

After Common Core, States Set Rigorous Standards

Paul E. Peterson, Samuel Barrows, and Thomas Gift

In spite of Tea Party criticism, union skepticism, and anti-testing outcries, Common Core has achieved phenomenal success in statehouses across the country. Since 2011, 45 states have raised their standards for student proficiency in reading and math, with the greatest gains occurring between 2013 and 2015. To reach this finding, we compared the percentage of students in 4th and 8th grade deemed proficient on individual state tests in math and reading and the percentage deemed proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a federally administered exam that sets a high, globally recognized bar for student proficiency.

If the percentage of students deemed proficient on the state and NAEP tests was identical, we determined that the state had set the same rigorous proficiency standard as the NAEP. If, however, the percentage of students that a state deemed proficient was considerably higher than the NAEP percentage, we inferred that the state had set a lax proficiency standard.

Since 2013, the average difference between NAEP and state proficiency levels has plummeted from 29 percent to 11 percent, representing a dramatic improvement over the previous two-year period (2011–13), in which the difference dropped only 6 percentage points, from 35 percent to 29 percent.

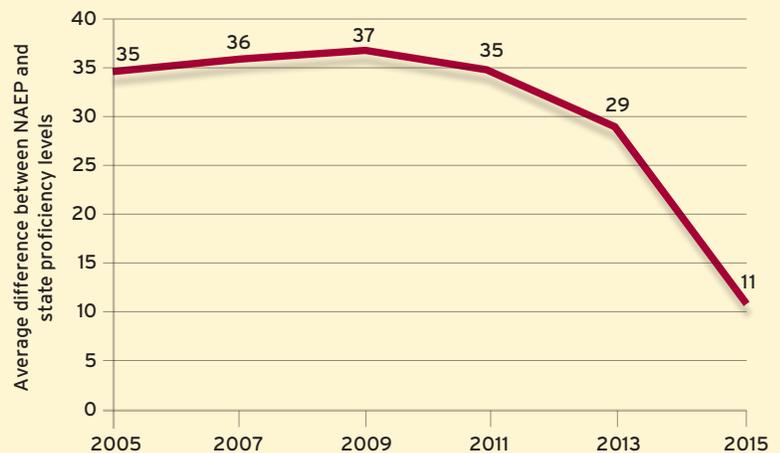
If Common Core works as its proponents expect, higher proficiency standards could propel schools to achieve at more impressive levels. Of course, parents, teachers, and administrators need to recognize that the low levels of proficiency now being identified in most states require serious action.



Postdoctoral fellow Thomas Gift presents research on state standards at a PEPG colloquium.

Closing the Gap between State and Federal Standards

The average difference between the percentages of students achieving proficiency on NAEP and state tests decreased from 29 to 11 percentage points nationwide from 2013 to 2015.



NOTE: Figure starts with 2005 because many states did not participate in 2003 accountability program. SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on NAEP and state exams



Paul E. Peterson

Samuel Barrows and Thomas Gift are postdoctoral fellows at PEPG. The full article appears in the Summer 2016 issue of Education Next.

Letter from the Director

Worth special mention are the following PEPG highlights:

- PEPG has established a new, multimillion-dollar fellowship program in education entrepreneurship.
- **Education Next (EdNext)** released a special issue commemorating the 50th anniversary of the "Equality of Educational Opportunity" study mandated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, also known as the "Coleman Report." Essays explore factors that have precluded a significant closing of the racial achievement gap.
- **EdNext** identified changes in public opinion over the past decade on key education policies as part of its 10th annual survey of nationally representative samples of teachers and other Americans.
- **EdNext** is enjoying a seamless transition, as Martin R. West becomes the Editor-in-Chief. I will become the Senior Editor.
- PEPG hosts a conference in December on the pioneering legal thought of Justice Antonin Scalia.

