

Linking State and Local
School Improvement

The Power of Persuasion:

A Model for Effective Political
Leadership by State Chiefs

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MARCH 2017

CRPE
REINVENTING
PUBLIC EDUCATION

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Introduction

Chief state school officers' formal powers are limited but most have unrealized potential for influence.

When chief state school officers say, “Jump,” they can’t expect very many people to ask how high. While chiefs are ultimately responsible for public schools statewide, both their authority and their resources are limited. They control little of the funding and appoint few officials. They have a role in writing and approving regulations, but those rules are constrained by state law, and chiefs have few enforcement powers. The people who directly run schools and educate children work for local school boards, not for the state.

Despite these constraints, chiefs can make a difference. They have often come up through the education ranks and care deeply about teaching and learning. But to be effective, chiefs must think and act not just as educators but as politicians.

In early 2016, a team of researchers from the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) interviewed current and past chiefs about the formal and informal ways they had pressed for reform, particularly in highly challenged localities. Their answers displayed real imagination and willingness to go far beyond their official powers and duties—to exercise leadership and persuasion. We reported on those interviews in an essay on how chiefs’ new “hard” powers can be used most effectively when paired with what we called “soft” powers.¹

When you consider lessons from the United States presidency, however, it becomes clear that leadership and persuasion are not as “soft” as one might think. Chiefs who moved outside the box to make a difference for students reminded us of a classic book from another field: Richard E. Neustadt’s *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership*.² When first published in 1960, it was hailed as the modern version of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, and has since been required reading for some new presidents.

Neustadt’s analysis of presidential power starts from a premise that all chiefs would find familiar: weakness. Presidents have more authority than anyone else in the United States government, and control more money and military forces than any other person in the world, but these powers are modest in comparison with the range of outcomes that they need to influence, and the variety of bases on which they will be judged a success or failure. Presidents can only do a few things on their own. Low unemployment, a stable stock market, climate stability, and world peace are among the many outcomes that matter a lot but depend primarily on the actions of people over whom presidents have no direct control and who have goals, concerns, and motivations of their own.

Presidents can do only so much without Congress, whose members have their own ideas, goals, and constituencies. Even the actions that are fully within a president’s power, such as making appointments, proposing the annual budget, deploying troops, and issuing policy proposals, depend on Congress for approval and appropriation. As this is written, it is clear that the unfettered power to issue executive orders is constrained by the courts’ power to block their implementation. Even when Congress and the president agree, the success of presidential initiatives depends on the actions of independent parties like business, state and city governments, and foreign governments, as well as individuals who officially work for the president (like cabinet secretaries and members of the White House staff) but have their

own loyalties and career goals. These individuals may implement a president's priorities half-heartedly or even delay action indefinitely. Firing antagonists—even those who serve at the president's pleasure—can be a risky lever to pull. Many don't depend on the president for their jobs, so firing is not an option. And, even when an official does serve at the pleasure of the president, firing can be self-defeating if a subordinate is doing other important things very well, or could stir up trouble with a group the president depends on for support.

Thus Neustadt's thesis: *Presidential power is not the power to direct but the power to persuade.* The president cannot accomplish much by merely issuing orders. Getting things done requires persuading others that acting to advance the president's goals is in their own best interest. Persuasion can involve argument and inspiration, but in the hard business of politics, words are usually just words. Persuasion mostly involves defeating or overcoming opposition by bargaining and coalition building.

Chiefs, like presidents, are responsible for a much broader range of activities than they can possibly control. Yes, presidents have more prestige, more authority, control more money, appoint more senior officials, and, in most cases, have more job security. For both leaders, however, these formal powers are puny, and the sources of opposition and obstruction they must overcome are formidable, compared to the vast range of goals and objectives for which they are accountable. Like presidents, chiefs must marshal their power to persuade if they want to be effective.

In theory, a chief or a president could decide to stay outside the fray and do only what is required of them, pressuring no one and avoiding conflict. But most chiefs come into their jobs for reasons other than to serve as figureheads—they often have grand policy ambitions. They likely want to reduce the achievement gap, better prepare students for college, strengthen curriculum and academic standards, bring great teachers and principals into the system, improve family engagement, and encourage innovation in instruction.

