

## Evidence Use from a Political Perspective

We're actually one of the better groups when it comes to using evidence. But you often see evidence falling on deaf ears, because it doesn't comport with a particular ideology or point of view.

—Executive director, education interest group

We talk a lot about polarizing ideology, but in the actual meetings where the work gets done, it has not been my experience it's about that. It's much more data-driven . . . When data is there, people are using it, when it's not there, people are going off on their own.

—Obama administration official

I don't want to appear anti-academic or a Luddite, but research isn't where I ground my arguments. I happen to believe that all meaningful legislation takes place based on an anecdote. Now the best combination is to have the human face in front of ten tons of research, but I never lead with the research.

—Former governor

THESE COMMENTS FROM prominent members of the education policy community capture an increasingly serious paradox: the wide acknowledgment that research can usefully inform policy decisions, but a recognition that other types of evidence often take precedence and even occasionally sideline

research in policy deliberations. For researchers committed to producing work that can inform education policy, the dilemma has only grown sharper with two recent contradictory developments. One is the federal directive in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that programs and interventions be “evidence-based.” Although judgments about quality are left to individual states, the legislation assumes that “evidence-based” means showing a statistically significant relationship between interventions and student outcomes.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the polarization of national politics has resulted in questions with settled scientific answers being reopened for partisan debate, with a senior presidential adviser advocating the use of “alternative facts” when documenting observable and quantifiable events. As research has become more politicized even within the education policy community, inconsistent or incomplete findings that were once seen as contingent and subject to further study have become fodder in ideologically charged debates over issues such as school choice and curriculum content.

The current situation is only the most recent manifestation of the tension between calls for research-based policy and challenges to scientific legitimacy. One consequence has been to reinforce perceptions that partisanship and ideology inevitably drive the selective use of research in advancing particular agendas. While we don’t reject this claim, we take an explicitly political perspective in this book and argue that blaming the nonuse or misuse of research on ideology is an incomplete explanation for how evidence is applied in the policy process, and it inhibits thinking about ways to increase effective research use. Analyzing research use through a political lens leads us to focus primarily on the information needs and incentives of policymakers and the groups that provide such information, and also on the context of policymaking. By doing so, we hope to provide researchers, typically most concerned with the educational implications of their studies, with a better sense of the political environment in which the policy implications of that work are debated.

## THE CENTRAL ARGUMENTS

The use of research and other evidence in education policy is best understood by viewing it as a part of the larger process of formulating policy and predicting its outcomes. Consequently, in building a theory of evidence use

we draw directly from political science and policy analysis research, in both the questions we pose and the concepts we apply in addressing them.<sup>2</sup> We make two arguments. First, the use of research-based evidence in the policy process cannot be understood without considering other types of evidence that policymakers draw upon in their decisions.<sup>3</sup> The “what” of evidence use includes peer-reviewed research, but it goes beyond that, including statistical data, judgments based on professional expertise, the personal experience of policymakers and practitioners, and appeals to values articulated through stories and symbols. Evidence serves multiple roles in the policy process. It can function as analytical information providing assessments about the scope, distribution, and probable causes of identified problems; the conditions under which different policy options are likely to produce their intended effects; and their technical and resource requirements.

Different kinds of evidence may also provide political intelligence about the preferences and strategies of major actors, and about who wins and who loses under different policy options and institutional rules. In many cases, moreover, the strategic uses of evidence may be more central than its analytical functions. In using the term *strategic*, we are referring to the intentional use of evidence in pursuit of a policy or political objective (such as winning an election or enacting legislation). It is done in a context where the accomplishment of the actor’s goal depends on the reactions of others, so that it is rational for the actors to anticipate those reactions and shape their argument accordingly. At their core, policies reflect ideas about what societal goals should be pursued, how those goals are most effectively attained, and what lessons from past policy successes and failures can inform policy. The strategic use of evidence reflects the reality of political decision-making, where even solid, well-accepted ideas are transformed through negotiations and compromise. Such transformations introduce the risk that validated inferences will be short-circuited before they can influence practice, and that evidence will be distorted and manipulated.<sup>4</sup>