What Matters for Student Achievement

Eric A. Hanushek

The Coleman Report, "Equality of Educational Opportunity," is the fountainhead for those committed to evidence-based education policy. What makes it a foundational document for education policy research is that it fundamentally altered the lens through which analysts, policymakers, and the public at large view and assess schools. Before Coleman, a good school was defined by its "inputs"—per-pupil expenditure, school size,

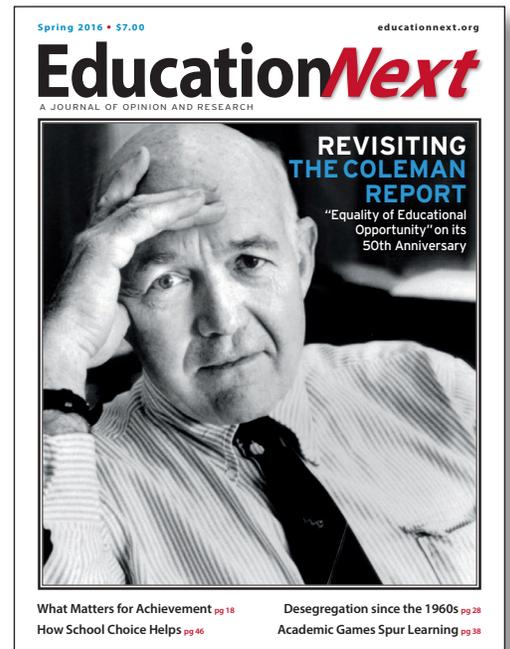
comprehensiveness of the curriculum, and similar indicators of the resources allocated for the students' education. After Coleman, the measures of a good school shifted to its "outputs" or "outcomes"—the amount its students know, the gains in learning they experience each year, the years of further education graduates pursue, and their long-term employment and earnings opportunities.

Regrettably, however, after nearly a half century of supposed progress in race relations within the United States, the modest improvements in achievement gaps since 1965 can only be called a national embarrassment. If we continue

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Eric A. Hanushek is senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, and research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research. His full article appears in the Spring 2016 issue of Education Next.



February 25 PEPG event in Washington, D.C.

PEPG featured a seminar on the "Coleman Report" that coincided with the publication of a special issue of *Education Next* marking the report's 50th anniversary.

Topics at the event included desegregation, the achievement gap, school choice, teacher quality, the role of the family, and academic games.



PEPG deputy director Martin R. West takes questions from the audience at the event "Reconsidering the 'Coleman Report' on Its 50th Anniversary."

Should Soft Skills Be Included in School Accountability Systems?

Martin R. West

Student “soft” skills—competencies other than academic ability and achievement—also predict future life outcomes. Yet important questions linger over how we gauge soft skills, because standard measures rely upon questions that ask students to assess their own abilities. This can introduce a problem known as “reference bias” if students who attend more-demanding schools judge their own skills more critically.

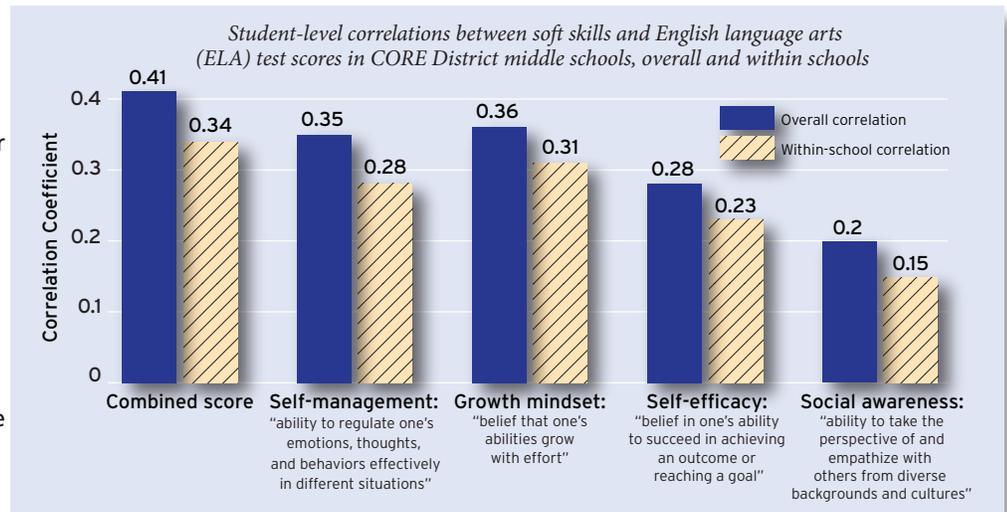
My colleagues and I looked at the potential for reference bias by analyzing data on soft skills collected by nine California school districts during the 2014–15 school year. The districts asked 450,000 students in grades 3–12 to evaluate four of their own soft skills.