For chiefs who want to make a difference, it is worth thinking how to have influence well beyond the scope of things they can personally control.

Chiefs can't accomplish these things except by working through others. For chiefs who want to make a difference, it is worth thinking, as presidents must, how to have influence well beyond the scope of things they can personally control. They should fully understand their own advantages and think hard about how to bargain effectively with others in the state capital and in school districts. They can enhance their power by using their authorities as the basis of bargaining with

others they seek to influence, building their professional reputation, and approaching every decision as an opportunity to strengthen their future effectiveness.

Turnover in the field is high: seven in ten chiefs have been on the job less than two years.³ Yet these newcomers are taking their seats at a time of opportunity. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) returned significant power over K–12 education to the states, and simultaneous changes in state law have given chiefs more to do, particularly in cases where local school districts have consistently underserved large groups of children. Now is as good a time as ever for chiefs to rethink their role and figure out how best to wield their influence.

Neustadt's Main Points

“Poor Ike: he will say ‘do this, do that,’ and nothing will happen.”

— Harry Truman on how a president's work differs from that of a general⁴

Neustadt's books on presidential power are worth reading, even for busy chiefs and other executives. But the Cliffs Notes version will suffice for now. Neustadt puts flesh on the bones of “Presidential Power Is the Power to Persuade” via three propositions:

- There is very little presidents can do entirely on their own authority. The best use of presidential authorities—for example, formulating the budget, making treaties, making appointments, issuing regulations, supervising agencies, and overseeing implementation—is in bargaining, offering, or threatening to take particular actions in exchange for actions others agree to take.
- Presidents' ability to make bargains, that is, to persuade, depends on their professional reputation. Presidents gain professional reputation by using authority, strategically forming mutually advantageous alliances, and following through on promised actions.
- In taking any action, presidents should consider its consequences for their power—their ability to bargain effectively in the future.

Bargaining

Presidents very seldom act entirely on their own; unless they can persuade others to support them and follow through, presidents who act unilaterally can be frustrated and even humiliated. As this is written, most of the executive orders President Obama issued in his second term are about to be nullified by the courts, President Trump, or Congress. These orders were effective for a while because President Obama was able to get his own cabinet officers to implement them; but they were toast as soon as others acted against them.⁵

Presidents have many assets in bargaining. They can support provisions that others want—for example, building a federal facility in a congressional member's district, or promising to support an unrelated bill that a senator wants to pass. Presidents can reward or punish Cabinet members by proposing agency budget increases or cuts, and can help individuals politically by praising them in public, visiting a constituency, or even arranging a White House photo op. Presidents can reward groups or people in particular localities by appointing their members to key positions, or let other officeholders stand by their side as they announce favorable actions. Popular presidents can also discourage opposition by, for example, threatening to cut a budget, oppose a bill, close a facility, and criticize a person or idea.

Presidents don't just take helpful actions out of the goodness of their hearts. They make offers in return for specific reciprocal actions (sometimes for a series of actions) and they reward those who help them. Presidents and other politicians, including private business and interest groups, play a long game, exchanging many benefits over an extended period. Presidents and their bargaining partners sometimes say or do something positive just to maintain a relationship, but nobody simply gives something away. These actions are often decried as politics at its worst. But they have always served an important function—enabling presidents to assemble enough support to advance ambitious policy agendas.

Sometimes a bargain with one individual is enough to ensure that a reluctant Cabinet member administers a program exactly as intended. But when it comes to advancing legislation, the president must bargain with many individuals and across many issues all at the same time. Different members of Congress might require different inducements, forcing the president to support or oppose bills other than the one immediately at hand, or agree to make particular appointments. This means presidents must understand not only their own agenda, but those of their potential allies and opponents as well.

President Obama acted unilaterally because there was no way the Republican-controlled Congress would bargain with him. But he would have greatly preferred making bargains that would stick, even if the results were not exactly what he wanted.

Professional Reputation

For presidents, a good professional reputation is based on the belief that they know how to play the cards they are dealt and are a force to be reckoned with. Professional reputation is based on others' perception that the president:⁶

- Has definite goals to achieve and that these are specific and realistic enough to be accomplished.
- Is persistent, will work hard and long to get something important, and won't give up at the first sign of opposition or conflict.
- Has the skill to bargain effectively, to draw fence-sitters in their direction, and to help those who are advancing his goals and can be trusted to keep his end of a bargain, as long as others keep theirs.

