilities. To understand whether a reform aimed at equity is succeeding on its own terms or, beyond that, meeting larger social aims, it's necessary to understand what is within its conceptual purview. The Common Core rests on an equal conception. Its purview is thus to distribute equal resources across schools. It is therefore reasonable to evaluate the Common Core against this goal. If it were achieved, the Common Core would reinforce arguments for meritocratic distribution of opportunities in a way that is not now possible. However, attaining this goal is unlikely to reduce the disparities in student outcomes associated with sociodemographic variables or to enable all students to graduate high school ready for college and career. Given its equal conception, the Common Core cannot close achievement gaps, any more than the same icing will transform different cakes. Policies and resources aligned to an expansive view of equity are needed to foster more equal chances of school and life success for children from disparate circumstances.

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