Recognizing that evidence use in policymaking is strategic has several implications. It means that the capacity of researchers to address questions relevant to policymakers in forms that are understandable to them is an insufficient condition for the use of their work. Similarly, policymakers’ use of research depends only indirectly on their ability to process and understand that information. What is crucial, rather, are the incentives of those who

supply and use a variety of evidence, and the broader institutional and political context in which policy decisions are made. Incentives that often crowd out research in favor of other types of evidence can include the credibility of conventional sources or the familiarity of conventional ideas, the promise of political support or financial contribution, association with new ideas, and options customized to a local area or constituency. In chapter 2, we elaborate our concept of the “what” of evidence use, distinguishing the different types of evidence by comparing the scientific warrants and political attractiveness of research versus others kinds of evidence.

Our second argument elaborates the primary conditions accounting for variation in the use of evidence: the incentives of those supplying and using different types of evidence, and the context that constructs the occasion for the political choice among policy alternatives. In chapter 3, we identify the “who” as participants in the policy process—elected officials, their staffs, and the interest groups and policy entrepreneurs who seek to persuade them—and we detail their incentives for producing, transmitting, and using research evidence. In chapter 4, we examine the “how” by analyzing the way the purposes for which evidence is used vary across stages of the policy process and institutional arenas. Simply stated, the theory presented in this book assumes that the types of evidence used in policymaking depend on the incentives of those supplying and using that evidence, and on the stage of the policy process. In examining these factors, we highlight three concepts:

*Policy learning* describes how policy actors apply evidence from past experience to guide and improve subsequent decisions. Peter May summarizes the literature on policy learning, pointing out that, although policymakers often strive to learn from the impacts of policies—writing formal evaluations into authorizing legislation, for instance—it is the experience of policy failure that most strongly and regularly motivates policymakers to rethink the formulation of the problem and seek to generate a wider range of solution alternatives.<sup>5</sup>

*Policy entrepreneurs* are advocates willing to invest their time, money, and reputation in promoting a particular position or policy agenda. Policy entrepreneurs bring new ideas into the policymaking arena (and the ideas are nearly always grounded in research), but entrepreneurs use evidence more strategically than researchers in trying to persuade legislators that enacting these ideas will be feasible and will solve an acknowledged problem;

successful entrepreneurs rely on social skills, as they build trust in their preferred alternative and construct the political coalition to pass the new policy.<sup>6</sup>

*Policy feedback* is the process by which policies, once enacted, generate costs and benefits, motivating political responses by affected groups. Those, in turn, influence future policies. The concept of policy feedback reverses the conventional aphorism that “politics creates policies,” investigating how “policies create politics” by redistributing political resources and creating incentives for previously advantaged interests to mobilize to reclaim the status quo ante, and for newly recognized interests to defend the policy change. For example, standards-based accountability policies begun in the states were reflected in the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, and dissatisfaction with that law energized and focused the movement for the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).<sup>7</sup> For a policy to be politically sustainable over the long term, its proponents must generate positive feedback in the form of policymakers and the public acknowledging its benefits and providing support sufficient to counter negative feedback from opponents.

The remainder of this chapter establishes the groundwork for these arguments by briefly describing the cases, the research design and data collection, and the analytical approach.<sup>8</sup>

## STUDY APPROACH

In constructing the model of evidence use, we draw on empirical material from our extensive investigation of the formulation of the Common Core State Standards. It might appear that a single case study would provide a thin foundation for building a political theory of evidence use. This concern is not unusual—the social science methodology literature has discussed the trade-offs between the depth of information in a case study versus the breadth in a larger sample. We draw on that literature and our knowledge of education policymaking to address the concerns about case study research in several ways. First, the Common Core is a historically important policy reform, impacting the status quo both in its depth (envisioning corresponding changes in curriculum, teaching methods, and learning) and in its scope (proposing common standards in place of wide variation across states). The significance and magnitude of the reform make this case a prime locus for observing the process of policy change.<sup>9</sup> Second, we designed our study to

take advantage of the qualitative research dictum that even in examining a single case, the potential for evaluating theory is significantly enhanced by increasing the number of observations of the process viewed from different vantage points. Complex changes constitute multiple processes, and participants in different contexts view the process from valuably different local vantage points and personal perspectives.<sup>10</sup> Our investigation rests on data collected from research producers, from intermediary organizations that translate and communicate research, and from a broad range of users within the policy community, including federal and state officials, agency administrators, and interest group representatives. The number of observations is also increased because we examine the Common Core's development over more than a decade, beginning with how the policy problem was initially defined, its subsequent design and adoption, and its early implementation. In addition to multiple categories of participants at the national level, we closely examine the use of evidence relevant to the adoption and implementation of the Common Core in four states.

