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Keywords

education policy; reform; advocacy; teacher preparation; the media

Challenging the Spectacle: A Case Study on Education Policy Advocacy

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Abstract

Much of the current education reform movement is centered on promoting policies aimed directly at improving teacher performance and, in turn, student learning. However, much of the advocacy has divided policymakers and educators by using ideologically charged methods that do not promote reasoned discussion or compromise. Schools of education have sometimes become targets for state-level policymakers who present teacher preparation programs as part of the problem. This paper is a case study of leadership by a school of education in advocating for policy. Viewing the circumstances through the lens of “political spectacle” theory, this study outlines how utilizing an advocacy model, backed by data and bolstered by coalition partners, convinced policymakers to make reasonable adjustments to dramatic rule changes.

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Introduction

Driven largely by the realization that, in a global economy citizens must achieve higher levels of education in order for nations to remain competitive, education reform has become a top priority for both developed and developing countries. In countries across the world, including the United States, local, state, and national governments are pursuing an aggressive education reform agenda. As a result, educational leaders today are increasingly required to engage in vigorous public debate on important policy issues.

Unfortunately, the debate on education reform in the U.S. is highly polarized by the political environment. Often acting on ideology rather than from research evidence, policymakers on all ends of the political spectrum are advancing ideas on everything from vouchers, charter schools, K-12 and higher education finance, teacher evaluation, pay for performance, school leadership and teacher preparation, teacher licensing, and more. While the federal government has played a large and unprecedented role in education reform in America through *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* legislation, most of the specific policy changes related to education reform are being implemented at the state level. That is the case in Indiana, where a reform-minded governor and superintendent of public instruction recently advanced a set of rule changes, known as the

Rules for Educator Preparation and Accountability (REPA), designed to change the way teachers and school administrators are prepared and licensed in the state.

The purpose of this article is to describe the process by which REPA was introduced, amended, and ultimately passed in the state, as well as the role education leaders played in calling public attention to the proposed changes and advocating for amendments to the proposed rules. A case study will be presented highlighting significant events and strategy used during the REPA debate.

Relationship Building

Civil discourse is an interaction that takes place in the context of a relationship. It may not be a deep and personal relationship in every case, but it always should be one that recognizes the worth and dignity of every individual no matter how different or even objectionable his or her views might be. Yet, just a cursory review of the popular press gives a clear impression that the American political system today seems more polarized than ever, with its actors less able to draw on trust and make tough choices to solve big problems. In the case of educational reform, it is difficult for someone to speak out against a controversial proposal, no matter the merits of the idea, without being immediately labeled as a “naysayer” or worse by the other side. As in the case of

political discourse and debate on social issues, generally, the national conversation on education reform is being framed largely by ideological differences that do not permit reasoned discourse and compromise.

Still, politicians and social leaders in a democracy must seek to develop personal and professional relationships that permit those on different sides of an issue to engage in meaningful dialogue based on mutual trust and respect. The existence of such a relationship allows opposing parties to listen to one another and compromise where necessary in order to achieve desired goals. The great humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers, known as the founder of person-centered therapy and student-centered learning, theorized that all therapeutic growth and deep learning take place in the context of a relationship (Rogers, 1955). In his model, the therapist and the teacher are responsible for creating the conditions necessary for a genuine relationship to develop. Those conditions are congruence or the ability to be honest, unconditional positive regard, and empathy — meaning the ability to feel what the other feels. Similarly, when these conditions are present in the broader society, collaboration and compromise needed to solve important social issues are possible.

In a democratic society, policy changes can best be achieved in an environment where stakeholders with opposing views can be honest with one another without the fear of retribution, try to understand each other's positions, and show respect for the opponent. Creating such conditions requires skills to develop strong relationships based on trust as well as willingness to listen. Lee Hamilton, Director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University, was well known during his 34 years in Congress for his hard work in building bipartisan compromise. In one of his many columns designed to inform the public about Congress, he wrote, "Seeking bipartisan agreement means not just taking time to listen to the other side; it also means really understanding their point of view and finding ways of incorporating at least some of it into your own thinking" (Hamilton, 2010).

Engagement With Political Leaders

Against this backdrop the authors sought to engage state government leaders in Indiana to explore ways to collaborate in efforts to promote policy changes needed for educational improvement and reform. Initially, the senior author scheduled a meeting with the state's newly elected superintendent of public instruction to

discuss common concerns and explore ways to enhance collaboration between the superintendent's office and the university. One of the topics discussed was teacher quality, which was an emerging policy issue in the state.