Presidents build a professional reputation by successfully building coalitions, making collaborators out of former fence-sitters, demonstrating that betting against success is a losing proposition, and causing one-time opponents to want to be on their side. Presidents can also build a professional reputation by effectively using the bully pulpit to make persuasive arguments to voters, praise and defend those who want to act in ways they approve, and discourage negative actions through criticism or implied threats. Conversely, presidents can lose professional reputation by being passive, taking inconsistent positions, or failing to deliver on promises and threats.⁷

Making Decisions to Maximize Power

Every decision a president makes can affect their ability to make decisions later. A given decision can build professional reputation or destroy it, make others want to cooperate with the president in the future or not, and convince would-be allies that the president will throw them under the bus. Presidential actions can also affect the public's support for the president and make people think they risk loss of public support if they cross him.

A president's decisions are not isolated events; those taken in one area (for example, economic policy) can affect the president's power in other areas (for example, foreign policy, education, or environment). It's easy to see why: potential collaborators who see that a president has a reputation for ineffectiveness in one policy area will hesitate to rely on that president in another area. Nor will they respect a president who goes back on his word or embarrasses those who have joined with him. On the other hand, many important actors will want to go along with a president known as a reliable bargaining partner and a reliable ally.

Presidents, therefore, need to make every decision with an eye toward its effect on their future ability to persuade and bargain. They can't afford to make decisions that exhaust their credit, disillusion their allies, or make others indifferent to what they think or want. President Richard Nixon provides a negative example: he resigned in 1974 in the wake of the Watergate scandal, not because he was

embarrassed by the continuing revelations but because he could no longer govern. It was clear to both allies and adversaries that he was unable to deliver on his promises or back up his threats.

Neustadt's argument about the importance of presidential power can be unsettling. Some may ask, Does this imply that presidents shouldn't care about good policy, and instead work to enhance their own prospects? Neustadt's answer is no, since goal attainment and good outcomes help build a president's professional reputation. But the argument strongly suggests that presidents should consider whether a given decision is likely to open up or close down the possibility of effective action later, whether on similar or unrelated issues.

How This Applies to Chiefs

No matter what their backgrounds, chiefs must think and act politically to be effective, even if their core concerns are educational.

What can chiefs learn from this?⁸ Chiefs are often education professionals who care most about teaching and learning. This paper's message is that no matter what their backgrounds, chiefs must think and act politically to be effective, even if their core concerns are educational. Chiefs can't and shouldn't always act as if they are presidents, but they can fully understand their own advantages and think hard about how to bargain effectively with others in the state capital and in school districts. This section suggests how chiefs might enhance their power by using their authorities as the basis for bargaining with others they would influence, building their professional reputation, and approaching every decision as an opportunity to maximize their power.

Bargaining

Every chief must understand their combination of powers, traditions, institutional constraints, and political issues. Some chiefs can issue policies and propose legislation directly while others must get the approval of their state boards of education. Chiefs also answer to different masters: some are elected by the people, others are appointed by the governor, others by their state board of education; and still others by combinations of state and local officials (see [NASBE](#), January 2017). These institutional factors help determine whom a chief must listen to and persuade, but none of them guarantees or prevents chiefs from developing influence. For example, elected chiefs, who at first glance look more autonomous, must depend on narrow constituencies and struggle to gain the attention of the governor and the legislature. Some appointed chiefs, who look most constrained by depending on one or a few individuals for their jobs, have nonetheless led the governor or state board that officially oversees them.⁹

Differences in state political structure will pose different challenges and will affect chiefs' tactical priorities. Nevertheless, all chiefs can make consequential decisions and enhance their power above and beyond their formal legal status.

Some of the decisions a chief can make affect events in the state capitol, for example:

- Proposing new legislation or amendments to existing bills.
- Issuing and amending regulations.
- Appointing deputies.
- Approving annual state allocations to districts.
- Proposing the state education agency (SEA) annual budget.

Other decisions affect districts and schools, for example:

- Administering statewide policies, including on accountability, standards, or instructional technology.
- Approving discretionary grants to districts and state contracts for services.
- Approving local plans for implementation of federal programs, including Title I and Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Submitting state plans for federal program implementation.
- Accrediting institutions, for example, teacher training programs.