Third, we strengthen the approach of earlier studies of research use, which have tended to rely on retrospective self-reports by policymakers, typically well after the decision, a method known to be susceptible to selective recollection and bias. Although our interviews did not occur in real time, they did take place soon after the standards were formulated and thus minimized the effect of retrospection. More importantly, we studied and coded a large number of documents *before* we began conducting interviews, giving us a prior basis for validating self-reports and the context for probing interviewees about the reasons why some sources were used and not others. Fourth, in developing a political theory of evidence use, we seek to move beyond past studies that focus narrowly on research. Our focus is on the entire policy process, taking in the use of multiple types of evidence and also the different ways that evidence is combined and communicated. This study design allows us to examine evidence in-depth through a case that represents a major change in contemporary education policy and allows us to evaluate our theory in multiple contexts and at different levels of analysis.

Finally, we address the limitations of case study research for theory building by systematically comparing a secondary case that examines evidence use in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). CHIP shares the focus on services for children, so that designing effective policy raises

many of the same sort of research questions posed in K–12 education. On the other hand, Congress was the primary locus of deliberation over CHIP, while the states were the focus of evidence use with the Common Core. Chapter 6 describes the use of evidence in the enactment and implementation of CHIP, and depicts the similarities and differences between these two cases.

### THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: AN ILLUMINATING CASE OF EVIDENCE USE

Not only does the Common Core represent a major change in US education policy, with its goal of K–12 mathematics and literacy standards shared across multiple states, but it also provides a unique opportunity to examine the use of varied types of evidence among a range of policy actors in different institutional venues and stages of the policy process. The group of policy entrepreneurs who advanced the idea of common standards and oversaw their development learned from previous policy: they explicitly promoted the CCSS initiative as “research and evidence-based,” and established procedures to encourage the use of research in drafting and validating the Common Core standards. The resulting process combined research from the full range of specialties in education scholarship, but it also drew upon the expert judgments of state administrators and politicians, and the active engagement of practitioners with classroom experience teaching mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA).<sup>11</sup> The product of this process was endorsed in the low-key adoption of the CCSS by forty-six states. Yet soon after its implementation began (to the surprise of its initial supporters), the Common Core was attacked from both the ideological right and left, mirroring to some extent the broader tensions in US politics, where polarized ideological competition has undermined evidence-based policy. Although this opposition was intense and attracted considerable attention, its policy effects were limited to a handful of states; forty-one of the original forty-six continue to implement the CCSS a decade after their initial adoption, while those that have made changes have typically retained the essential elements of the Common Core.

Policy feedback is apparent in the use of evidence. Even before opposition to the Common Core became visible, it was clear that evidence was used strategically in developing the standards, as a resource much like money or reputation. By focusing on the strategic use of evidence, we show how

the formulation of the Common Core benefited from policy feedback. By the mid-2000s, state academic standards as the central component of an assessment-based accountability system had a twenty-year history, culminating in the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) program.<sup>12</sup> Although standards and student assessments specific to each state were well institutionalized, policy feedback, particularly from NCLB, was becoming increasingly negative. Early expectations that standards-based accountability would narrow achievement gaps between affluent white students and low-income students of color went unrealized; at the same time, NCLB-mandated testing was narrowing the curriculum. There was little agreement about how NCLB should be revised. Influential groups, such as the national teacher unions, were mobilizing in opposition to the strong emphasis on high-stakes testing; yet several former governors and their allied interest groups continued to believe in the potential of standards-based reform, and sought to preserve the policy idea by redefining it in a new incarnation.