Within two weeks of that meeting, however, the superintendent publicly announced that his department would seek to change educator preparation and licensing in the state and proposed the rule changes that became known as REPA. When the announcement was made, the stated rationale for REPA was to improve educator preparation by increasing the level of subject-area content preparation required of teachers in order to be licensed in the state. The other reasons given for REPA were to reduce regulation and increase preparation options.

Everyone in higher education, including the senior author who had just met with the superintendent to discuss the very issue of teacher quality, was surprised by the announcement because there had been no indication or communication with educator preparation programs in the state about REPA up to the point of the announcement. In fact, the education community in general was entirely unaware that policy changes were in the offing.

The Political Spectacle

Members of the Indiana Professional Standards Board (IPSB), which at the time was the statutory body responsible for oversight and approval of educator preparation and licensing, also were surprised by the timing of the REPA announcement. The document outlining the proposed extensive rule changes was presented to the board only a few days before members were to take the initial vote on it. Some members publicly expressed dismay about the short amount of time they were given to consider what were obviously very complex and highly controversial rule changes.

Miller-Kahn and Smith (2001; Smith & Miller-Kahn, 2004) wrote of the imposition of "political spectacle" on education reform in a variety of circumstances. The researchers have examined circumstances surrounding education reform issues through the frame of Edelman's (1988) theory of political spectacle, which he defined as elite actors using scripts designed to sell particular points of view to the public. In such circumstances, the spectacle of politics is conducted very much as a drama, complete with directors, stages, actors, narrative plots, and a curtain to separate action onstage that is seen by the public from what is happening backstage (Miller-

Kahn & Smith, 2001; Smith & Miller-Kahn, 2004). Skillful politicians are able to utilize political spectacle through the use of identified “enemies,” “leaders,” and “problems” that mask actual problems and obscure unequal policy outcomes (Burnier, 1994, p. 243). The political spectacle is complete when media coverage portrays the drama as it is presented.

The spectacle in education is often portrayed through the language of crisis (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Gordon & Gordon, 2007) to emphasize the need for education reformers to impose a solution. Miller-Kahn and Smith (2001) wrote of a group of elite parents (the leaders) making the case for school choice because of falling student test performance (the problem) with a school district (the enemy) failing in its reform effort (while in reality, achievement scores supposedly falling were actually on the rise). In another instance (Smith & Miller-Kahn, 2004), they cited a particular case in Arizona when the superintendent of public instruction thrust an agenda for change upon the state board of education. In this circumstance, months of discussions with interested parties had resulted in an expected approval vote in March 1996 for new reading, writing, and math standards for the state. Before the vote could take place in that meeting, the governor (the leader) burst into the meeting, aides distributing a press release. He denounced the standards as a fad (the problem) and announced that he was opposed to the state school superintendent and board’s actions (the enemy) and wanted more standardized testing to bring accountability to schools.

The state of Indiana’s 2009 movement on the REPA changes similarly used the device of political spectacle. The process began just days before the superintendent of public instruction presented the proposed REPA changes to the IPSB. Speaking to an Indiana politics website for an article published the Friday before the Tuesday IPSB meeting, the governor noted the newly reconstituted professional standards board would “revolutionize the colleges and schools of education much more in terms of content knowledge” (Howey, 2009). He noted that the schools of education would need to make major changes, requiring students to spend more time studying what they planned to teach, establishing a premise that Indiana teachers did not have adequate knowledge of the subjects they teach. “They are not going to need as many people teaching what to me is mumbo jumbo,” the governor concluded (Howey, 2009).