To be effective, chiefs must assemble coalitions for positive actions and prevent others from building coalitions against them. To be powerful, a chief will always need to persuade.

In many states, chiefs are gaining additional powers to designate schools and districts for special scrutiny, or even to take over groups of schools, assign schools to new operators, or bypass district governance in favor of control by mayors or state appointees.

On their own, none of these powers is likely to be enough for chiefs to have definitive influence over the many state and local actors whose cooperation they require. To be effective in any setting, chiefs must assemble coalitions

for positive actions and prevent others from building coalitions against them. The cast of characters and the issues will vary over time and between the state and local levels, but to be powerful a chief will always need to persuade.

State Level. Chiefs need to bargain with members of the state board, legislators, the governor, their own staff, and with the heads of other state agencies. Governors and legislators are more publicly visible than chiefs and hold the keys to expanding chiefs' legal and budgetary powers: they need to understand how a given action will help chiefs, and chiefs need to know enough about those parties' interests to formulate proposals that will attract them.

With few exceptions, chiefs must work with their state boards. As we learned from our interviews, these relationships can be a source of chaos as chiefs respond to the diverse concerns of board members from different constituencies and different parts of the state. But relationships can also be strong sources of support if a chief can define priorities and initiatives that help board members see beyond parochial concerns. As chiefs told us, most state board members want to do good for schools and students, and are open to persuasion. Influential chiefs use their expertise and breadth of perspective to set overarching agendas for the board. In states like California, with strong state board chairs, chiefs can also have valuable but independent-minded allies.¹⁰ Savvy chiefs also work to understand what individual board members care most about, and demonstrate interest without letting these concerns take up all their time.

Current and former chiefs often told us that people coming into office typically spend too little time with legislators, mainly when defusing a crisis or trying to block a bad idea. As they explained, chiefs can't expect legislators to support them simply on the basis of position or expertise. Moreover, legislators often want the chief's support. Former chiefs told us of instances where legislators would seek a statement for or against a bill. One said it created opportunities to visit, learn what mattered to individual legislators, educate them on issues, and identify areas of mutual interest. Chiefs don't require a White House staff to blanket the legislature with phone calls and negotiate on every bill under consideration. But they can use their own time and that of a few key aides and external allies to decide when intervention is possible and what kinds of deals can be made.

Chiefs must know when they will challenge and when they will go along with the teachers union and the school board associations. Chiefs need decent working relations with these groups, but to be influential they must not be “in their pockets.” Important initiatives are often possible only if the chief can build coalitions that can reduce the dominance of these groups and lead them to make compromises. This is successful only if the chief can attract powerful allies that might previously have stayed on the sidelines.

The exact combination of state-level interest groups with which a chief can bargain will vary. Unions and school board associations are always important but even they differ in agenda, control of legislators, skill, and most importantly, divisibility. Rivalries sometimes exist between unions and between rural and urban school boards. Not all teachers agree completely with their union organizations, and some school board members are much more open than others to reform ideas.

As a politically savvy veteran told us, chiefs need to know where the possible fissures in such groups are, and whether some members of those groups might become their allies on certain matters. Some chiefs, understanding that junior teachers have distinctive pay and job security interests, have built teacher support for pay flexibility, for example, based on scarcity of skills or demonstrated potential. Others have gained teacher support for school-based hiring and pay-setting based on teachers’ desire to enhance their own bargaining power.

Chiefs also need to assess their allies—whether within the K–12 community or in other parts of state government—to know what issues are central to them and what they are willing to do as part of a coalition. Chiefs who have built state-level coalitions to support important new legislation have told us that few of their allies cared equally about everything in a key bill. For example, teachers and stakeholders from business and higher education might all support a bill to strengthen math and science education, but for different reasons. A chief pulling together such a coalition must know what provisions each ally cares about the most, what else they will stand up for to keep faith with others, and what might drive them to withdraw. In the next section we will explain how some chiefs have gained new leverage on K–12 problems by joining with other state agency heads concerned with economic development and workforce readiness.