Acting as policy entrepreneurs, they promoted academic standards designed to prepare students for college or entry-level careers, and to replace individual state standards with shared standards common across the states. Their strategy for advancing these new standards placed evidence of multiple types front and center. The leadership of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) asserted that the development process:

is being driven by evidence and research. In the past, standards were largely based on personal judgment. By allowing personal judgment to determine what concepts are in or out of standards, the process often becomes a negotiation, rather than a reflection on what the evidence and research tells [sic] us about the connection between K-12 experiences and success in higher education and promising careers.<sup>13</sup>

This approach reflected a commitment to research-based evidence, but as one leader of the process described it: “I would argue that the standards development was primarily a political process informed by evidence.”<sup>14</sup>

Leaders of the CCSS initiative acknowledged that their commitment to ground the effort in research and evidence was a strategy to avoid past ideological debates stemming from the “curriculum wars” of the 1990s. In essence, reliance on research operated to depoliticize the standards development



process. This strategic use of evidence is a prime example of policy learning. However, that learning extended beyond avoiding a repeat of past ideological battles. The commitment was to research *and* evidence, and, as we discuss in chapter 2, multiple types of evidence were used. These included: research syntheses published by organizations such as the National Research Council (NRC); expert panels convened by federal government agencies and national subject-matter associations; scholarly journal articles, chapters, and conference presentations; reports by Achieve, ACT, and the College Board, based on faculty surveys and analyses of the relationship between student performance on admission tests and grades in first-year college courses; and reviews of international test data and the standards of high performing countries. The standards writers also reviewed existing state standards and the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) frameworks.

In short, the process of formulating the CCSS entailed vigorous use of many kinds of relevant evidence. Part of the reason for including evidence beyond traditional peer-reviewed studies was the limited supply of relevant research. When asked why the standards documents emphasize “research and evidence,” a leader of the development effort replied, “we wanted to be able to cite non-peer-reviewed research because there’s not enough research available, and often the findings are inconclusive.”

But the scarcity of directly relevant research was not the only reason Common Core advocates drew on other types of evidence. The failed efforts of the George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations to introduce limited forms of cross-state standards and assessments provided another source of policy learning. As a civil rights organization executive who served in the Clinton administration noted:

We learned our lesson—from the VNT [Voluntary National Test] and other attempts to introduce assessments. This cannot be top-down. If we had gone to more trouble to build information and support, those [prior initiatives] would not have had so many problems.

In drawing lessons from past attempts to establish national standards, the Common Core policy entrepreneurs recognized that states would not accept such standards if they came from the federal government. Consequently, CCSSO and NGA, as groups representing state policymakers, took the lead in developing the CCSS, and what they had originally referred to as “national

standards” were quickly renamed “common standards” with “state” as one of the primary identifiers. A longtime congressional staffer and executive of a Washington education organization summarized this policy learning:

Whoever conceived of the process of drafting the standards—bringing in groups, getting feedback—must have been aware of what had happened, and they did it more comprehensively and more thoughtfully than it had been done before . . . There were no virgins in this process; they had been around. They drew on this experience to avoid the pitfalls . . . And then they assiduously tried to stay away from the federal government. Leaders repeatedly told [Secretary of Education Arne] Duncan, “Keep your mitts off this; don’t even talk about common standards.” The leaders didn’t succeed completely in making sure that Washington was seen to be not involved, yet they basically succeeded.

One especially salient lesson, perhaps the most important form of policy learning in the CCSS process, was the value of wide and genuine consultation. In addition to bringing in the work of expert researchers on teaching and learning, the standards writers consulted with state education agency personnel, classroom teachers representing the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), and civil rights organizations concerned about the education of low-income students of color, especially English language learners. Those consultations brought to the table a variety of valuable perspectives beyond formal research, including systematic reviews and reflections on existing state standards, and the judgments of professionals and practitioners, for instance, about when in students’ development particular standards should be taught.