The Role of the Media

On July 28, 2009, the superintendent of public instruction’s presentation to the IPSB used crisis language and political spectacle throughout a board meeting that received wide media attention, pushing forward the state’s agenda for K-12 school reform, particularly focused on the licensing of teachers. The superintendent immediately set the tone for the process that was to follow. He focused upon saving Indiana from poor teachers, noting that “improving education starts with a high-quality instruction” (Gammill, 2009, July 29), reflecting the previous comments of the governor to back his point: a teacher who doesn’t understand math can’t teach it, he said. Kovacs (2007) noted that political actors have engaged in education reform in recent years by using causal stories, portraying problems in a particular way to gain support for their side, masking their own dominant interests with the message that reform is best for all. By presenting a causal story that implied, for instance, that many teachers in the state of Indiana who were charged with teaching mathematics didn’t understand it, the rules changes carried a sense of urgency. Additional elements to the story included discussion that REPA would increase student achievement to meet state goals, allow for administrator flexibility to innovate and improve student achievement, reduce bureaucracy, and eliminate outdated regulation. To achieve these goals, the initial REPA recommendations eliminated a reference to any national teacher license standards, eliminated secondary education majors as candidates for licensure, added online certification, allowed teachers to add a new license content area by simply passing a test, set credit limits on the number of education courses schools of education could require, and mandated specific academic content for state programs preparing teachers.

In the immediate response to the sudden reform agenda, the senior author noted to a reporter that school of education leadership received notice of the proposed changes only the day before the IPSB meeting. Further comments to the media focused on concerns about the problematic nature of pushing through such changes too quickly and the implications of *having a state agency dictating the university’s curriculum*.

After a period of reaction to the media frenzy that followed an editorial board tour of major newspapers in the state conducted by the superintendent immediately after the introduction of REPA, strategic discussion about a continuing response centered on what portions

of the causal story could be understandably critiqued in the public debate. Quickly, the focus became critiquing elimination of the secondary education major as a pathway to teacher licensure. The causal story behind the secondary education change centered on the tale of the ill-prepared math teacher (and other similar stories): Indiana teachers didn't know enough content, proponents of REPA maintained, so future teachers would be better prepared by majoring strictly in a content area, such as mathematics, *outside a school of education*.

Fueled in part by the superintendent's editorial board tour, media reporting in the days after the IPSB meeting repeated the reasoning that requiring teachers to major in the content area would necessarily mean more content hours required of the future teacher. The available data indicated that, for most teacher preparation programs in the state, this wasn't true for nearly all program areas. At Indiana University Bloomington, for example, a physics teacher who substituted the departmental major for the comparable education major might take as much as 18 fewer hours in physics classes. Similarly, chemistry majors might take 16 fewer hours in chemistry to become a teacher, and mathematics majors could take 12 fewer mathematics hours than if they were education majors.

Still, in the early media reports, the spectacle was complete: the leader was the state school superintendent tackling the problem of poor teachers. Obstinate schools of education quickly were portrayed as the enemy to this needed reform.

Combating the Causal Story

A spokesperson for the superintendent of public instruction, in numerous stories over the next several weeks, continued to repeat the assertion that teachers would gain more content knowledge. In response to a statewide September Associated Press story noting that college students majoring in math education may take few math classes (Martin, 2009), the senior author stated in an editorial submitted to many of the same papers, "Let's be very clear: that's not true" (Gonzalez, 2009a).

The decision to focus on combating the causal story regarding content preparation became the primary public point of contention regarding the "problem" of teacher licensure. Despite the continued assertion and evidence presented in response to reporters and others that the new regulations would not increase content preparation, but actually reduce the number of content hours for pre-service teachers, the state superintendent and Indiana Department of Education spokespersons continued to repeat their claim. The state school superintendent

also took advantage of the national education reform environment to restate the problem and take aim at the "enemy." On Oct. 22, 2009, the superintendent released a statement commenting on a major speech on teacher preparation delivered by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan earlier that day. The state superintendent said: "In recent months, schools of education in Indiana have told us that all is well; that we are wrong to demand that their graduates have a much deeper knowledge of the subjects they'll teach Indiana kids for the next three decades or more" (Indiana Department of Education, 2009). In response, the senior author issued his own news release commenting on the Duncan speech, noting "...it is right to demand that our graduates have a deep knowledge of subjects they teach Indiana students," then emphasizing that "rule changes proposed by the Indiana Department of Education would reduce the content hours in the teaching subject for future teachers in Indiana" (Indiana University, 2009). The statement concluded that perhaps strengthening teacher licensure exams, as suggested by Secretary Duncan in the speech, would be more appropriate.