Less experienced chiefs might think that issues of general import—inequities, inefficiencies, and state economic growth—are what will bind coalitions together. But most soon learn that an initiative in the broad public interest can succeed only if it draws support from groups that care only about particular elements.

Chiefs who want to make a difference need to cultivate relationships with local unions and school boards, but they can also make allies of local civic, higher education, and foundation leaders.

Local level. The players are different when chiefs try to influence localities, but the dynamics are similar. Localities have their own politics, often with a few groups firmly in control and others discouraged or kept on the sidelines. Chiefs who want to make a difference need to cultivate relationships with local unions and school boards, but they can also make allies of local civic, higher education, and foundation leaders.

Current and future chiefs told us rich stories about influencing localities. Some took advantage of the annual Title I planning process to call districts’ attention to issues and press for changes: “Just how will you use your Title I money to improve the nine schools in your district that have been at the bottom for years? What assurance can you give that they are getting a fair share of local funds and can keep good teachers?” Chiefs sometimes made these questions public to stimulate local pressure for change. Though chiefs know they will ultimately approve local proposals, veteran leaders told us that a lot can be accomplished by sending a first draft back to a district with specific critiques and suggestions.

ESSA offers chiefs an opportunity to set priorities and challenge localities to rethink the ways they support schools for disadvantaged children.

As this is written, state policies to implement ESSA, the largest federal K–12 funding program, are being developed. Experienced chiefs say this is an opportunity second only to the state Race to the Top planning process for chiefs to set priorities and challenge localities to rethink the ways they support schools for disadvantaged children. One former chief frankly stated that “a lot of chiefs are missing the opportunity, some by convening 100-person task forces

that are sure to favor a little bit of everything, and others by doing it all alone, issuing guidance that localities aren’t likely to understand.” Most worry that in the absence of substantive leadership, states will eschew using many of the available freedoms and fall back to the *status quo ante* ESSA.¹¹

Several chiefs we spoke with also made aggressive use of state discretionary grant funds for everything from technology purchases to teacher professional development. As one said, “With these grants I run the biggest educational foundation in the state. If I don’t ask questions and attach questions, I’m squandering opportunities to exert influence on behalf of kids and schools in need.” Another said the state approved contracts for everything from technical assistance to testing and data analysis. Just by asking questions or inserting a few words in an RFP or contract, chiefs can affect who works for the state and ensure they deliver on the chief’s goals. Another said, “Chiefs seem oblivious to the power of the purse.” Even when funds are allocated by formula, the chief can affect priorities by negotiating with localities before approving spending plans.

In some cases, chiefs visited localities and held frank conversations with education, business, and government leaders about data—local elementary school test scores, graduation and college-going rates, and youth unemployment—pointing out the need for school improvement initiatives and leading conversations about what was possible. Chiefs also heard about needed relief from state regulations and greater spending flexibility, and promised flexibility in response to local initiative.

Chiefs can also learn a lot from local teachers and school leaders about how state policies get in their way and what kinds of help would make a difference. A recent RAND report shows how a chief and state department built grassroots educator support for (and avoided fear-based resistance to) standards-aligned instructional practices.¹²

An outstanding example of chief-brokered local initiatives comes from Louisiana. A national technology company wanted to locate a facility in a small city, and local leaders wanted the jobs and cash flow that it would bring. However, the company’s concern about the quality of local schools became a sticking point until the chief guaranteed that several new charter schools could be started locally to serve both resident and incoming families. Local actors would not have been able to accomplish this on their own (and might not even have been able to agree on a new schools plan), so the chief’s brokerage of a deal benefited all parties.

The new takeover powers based on state law are a major addition to chief’s resources, but they don’t eliminate the need to build alliances and bargain at both state and local levels.¹³ Some laws require approval by the legislature, others by the state board. These approvals are seldom automatic, especially if unions, parent-teacher associations, and school boards don’t like them. Regardless of what the law says, chiefs might need support from the governor to withstand any backlash against proposed actions from affected localities.

Chiefs also increasingly use these authorities to intervene in low-performing schools and districts to enhance their bargaining power by suggesting initiatives districts could take to stave off state action. (Initiatives can include reallocations of funds, school transformation, and attacking problems like teacher absenteeism.)