If wide consultation strengthened the process, a too-narrow conceptualization of the conditions for successful implementation led to what is arguably the largest mistake. Policy learning requires not only analytical evidence about how to improve upon past policy choices, but also strategic evidence to inform calculations of what changes will be politically acceptable. One lesson the Common Core entrepreneurs could have drawn from the past twenty years of standards-based policy is that if high-stakes accountability systems are implemented without commensurate system capacity, the policy will fall short of its goals.<sup>15</sup> Initially, proponents gave very little attention to teacher training, appropriate curriculum, and instructional materials. Instead they

focused on assessment design, even before curriculum aligned with the Common Core was widely available, and they accepted federal funds for test development. This choice of emphasis was not out of ignorance, for both experts and practitioners emphasized the importance of planning for implementation. The explanation for why such evidence might be acknowledged but not acted upon stems from the proponents' attempt to take into consideration the political context. The promise of Common Core-aligned assessments was critical to persuading governors to support the CCSS and encouraging states to adopt the standards, because maintaining test-based accountability systems was a high priority for states. Without federal financial support, the development process would likely have been less efficient or taken longer. The proponents of CCSS, political entrepreneurs who were well aware of the short duration of a window of opportunity for policy change, opted to link the standards to assessment at an early stage, even though they knew from experience that testing would likely become the dominant focus, leapfrogging the multiple steps involved in building system capacity sufficient to move the CCSS effectively into classrooms. Predictably, the early turn toward testing interfered with capacity-building for implementation. The optimistic policy entrepreneurs assumed that the timetable for actually using the tests to hold schools and teachers accountable could be revised in light of experience, but that it was important to get the standards written and adopted by states before the opportunity for policy change disappeared. The early emphasis on testing undermined teacher support in some places, but the entrepreneurs were surprised at the vehemence of opponents' attacks on the CCSS reforms as a whole, charging that the role of national government money for test development signaled federal overreach.

The theory we develop specifies the conditions under which a set of factors—the what, who, and how—are combined and used strategically. Because we have selected two cases representing major changes in youth policy and involving a diverse group of policymakers and interests across multiple governmental levels, the theoretical framework is applicable to other major youth policies that pass through several levels of the federal system. Our theoretical framework, however, stresses correlations and policy-process connections; it makes no claims about causal relationships between policy actors and their use of different types of evidence. Nor should the conceptual framework be directly exported from this study of education policy to practice. The use of

evidence by school administrators and classroom teachers should be quite different, given different time frames (typically longer for practice than for policy arenas), central tasks (such as creating new policy versus interpreting enacted policy and adapting it to local circumstances), and types of intermediary organizations (for example, the dominance of advocacy organizations in policy versus consultants and private providers in practice).

## DATA SOURCES

Evidence use is a process that extends from those who produce research and other types of evidence to those who translate and communicate it, and finally to members of the policy community who decide if and how to use the evidence. In the case of the Common Core, that process included education researchers, policy entrepreneurs promoting the CCSS, representatives of national and state organizations supporting and opposing the Common Core, members of CCSS working groups who developed and vetted the standards, foundation staff, state elected and appointed officials, and third-party providers who developed Common Core curriculum materials and worked with educators. To understand that process, the incentives of the different participants, their use of evidence, and their decisions, we conducted 117 interviews between May 2011 and June 2013. Potential interviewees were identified through multiple sources, including a large database of documents related to the CCSS and its development (described below), consultation with staff at the James B. Hunt Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy who were active participants in the CCSS process, and additional names of informants offered by interviewees. In examining Common Core evidence use at the state level, we focused on four states: California, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Tennessee. They were selected to provide regional variation and different political contexts, and to include representatives from states receiving Race to the Top funding and those not receiving it. Sixty-four of the 117 interviews were conducted in the four states. A detailed profile was prepared for each of the four states based on the interviews and documentary sources. Each profile summarizes the governance and politics of the state as they relate to education policy, the state's past experience with standards policy, the CCSS adoption process, plans for CCSS implementation, and the use of evidence in

support and opposition to the Common Core. These profiles were updated as the CCSS process progressed from adoption to implementation.

The interview guides were customized for each category of respondent, with questions tailored to Common Core participants based on their unique roles. To facilitate comparability, however, the core of the interview consisted of a similar set of questions about the interviewee's involvement in the CCSS: what prompted it; what types of evidence they provided or used, and the reasons for those choices; what arguments for or against the Common Core they found to be most persuasive; and how they rated the significance and effectiveness of findings from research as compared with other types of information. We also asked a set of general questions about what types of evidence interviewees have found to be the most convincing to elected officials and other relevant policy audiences, what formats they have found to be most effective in communicating with them, and the extent to which they have to translate or interpret research findings in their work. As a final question, we asked our interviewees what advice they would give those interested in ensuring that research-based evidence is considered and used appropriately in education policy.