In late October and early November, the Indiana Department of Education held three public hearings. By this point, the IU School of Education had become one of the most public voices in questioning the wisdom of the proposed changes. A new editorial by the senior author for the statewide *Indianapolis Star* emphasized the dichotomy presented in the new regulations, which purported to improve education by weakening standards and requirements for teacher preparation. The editorial headlined "Less Time in Classroom Spells Trouble," appeared in print just before the final public hearing. Seeking to re-emphasize the point that the "problem" was based on a faulty premise, the senior author offered in the editorial another example of how the spectacle had obscured the actual action. The editorial noted the REPA requirement for 9 weeks of student teaching, a requirement that would reduce classroom experience by several weeks for most IU student teachers. "That is a microcosm of the problematic vision of REPA. It is a small vision of educational change, one which seeks to somehow reform teacher preparation by requiring *less* of teachers" (Gonzalez, 2009b).

The Challenge of Accurate Reporting

As the leadership of the IU School of Education attempted to promote factual information in the face of the spectacle of the REPA reform, a complicating factor was the continuing behavior of news media reporting the

story. Much of the early reporting that repeated the script of spectacle remained constant. This has proven true in coverage of other education reform issues, particularly because reporters rarely offered critical analysis of the source or its message. Haas (2007) examined more than 1,500 stories about education reform that cited education think tanks, which often produce research intended to promote an agenda, and found that of the think tanks presented as credible sources nearly all were described in exactly the manner the think tanks described themselves. Often, media frame the coverage of education reform in favor of the view that education is failing and needs to be saved (Gerstl-Pepin, 2002; Goldstein, 2011), making a contrarian view to proposals to reflect negatively upon those who espouse it. Reporters covering education stories have cited a need for more training to better understand the depths of education issues (Willen & Snider, 2008) and a related reliance upon sources to clarify complicated education reform debates, which are often reported as presented by interested organizations as the story “angle” (point of emphasis in the news story) and with little context to provide a useful and complete view to the public (Rotherham, 2008).

As the REPA proposal advanced, the state’s largest newspaper, *The Indianapolis Star*, provided continuous coverage but had no single reporter devoted to consistently covering developments. Several different reporters from the newspaper wrote stories during the several months of developments, which included three public hearings on the REPA proposal. Early stories from various sources characterized the REPA proposal as a way to simplify and improve the process, emphasizing that opposition to these efforts means opposing less regulation and better teachers. Headlines such as “Indiana schools chief wants simpler teacher licensing” (Van Wyke, 2009) and “Simpler Teacher Licensing Wanted by Indiana School Chiefs” (WXIN-TV, 2009) also confused the issue by pluralizing the state school superintendent in its title. Van Wyke posited the low rating of Indiana’s education system by the advocacy organization, The National Council for Teacher Quality, as support for the change. The WXIN story featured no opposing voice to the proposal.

Later, as the REPA proposal moved closer to passage before the professional standards board, the context and adjustment of the rule changes were lost in much of the coverage. By the time the board met in early 2010, the provision most damaging to schools of education had been changed: the proposed rules no longer eliminated secondary education as a pathway to licensure. Nevertheless, the reporter from the *Indianapolis Star*

covering the board meeting (a reporter who had not covered the REPA issue previously) missed this fact in a story headlined “Teachers may need a different major” (McFeely, 2010). An *Indianapolis Star* headline proclaimed “Education Officials Reveal Big Reforms,” while presenting a new package of education reform proposals in the story’s lead sentence “as a bold and controversial path for the state’s schools with a series of reforms that include forcing out weak teachers, shutting down teacher colleges whose graduates don’t get results, and converting troubled schools to charters” (Gammill, 2010). Though measures related to teacher quality were a focus throughout the article, the context of new proposals with the pending REPA regulations was never mentioned.

On March 30, 2010, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels signed the revised REPA regulations. Many of the proposals that educators viewed as the most damaging in the initial document were altered significantly, most notably the elimination of secondary education as a valid major for new teachers and the cap on the number of education credit hours students could pursue. Other curriculum mandates that higher education groups had determined early on deserved the most attention were deleted from the proposal. While this and much else had changed after nearly eight months of meetings, public discussion, and media coverage, the narrative from both the proponents and some media reporting remained virtually unchanged. An Indiana Department of Education news release issued after the signing ceremony stated that all new teachers “will be experts in the subjects they teach” and that “a degree in education by itself for these grades will no longer qualify an applicant for an Indiana teaching license.” The governor also returned to the original causal story, stating, “we’ll know for certain that math teachers know math, science teachers know science, history teachers know history, and so on,” and continued by saying that “how to” teach courses had their place but were secondary to content mastery.