Though not all districts approached in this way will respond positively, some states' experiences (for example, Georgia's with Atlanta) suggest that ambitious local leaders can turn the prospect of state action into real local action. Similarly, Louisiana's high-profile takeover of New Orleans schools gave then-chief Paul Pastorek something to discuss with other lagging localities like Baton Rouge and Shreveport, and to promote locally initiated transformation strategies in East Baton Rouge and Jefferson Parish.

Of course, chiefs can overuse such authorities. As Ashley Jochim's earlier paper in this series shows, shortages of human resources and technical capacity can limit the number of schools or districts in which a state can work.¹⁴ Even in states with hundreds of districts, a chief can bargain with and closely monitor a few, chosen for their size, prominence, and example value.

Sometimes not using a power can create more change than using it, and sometimes widespread use of a power can lead to it being taken away. Chiefs need to use the possibility of employing their powers as leverage in bargaining.

Local leaders aren't likely to be impressed by threats that chiefs obviously can't follow through on. Moreover, too much use of formal authorities can trigger opponents to press their cause with state legislators or the governor, who themselves are vulnerable to getting caught up in shifting political winds. In Louisiana, for example, the Legislature strongly supported the state Recovery School District's actions in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, but use of the same authority statewide was much more controversial.

Like presidents, chiefs need to pick and choose which actions will be the most effective in advancing their goals, and which ones will be politically sustainable. Sometimes not using a power can create more change than using it, and sometimes widespread use of a power can lead to it being taken away. Like presidents, chiefs need to use the possibility of employing their powers as leverage in bargaining.

However, chiefs should think twice, or a dozen times, before saying they will not use a power at all. A power foresworn is of no use at all, but a power not yet used is always a source of leverage.¹⁵ Some chiefs have weakened their own position by telling local reformers, "Your district meets the criterion for state action, but I have no intention of initiating a takeover," instead of, "I won't use my takeover powers now, seeing that you have ambitious improvement plans, and I won't in the future if you do all that you propose."

Professional Reputation

A chief can cultivate a kind of professional reputation for being passive, benign, and no trouble to anyone. However, chiefs with that reputation can't expect anyone to pay much attention to what they say; people wouldn't have any incentive to change their behavior to accommodate that chief. To build a personal reputation for effectiveness, a chief must have goals—strong and specific desires to build something new or to change the status quo—and communicate them to those affected or to who may serve as a source of support. That means a chief cannot avoid pressing for actions that imply changes in laws, rules, allocations of money, or performance of organizations. A person with goals will always be in tension with somebody, and must therefore work to build support for particular actions.

An influential chief must have a substantive agenda that's ambitious enough to draw in supporters from the sidelines. However, the agenda shouldn't be just a product of the chief's

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imagination or copied from elsewhere. The chief needs to start with some core ideas but learn how to talk about them, and what to emphasize, during quiet discussions with potential allies.

Chiefs we interviewed cited the adoption of the Colorado Growth Model (which compares individual students' annual growth with those of students statewide who had started the academic year with the same test scores) as an example of smart, sensitive, but persistent agenda-setting. Former Colorado chief Dwight Jones, supported by extremely able SEA staff members and consultants, discussed the model throughout the state and learned how to explain it as a solution to a problem inherent in past status-based measures of student performance in ways that laymen and educators could support. A more recent example of successful agenda-setting is Louisiana's rich program of support for standards-aligned instruction.¹⁶

Chiefs need to decide what they will be held accountable for, and therefore shouldn't set goals that are wildly inconsistent with realities, whether human, financial, or political. In setting goals, chiefs should know from where they will get automatic support and opposition, and where they might make allies of individuals and groups that are on the fence or simply not engaged.

Some chiefs and local superintendents consider making preemptive concessions or giving gifts to powerful interest groups—most frequently wage increases to teachers—as an opening move. Neustadt's analysis, and the negative experiences of leaders who have made such moves, suggest that chiefs should use these benefits in bargaining, making them contingent on specific actions by the other party. Once unions and other groups have a benefit, they see no reason to compensate the chief retroactively. In general, chiefs build their reputations through forthright negotiation, not sacrificial offerings.

Chiefs don't gain much professional reputation for only doing what's easy, and they gain the most by succeeding when it looked like they would fail.