To ensure greater reliability and validity of the interviews, we coded a large number of documents before we began conducting interviews, so that we would have a sense of how key actors were actually using evidence in public presentations such as speeches, testimony, and legislation. We collected 1,655 artifacts that were produced between 2004 and 2011. These include research reports, policy briefs, speeches, blog posts, press releases, and congressional testimony related to the CCSS. They were collected and archived from the web sites of fifty-three nongovernmental organizations, along with the US Department of Education, the Obama White House, and the Senate and House Education and Labor Committees. The organizations were identified iteratively with the first set based on prior research on standards-based reform, the work of a National Research Council (NRC) committee examining the implications of state standards policies for common standards, and consultation with Hunt Institute staff.<sup>16</sup> As new groups became involved with the Common Core, their documents were added to the database. Media articles published during this time period by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Education Week* were also collected. In addition, two other types of

documentary data were collected. To understand how evidence was used in the actual writing of the mathematics and ELA standards, we collected the successive drafts produced as the development process moved from the initial College and Career Ready (CCR) versions to the K–12 standards that map back from the CCR standards to the grade-by-grade standards, specifying what students need to master to graduate from high school ready for college or a career. We also collected information on CCSS-related grants from private foundations, since most organizations' use of evidence and participation in the CCSS process was facilitated by private funding. (The interview and documentary data are described in the appendix, on page 206.)

## ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Chapter 2 focuses on the types of evidence used in the policy process. We array the types of evidence along a continuum indicating how each type is situated in the canon of scientific procedure. Even if research knowledge must compete for attention with other types of evidence, how the legitimacy of peer-reviewed research is grounded in the scientific method represents a useful starting point for considering other types of evidence. The reason is simple: for any type of evidence to be effective in policy argumentation, whether it be anecdotes or statistical data, its intended targets must view it as credible, valid, and generalizable in comparison with the other evidence available to them. This chapter compares other types of evidence and their sources of legitimacy with the scientific canon that defines peer-reviewed research. In addition to research-based observation and analysis, we also examine three other categories typically used in policy deliberation: professional judgment, comparisons with past and current policy, and values-based arguments and stories. We discuss the threats to credibility that are endemic to each type of evidence when used in highly politicized venues.

In analyzing the conditions under which different types of evidence are combined for persuasive purposes, we consider the special case of policy ideas that link research results with normative values (for instance, linking studies of how students learn with calls for greater educational equity). Concepts such as school choice and standards-based accountability are closely linked with abstract philosophical ideals—for example, market efficiency or democratic accountability—but their role in education policy conversations hinges

on academic researchers presenting some type of research-based evidence supporting the concepts and working out the application of the concepts to new policy domains. This process, more appropriately understood in terms of building an argument than as the mere translation of research findings, plays a crucial role in policy change.

In chapter 3, the diverse array of policy actors who produce, translate, and use evidence is analyzed, focusing on how their institutional roles and policy goals condition their use of research. Two groups receive special attention: policy entrepreneurs and intermediary organizations (IOs). Policy entrepreneurs are central to understanding evidence use because, in their efforts to advance a policy agenda, they typically take the lead in framing a policy idea, determining what will be the most effective way to support it and arguing persuasively for its adoption. But they face political dilemmas that often cannot be neatly resolved. For instance, several former governors played crucial roles in the development of CCSS, and they were aware that the concerns of the potential audience for such an ambitious policy change would be diverse and often hold inconsistent views. Learning from the mistakes of past proponents of standards-based reforms, their framing and the process of formulating the standards anticipated the sort of objections likely to come from governors and teacher unions—for example, concerns based on states' rights, local control, and professional autonomy. Those concerns led to a development process focused on policy elites and largely invisible to the general public. The result was an efficient development and enactment process, but it left CCSS proponents open to charges of secrecy and lack of public transparency.