After the signing of REPA, the first story from *The Indianapolis Star* perfectly reflected the continuance of the spectacle, reporting as fact in the first few sentences that “the new rules, which take effect July 31, will require that those who teach the 5th to 12th grades earn their bachelor’s degrees in the subjects they teach, rather than getting a degree in education” (Schneider, 2010). The junior author contacted the reporter soon after the original story appeared online, citing the information as factually incorrect and informing her that secondary education majors simply needed equivalent

content hours to count toward licensure. In a personal email to the junior author, the reporter stated that she had never covered this story before and preferred that an education reporter cover it. She explained that she wrote her account based on the state's news release. The reporter checked with a state department of education spokesperson, who stated that secondary education was not valid for licensure. In another email, the junior author copied the exact line of the regulation that provided the equivalency requirement. The reporter presented this to the spokesperson, who finally confirmed that secondary education could count if content hours were equivalent (Schneider, M.B., personal communication, March 29, 2010). The online story was corrected and the print story quoted the junior author, who emphasized most IU School of Education majors already met that requirement (Schneider, 2010).

Results of the REPA Rulemaking Process

When the dust had settled on the REPA proposal, from unveiling in July 2009 to signing into effect in March 2010, most of the adjustments requested by state schools of education and other organizations concerned with teacher preparation were adopted into the final measure. The three public hearings provided the state professional standards board with voluminous personal testimony, most critical of the measure in one way or another. The senior author submitted testimony and other documents that supported the educators' assertions. When presented with considerable opposition to the most draconian of measures placed in the original proposal, the standards board acted to adjust REPA to more adequately reflect what education professionals deemed as problematic. Such a conclusion was not certain at the start of the process, particularly given the prevalence of the causal story presented by REPA proponents and the continuance of the spectacle. In the authors' view, the spectacle and countless hours of acrimonious debate that followed could have been avoided if policy leaders would have taken the time to develop a meaningful relationship with stakeholders and had sought to affect change within the context of that relationship. In the absence of the opportunity to reach agreement on changes needed, a few keys to ensuring the education community's important points of contention were heard and acted upon.

First, in determining that the measure affecting secondary education as a pathway to licensure was a primary point of emphasis, we knew that evidence had

to solidify the argument. The Indiana Association of Colleges of Teacher Education assembled a document to present to the board showing that most secondary education programs already exceeded the content hours for that of content majors. Those data were made public when possible through editorial submissions and to media outlets. This was intended to combat the original causal story that teachers in Indiana didn't possess enough content knowledge because they were not receiving it from teacher preparation programs. While the proponents continued to repeat the false claim that content majors would receive more content hours by eliminating the secondary education major for becoming a teacher, the authors and others who shared their concerns consistently and repeatedly made a counter-argument backed by data. *The key to this eventual success with the board was collecting, summarizing, and distributing accurate data to the board.*

Second, the coalitions of teacher preparation programs, faculty, current teachers, and school administrators bolstered their position by presenting their own stories, but backed by research. While the causal stories presented as a part of the spectacle never provided examples, the coalitions attempting to temper the REPA regulations cited reams of research that presented ample correlations between many of these rule changes and poor education outcomes. *A position underpinned by research has an unshakable foundation.* In this case, the professional standards board could not ignore it.

Finally, it was essential for educators to present a focused message and ensure all remarks did not deviate or dilute that message. For the debate in the public sphere, the authors crafted an easily understandable message and kept it consistent: REPA proponents claim that eliminating secondary education will mean teachers get more content knowledge, but it will actually reduce exposure to content. From the days after the initial announcement through the regulation signing, that was the primary point. Others were made, but always in tandem with this main assertion. Staying on message proved vital, as the information the public received from the media was either contradictory or simply wrong. Illustrating the importance of doggedness on this point is the reporting by the *Star* when the regulations were signed. Had the original story been allowed to stand unchallenged, countless numbers of readers across Indiana and the U.S. and world would have read that enrolling as a secondary education major in the state of Indiana was useless if the enrollee's intent was to become a teacher within the state. Our message was not simply to the board, but to anyone with an interest in education.

In an age when archive media articles are available more easily than ever, establishing the historical record and making it public also were crucial.