Willingness to fight for what one wants and win against opposition are key elements of professional reputation. Chiefs need to be regarded as determined, resourceful, and difficult to keep down. Chiefs, like presidents, don't gain much professional reputation for only doing what's easy, and they gain the most by succeeding when it looked like they would fail. Wins that build professional reputation take time and almost always involve recovering from setbacks.

Chiefs can take some actions that no one seriously opposes. Declaring a "say thanks to your teacher" day or announcing a third-grade reading guarantee are important, and the chief's efforts are likely to be crowned with success on the first try. However, important actions involving state spending levels, reallocation of budgets, de-emphasizing one element of the curriculum to emphasize another, or accountability systems often fail the first time. On some topics, success can come only after failures.

Other than being personally resilient, how does a chief build a professional reputation for overcoming obstacles and defeats? Chiefs must be prepared to persist through failure. Neustadt would suggest three ways:

- Play the long game in coalition building and don't give up simply because you can't win today.
- Create new allies by mentoring and developing the careers of those who are likely to hold positions of power in the future.
- Develop and conspicuously exercise your own political skills.

Building Coalitions

Big changes take time. Chiefs who see the need for new state legislation or major transformations of the teaching force can't expect to succeed immediately. Like presidents, they must put an idea on the table, expect some hard knocks, but work to build a winning coalition for it over time. That's what it means to be resilient.

Big changes take time. Chiefs must put an idea on the table, expect some hard knocks, but work to build a winning coalition for it over time. That's what it means to be resilient.

Chiefs in some states are likely to be advised to avoid anything that unions or school boards would oppose. Of course, there are times when chiefs should avoid provoking opposition from such groups. But doing some things despite their opposition, or building other sources of support and persuading original opponents that change is inevitable, is a great reputation builder. Many of the veteran chiefs we interviewed admitted that successful brokerage of their state's Race to the Top proposal had increased their influence overall.

Accomplishing something difficult almost always involves finding or energizing new allies. The status quo with respect to any issue exists for two reasons: first, because some important interests support it, and second, because other groups that might benefit from different arrangements have acquiesced.

For example, school boards and teachers unions might have agreed that only education school graduates can be certified to teach math and science. Higher education and the business community might wish students were much better prepared in those fields, and might, if motivated and led, join a chief-led coalition for opening up new pathways allowing experienced mathematicians, scientists, and engineers to move laterally into teaching. A chief who seeks support from such groups might overcome opposition and accomplish something considered nearly impossible.

Chiefs can develop unconventional sources of support for actions they are technically empowered to take but that traditional education interest groups oppose. Chiefs have, for example, joined forces with local mayors and philanthropic communities before taking over a city's schools. Chiefs might also establish common cause on some issues with local economic development authorities or higher education institutions.

Another way chiefs can succeed against the odds is to build new coalitions in the state capitol. Chiefs can propose and argue for education-specific legislation, but the results are typically determined by the effectiveness of interest groups and the loyalties of education committee members, themselves often teachers union or school board members.

Some savvy chiefs have formed alliances with other state agency heads to address issues that were too broad for any of them to resolve alone. By forming coalitions around new ideas for workforce development and job creation, chiefs (and their fellow agency heads) have gained new leverage, often bypassing political blockages that had kept each in check. As one chief told us, a focus on workforce development led to improvements in high school curricula, community college programs, business hiring and training policies, and local governments' zoning and public service planning. Another chief explained how a multi-departmental workforce development initiative led to collaborative hiring and teacher sharing among rural districts, regional career academies, and much stronger dual credit agreements between school districts and community colleges.

As one former chief said, "The education reform debate—charters, common core, labor management fights—had become stale. A broader focus and new allies let us act on behalf of kids again." Other chiefs have explored joining with other cabinet members on a bill allowing mayors to combine money for schools and social services as part of developing a citywide youth policy.

For any chief, the governor is an extremely important ally. Some chiefs might find their governors indifferent about education or unwilling for electoral purposes to rock the boat.¹⁷ But many governors appreciate having state agency heads who accomplish the unexpected, solve problems, and work across institutional lines. They might be persuaded to support an action they hadn't previously contemplated. In such cases, even if governors take public credit for a new initiative, the chief's stature and professional reputation will grow. This holds true even if the chief isn't appointed by the governor.