We found a moderately strong overall correlation between reading test scores and four kinds of soft skills. The strongest correlations were between test scores and “self-management” (the ability to regulate one’s behavior in different situations) (0.35) and “growth mindset” (the belief that one’s abilities grow with effort) (0.36). By comparison, test scores correlated more weakly with “social awareness”

(empathy for others from diverse backgrounds) (0.20).

To check for reference bias, we also looked at these correlations among students who attend the same school. If students in schools

is lower than the overall correlation, suggesting that students attending schools that are more-demanding academically do not rate themselves more critically than students in less-demanding schools.



with higher test scores rate themselves more critically than those in schools with lower ones, then student self-ratings in the high-performing schools will be artificially low. This would, on average, cause the overall correlation to be lower than the ones for specific schools.

The opposite is the case. The average correlation for each school

These findings suggest that self-reports may be valid indicators of student soft skills and thus can be used as another measure for evaluating school performance.

Martin R. West is associate professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His full article appears in an Evidence Speaks report published by the Brookings Institution.

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Why Does the NAACP Oppose Charter Schools?

Paul E. Peterson

The NAACP, at its national convention in Cincinnati, voted this July to support “a moratorium on the proliferation of privately managed charter schools.” In Massachusetts, a local NAACP leader is campaigning against the charter-expansion referendum bill on the state ballot in November. Comparing charters to segregated schools, he shouted: “As *Brown v. the Board of Education* [banning segregation] taught us, a dual school system is inherently unequal.”

Why have a number of civil rights groups joined the teacher-union opposition to charter schools? Figuring that one out is, to borrow a phrase from Winston Churchill, like solving “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.”

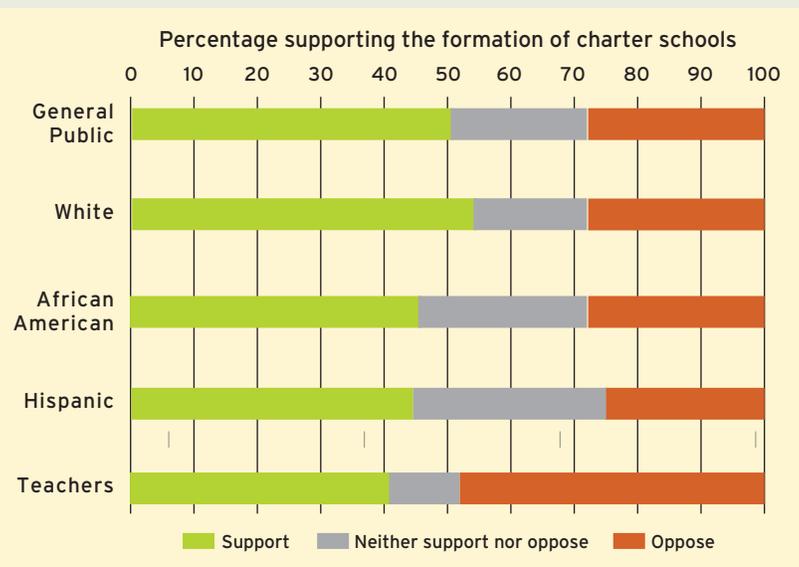
My colleagues and I at *Education Next* just released an education opinion survey administered last May and June to a nationally representative sample of 700 teachers and another 3,500 Americans. Unlike rank-and-file teachers, the African Americans we surveyed support charters by a nearly two-to-one margin. Forty-six percent of African Americans say they favor the formation of charters, while only 29% stand in opposition, with the remainder taking the neutral position. In fact, the opinions of African Americans resemble those of the American public as a whole: 51% support, 28% oppose, 21% neutral.

Not only does the black community support charters, but African American students enjoy over-representation in charter schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 27% of all charter students are black, even though black students constitute only 16% of the overall public school population. White students constitute just a quarter of the enrollees at charters, even though they are half of all students attending public school.