Intermediary organizations have become the predominant channel through which policymakers learn about relevant research. Although IOs are often lumped together, we distinguish three categories—disseminators and translators, policy advocates, and hybrids—and compare each category to research producers.<sup>17</sup> IOs engaged primarily in *dissemination* interpret and customize research to the needs of specific types of users. These IOs include third-party providers (e.g., ASCD, McRel, Learning Forward) and government agencies that address an audience that includes policymakers and practitioners (e.g., state education departments and the National Center for Education Statistics). Compared to research producers, these IOs are more oriented toward policymakers and practitioners, and because they

are concerned with maintaining their reputation for trustworthy advice, they generally adhere to the canons of scientific method and are cautious about making inferences far beyond their data. Quite distinct from these are IOs that *advocate* group interests in the policy process (e.g., Association of Test Publishers, National Education Association, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, American Legislative Exchange Council). Their use of evidence is driven by short-term effectiveness at modifying current policy, and research is one among several instruments (also including ideology and campaign contributions). Although they are wary that competing groups or policymakers will publicize unwarranted exaggeration, they are not bound by scientific canons. A third category, *hybrid* IOs, are similar to advocacy groups in that they seek to advance a policy alternative (although typically aiming at a purposeful and inclusive goal, such as standards-based reforms or children's health, rather than particular material benefits). These groups act as disseminators in interpreting research to policymakers (e.g., the Ford or Gates Foundations), and the fact that credible research findings are a central component of their identity and reputation makes them attentive to scientific considerations such as validity and generalizability.

The fourth chapter details how evidence varies systematically across four stages of the policy process: problem definition and promoting a solution, policy design, enactment, and implementation. For example, during the problem definition stage, Common Core policy entrepreneurs used research evidence in how they framed its rationale, strategically emphasizing global competitiveness because it carried great appeal among governors concerned about the economic health of their states—even though educators were less persuaded that this was a compelling reason for major curricular change. During this stage, advocates focused on the particular set of inferences relevant to national competitiveness, among the many that could be drawn from research and indicator data, in such a way as to persuade key policy audiences that common standards were the best solution to rectify pressing educational and economic problems. In contrast, we know from policy analysis that the implementation phase leads to more diffuse evidence use across the distinct local sites where the new policy is introduced into agency routines, and to a proliferation of anecdotal evidence stemming from many actors and different local contexts. This type of evidence is often disseminated informally among educators and through media accounts, and it is sometimes dismissed



as idiosyncratic and unscientific, but we describe how it augments more formal evidence derived from research.

While chapter 4 examines evidence use over stages of the policy process from a national perspective, chapter 5 focuses on the adoption and implementation of the Common Core in the four case-study states. Officials in California, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Tennessee engaged in similar tasks as they considered CCSS adoption and began to implement the standards. All used research, current policy, and professional judgment to inform their decision. The extent to which research-based evidence has helped guide Common Core implementation has partly depended on the capacity of state institutions, particularly state education agencies, to produce and disseminate that information. However, even where that capacity is strong, negative policy feedback can jeopardize the political sustainability of the Common Core, with value-based arguments challenging research and other types of evidence for public support. Such challenges can be exacerbated if the state's educators feel unduly burdened by accountability policies linked to the standards.

Chapter 6 takes up our comparative case study of the enactment and implementation of the Children's Health Insurance Program. We rely on the secondary literature and a close reading of the testimony at relevant congressional hearings from 1997 to 2017. As in the case of the Common Core, we document the variety of evidence use, depending on the policymaking stage and the institutional roles and policy goals of the advocates. The CHIP case study mirrors our investigation of the Common Core in tracing how evidence use in the deliberation over both programs responded to the changing balance of political ideology and resources; the use of evidence is not a smooth process, because it tracks discontinuous changes in the political context. This chapter highlights two significant shifts in the use of evidence over CHIP's twenty-year history: the transition from federal agencies supplying most of the evidence in the early stages of enactment to the states providing the bulk of the evidence as the individual state programs were implemented; and the shift from the emphasis on enrollment of low-income children to the analysis of evidence about health outcomes, in response to conservatives' critiques.

The final chapter continues to build on the focus of the book, outlining recommendations for strengthening the use of research-based evidence, with particular attention to creating political incentives in the policy process. We discuss three leverage points for improving evidence use: policy ideas, policy

design, and the training of policy analysts. Although we are under no illusions that the paradoxical nature of research use—valued but often sidelined—will be resolved in the near future, our analysis offers a better sense of the political environment in which the policy implications of the use of research evidence are debated.