A Conceptual Framework for Advocacy

Shane Jimerson (Indiana University School of Education, 2012) proposed a model of advocacy that provided a good conceptual framework for the actions taken by educators in the REPA debate. In his model, the crucial steps for effective advocacy are: 1) Clearly identify the issues; 2) Collaborate; 3) Plan; 4) Take action; and 5) Reflect and Evaluate. Consistent with Jimerson's model, the authors believe this case study provides important lessons for educational leaders involved in public policy matters. First and foremost, it was important to clearly identify the issues. Second, though unsuccessful, it was important to reach out to policymakers early in the process to establish a professional relationship and seek to shape policies before they became the focus of contentious public debate. When public debate became necessary, however, developing a carefully crafted, focused message on the key points of the debate and forming coalitions with like-minded groups to deliver the message became critical. Third, staying on message and supporting the key message with data was indispensable. Finally, speaking out on the issues without fear of retribution and reflecting on the results to sharpen the message and offer concrete suggestions for solutions were central to achieving the desired changes on the proposed rules.

In today's political environment, speaking out against positions advocated by powerful political figures may have consequences. Following the REPA debate, during a five-year dean's evaluation of the senior author, an unsigned statement sent by the Indiana Department of Education to the review committee read in part, "Dean Gonzalez' actions in the past year have caused irreparable harm to the relationship between the IDOE and the IU School of Education." It continued, "Dean Gonzalez is the 'best' example of what needs to change in Indiana higher education leadership in order for more progressive ideas to be fairly considered, openly discussed and, if merited, implemented to allow forward movement in education in Indiana." In response to the IDOE statement, a member of the review committee wrote, "The Dean has shown appropriate and informed resolve around all matters educational. One only needs to consult his *Indianapolis Star* op-editorial page contributions. Each is thoughtful

and informed, reflecting deep concerns of the Indiana University faculty and the needs of public education in this state on topics such as licensure, pedagogy, and rigorous content." It continued, "It should be noted too that many leaders of higher education in this state took positions similar to the Dean's throughout this chapter in education reform...These voices came from public and private universities alike."

Changes After the REPA Debate

Following the timeline of events considered in this case study, and following the November 2010 mid-term state elections, the Indiana state legislature, with the support of the governor and superintendent of public instruction, abolished the Indiana Professional Standards Board. The powers formerly vested in the IPSB transferred to the Indiana State Board of Education, whose members are appointed by the Governor. In May 2012, the Indiana Department of Education promulgated a new set of educator licensing changes that became known as REPA 2. The new changes reintroduced many of the changes contained in the original REPA proposal removed by the IPSB as a result of public comment and opposition from the education community. In the midst of that process, however, the incumbent superintendent of public instruction, an elected position in Indiana, unexpectedly lost the general election of November 2012 to a relatively unknown opponent who positioned herself not as a politician but as an educator.

The governor also completed his second (and final) term, and a new Republican governor was elected. Both the new governor and the legislature, which gained a Republican supermajority in both chambers in the election, publicly advocated for greater civility in public discourse than had been the case during the previous administration. The state's attorney general also weighed in on the REPA 2 proposal, which the lame-duck state school superintendent pushed through the state board of education in December, just before he left office. The attorney general ruled in April 2013 that the process by which the board introduced REPA 2 and sent it forward for public comment did not follow the state's rulemaking requirements and ordered that the rules be re-promulgated. As of the date of preparation of this manuscript, the state is engaged in the re-promulgation process under the leadership of the newly elected superintendent of public instruction, who is the lone Democrat in a statewide education policymaking

position. She has promised that changes to REPA 2 will be made in close consultation with the education community.

Conclusion

In sum, a democratic society depends upon leaders willing to speak out on controversial issues and, when necessary, engage in vigorous public debate on the merits of competing ideas. The right to free speech and academic freedom are the bedrock upon which democratic and academic principles rest. Ideally, important academic and policy debates should take place in the context of a relationship characterized by mutual respect and willingness to listen to opposing parties. Unfortunately, in the current political climate in the U.S. such debates are increasingly rare. Nevertheless, in today's interconnected world where education truly is "the great equalizer," education leaders cannot afford to be silent. Even in the face of possible sanctions and against the odds for reasoned discourse based on facts, education leaders have a special responsibility to speak from an informed perspective on what in a globalized economy is perhaps the most important issue of the day – education.

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