Finally, the mysterious riddle is tucked within an amazing enigma: civil rights groups oppose charters, even though African Americans are learning more at charters than at public schools. According to a 2015 study of charters in

Support for Charter Schools

Question: Many states permit the formation of charter schools, which are publicly funded but are not managed by the local school board. These schools are expected to meet promised objectives, but are exempt from many state regulations. Do you support or oppose the formation of charter schools?



urban regions across the country, conducted by CREDO at Stanford University, African American students at charters outperformed comparable students at nearby public schools in math by roughly a half year’s worth of learning. Reading gains were also hefty.

The enigma can be unraveled, however. The NAACP national board must give its approval before any convention

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resolution becomes official organizational policy. The Black Alliance for Educational Options, a pro-charter civil rights group, calls the resolution “inexplicable” and urges the NAACP’s board to reject it. Hopefully, the board will solve the riddle itself.

The full article appears in U.S. News & World Report on August 23, 2016.

Clinton Abandons the Middle on Education

Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West

Throughout this campaign season, Democrats have feigned confusion about why disaffected Republicans have not embraced Hillary Clinton, given Donald Trump’s character defects. But the K–12 education plank in the Democratic Party platform does a lot to explain the hesitance. The party’s promises seem designed to satisfy teachers unions rather than to appeal to ordinary Democrats, much less opposition moderates.

Democrats say that they will “recognize and honor all the professionals who work in public schools,” including “teachers, education support professionals, and specialized staff,” suggesting that every teacher does a terrific job. The party also promises that it will “end the test-and-punish version of accountability.”

Democrats nationwide seem to have a different view. Like Republicans, Democrats have a positive view of most teachers, but their confidence does not extend to all of them. Democrats and Republicans both think that nearly 60% of teachers in their local schools are either excellent or good, and another quarter at least satisfactory. But Democrats find as much as 15% of teachers unsatisfactory. It doesn’t seem like rank-and-file Democrats are ready to honor all teachers and simply trust them.

These are some of the data reported in the *Education Next* survey of American adults. Over the course of May and June, our publication surveyed representative samples of 700 teachers and 3,500 other Americans. The results demonstrate how out of touch

“The [Democratic] party’s promises seem designed to satisfy teachers unions rather than to appeal to ordinary Democrats, much less opposition moderates.”

the Democratic Party has become on education.

In contrast with platform-committee Democrats, 80% of rank-and-file party adherents who took a position on the issue said they backed the federal requirement that “all students be tested in math and reading each year,” with only 20% disagreeing. Republicans had similar responses: 74% and 26%, respectively.

As for punishing and rewarding teachers, 57% of Democrats nationwide said they supported “basing part of the salaries of teachers on how much their students learn.” Fifty-nine percent said teacher tenure should be eliminated.

For their platform, party insiders voted to “support enabling parents to opt their children out of standardized tests.” But Democrats nationwide do not share this view. When asked whether they favored “letting

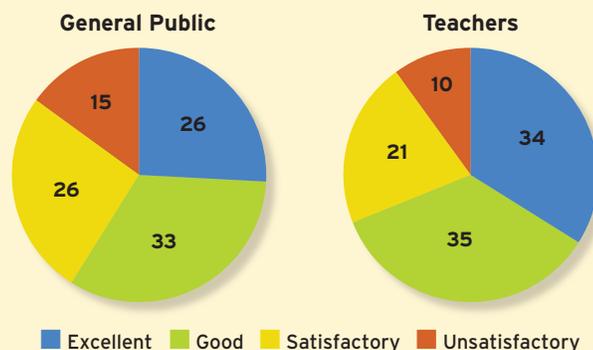
parents decide whether to have their children take state math and reading tests,” 71% of Democrats said they did not. So did 69% of Republicans.

If the views of rank-and-file Democrats don’t count, and party leaders care little about the political center, it’s hard to see how Mrs. Clinton could turn victory into a governing majority.

The full discussion appears in a Wall Street Journal op-ed on August 14, 2016.

Room for Improvement in the Teaching Profession

The public reports that 15% of teachers are unsatisfactory, and an additional 26% are no better than satisfactory. Teachers themselves say that more than 10% of their peers are “unsatisfactory.”



Question: Suppose you had to evaluate each teacher in your local schools for the quality of their work. What percentage of teachers in your local schools would you put in each category? Your answers should add to 100%.

Law and Education Conference

Paul E. Peterson and Michael McConnell of Stanford Law School will be co-hosting an event on law and education that focuses on the legal thought of the late Justice Antonin Scalia.

The all-day conference, titled "Law and Education: The Legal Thought of Justice Antonin Scalia," is sponsored by PEPG and will take place on **December 2, 2016**, at the Harvard Kennedy School. Confirmed participants include:

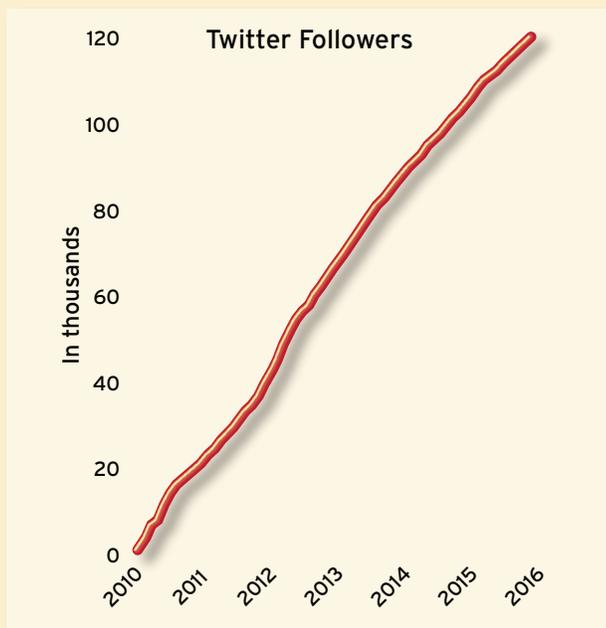
- Mark Blitz** (Claremont McKenna College)
- John Coons** (UC-Berkeley School of Law)
- James Ryan** (Harvard Graduate School of Education)
- Amy Wax** (University of Pennsylvania Law School)
- Adam White** (Stanford's Hoover Institution)
- Michael McConnell** (Stanford Law School)
- R. Shep Melnick** (Boston College)



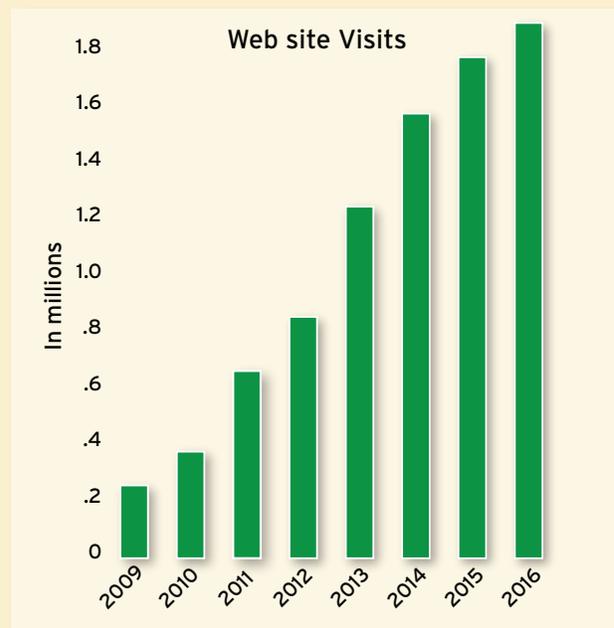
Paul E. Peterson speaks with the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia at a reception held at the U.S. Botanic Conservatory in Washington, D.C., in 1986.

EdNext Impact Statistics

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Post-Regulatory School Reform

Paul E. Peterson

In 2001, President George W. Bush persuaded the U.S. Congress to pass a new law, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which created the nation's first federal regulatory regime holding schools accountable for student performance. Accountability under NCLB looked for a while like it could drive the achievement of America's minority students forward. But signs of steady improvement did little to bolster political support for the law. With nearly every school failing to bring all of its students up to the full proficiency required by NCLB, resistance to the law intensified.

Responding to the rising opposition, President Barack Obama's Department of Education announced Race to the Top (RttT) in 2009, a \$4 billion competitive grants program. The initiative proved so politically successful that the department built on it by allowing all states to waive most NCLB requirements if they submitted RttT-like reform plans, including test-based teacher evaluations and the setting of standards similar to the Common Core State Standards.

Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), however, cast doubt on the success of Obama's reforms. NAEP performances of both black and white students in 8th grade fell by 1 point in math and rose by just 2 points in reading between 2009 and 2015. At the 4th-grade level, whites registered no gains in math, and black students gained but a measly 2 points. The picture in reading is similar—2-point gains for blacks and whites alike. Improvements among Hispanics were only slightly more.

Caught in a vice between teacher unions on the left and Tea Party supporters on the right, the Obama administration was unable to defend against a bipartisan move on Capitol Hill to end waivers altogether by enacting, for the first time since 2002, a new federal education law,

ESSA. The law requires annual testing but leaves it to the states to decide how the testing will be done.

Most of the other regulations have been removed, shifting authority over schools back to states and localities. If continued student testing is to have an impact on reform, it will be due to the better information parents receive about the amount of learning

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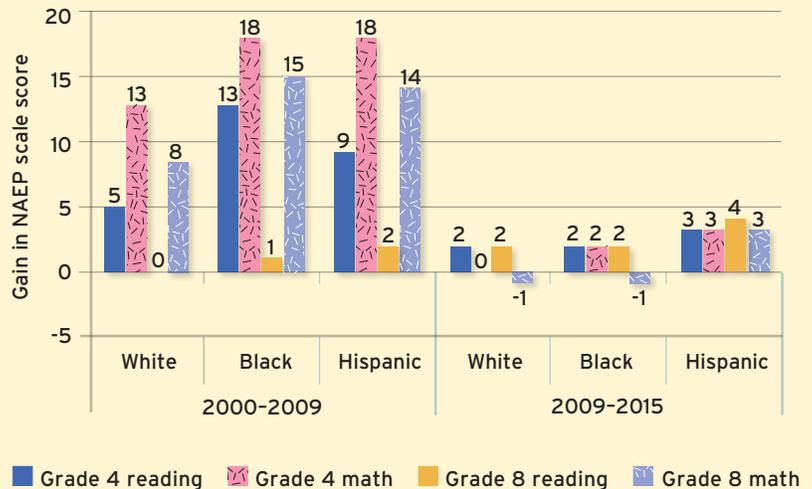
taking place at each school, not top-down directives for improvement.

The Bush-Obama era of reform via federal regulation has come to an end. The regulated have captured the regulators.

The full article appears in the September-October issue of 'Harvard Magazine.'

NAEP Gains Stall

The gains made on the National Assessment of Educational Progress during the first decade of the 21st century slowed to a virtual halt once Obama came into office.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

The Program on Education Policy and Governance is launching fellowships in education entrepreneurship with a multimillion-dollar grant from the Charles Koch Foundation.

The grant will provide support for master's and doctoral candidates at Harvard focused on education entrepreneurship and school reform in the United States. Support for students will come from newly offered tuition and stipend fellowships starting in the 2016-17 academic year.

The grant will also provide support for postdoctoral research fellowships at PEPG and for visiting scholars.

The Koch Foundation funds will enhance PEPG's programming in teaching and mentorship, research, and administrative resources and support. PEPG, through its core faculty, affiliates, and staff, will offer mentorship and training to its graduate and postdoctoral fellows.



2016-17 PEPG Fellows in Education Entrepreneurship with director Peterson: Marie Perrot (left), Liz Coffin-Karlin, Molly Thomas, Kim Howard, and Laura White. All five are Masters of Public Policy candidates at the Harvard Kennedy School.

2016-17 PEPG Postdoctoral and Visiting Fellows



Samuel Barrows received his Ph.D. in government from Harvard University. His research primarily explores how information shapes people's satisfaction with schools and their political behavior.



Beth Schueler recently graduated with a doctorate from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research focuses on K-12 education policy and politics in the U.S., with a particular focus on efforts to improve persistently low-performing schools and districts.



Albert Cheng joins PEPG from the University of Arkansas where he completed his Ph.D. in education policy and was a research fellow for Charassein: The Character Assessment Initiative.



Katharina Werner is a visiting research fellow from the Ifo Institute and the University of Munich where she is currently a doctoral candidate. Her research interests include labor economics with a particular focus on education economics, political economy, and survey design.