Other chiefs told us of building coalitions against the possibility that the governor would attack them. One highly successful chief built strong support among local school boards and members of the state board who, though appointed by the governor, had terms longer than his. It is unlikely that this individual could have survived if the governor had been eligible for another term, or had the authority to fire the chief unilaterally. But this story illustrates what coalition building can accomplish.

Chiefs who can work outside the box substantively and politically can gain a reputation for getting things done. By pulling together broader coalitions than what normally controls education policy, chiefs can expand the horizons of possibility.

Developing new coalitions takes time and sustained attention. That's where chiefs prove their tenacity—putting in the time, tending the new alliances, living with the risks and criticism, and working at proposals until they can pass.

Chiefs who can work outside the box substantively and politically can gain a reputation for getting things done. By pulling together broader coalitions than what normally controls education policy, chiefs can expand the horizons of possibility. This is possible because the other new coalition partners—mayors, business, other Cabinet members—also benefit.

Creating Allies

Chiefs can also accomplish the unexpected by supporting others who are acting on their own to pursue initiatives the chiefs want to succeed. No matter how ambitious their goals are, chiefs are likely to find allies here and there in state and local government and among professional educators, including groups of teachers whose views and interests may not be represented by their union or school board.

This is the case whether they focus on transforming opportunities for big-city children, promoting technological innovation, improving incentives for teachers, strengthening accountability, promoting (or discouraging) charter schools, improving preparation for college, and so on. Chiefs can build their reputations by helping allies pursue goals they have in common.

Most chiefs know about local superintendents and board members who wanted to make important changes in their districts but faced opposition. Chiefs told us about traveling to such a locality, talking to civic leaders and newspapers about the need for dramatic improvements in schools, and publicly praising local reformers' efforts. Some even convened meetings with the mayor and other city officials, business leaders, and neighborhood representatives to make the case for particular actions and to elicit pledges of support.

In doing these things, some chiefs were able to promise modest state grants to lubricate the effort. But many simply relied on their status as head of the state's education system as a warrant for drawing attention to particular problems, convening groups, and pressing for action. In states where the chief has authority to intervene in local schools, chiefs can get the attention of civic and government leaders even without mentioning all the possibilities. The threat of state action is enough to strengthen the hands of local reformers who can press local leadership to enact effective reforms.

Chiefs can also support their local allies in the state Capitol. One chief urged SEA regulators to interpret rules in ways that would not interfere with a promising reform strategy in a key city. Others sponsored technical legislation to eliminate potential regulatory conflicts affecting local reformers.

Another worked with the governor to propose a large number of technical amendments and statements of legislative intent, all in support of reform in a struggling city.

Finally, chiefs frequently represent the interests of key localities in Washington, D.C., pressing for favorable interpretations of Title I or IDEA regulations, or making the case for localities seeking competitive grants. In doing this, chiefs can be selective and focus their energy behind localities that are pursuing ambitious and promising strategies. As chiefs told us, they feel a duty to represent all their localities, but how they do that, and how much time and energy to devote to a particular issue, should reflect their priorities.

Chiefs prepare to win at the long game of slowly building support for important actions by creating allies through mentoring. Many chiefs we interviewed were aware of this, taking pains to identify local superintendents who were competent and ambitious, making public comments to enhance those the superintendents' current status, and establishing mentoring arrangements. Chiefs mentor others through one-to-one contact, but also by establishing cohort groups of mentees (for example, local superintendents, outstanding SEA staff members) who meet and discuss issues and tactics, and by arranging shadowing arrangements for less experienced mentees to work with accomplished district or state leaders. Some chiefs also established mentoring relationships with non-educators who hoped to become district or state leaders.

Though mentor-chiefs are relatively rare, some have had outstanding results. Paul Pastorek selected John White as head of the Louisiana Recovery School District, which operated the majority of New Orleans schools, and then prepared White to succeed him as chief. Terry Holliday of Kentucky mentored superintendents all over the state. Perhaps the most vivid example of a mentor-chief was at the local level, where New York City Public Schools Chancellor Joel Klein mentored at least six people who became big-city superintendents (Chris Cerf, John White, Andrés Alonso, Garth Harries, Cami Anderson, and Paymon Rouhanifard); to date at least two, White and Cerf, have also become state chiefs.

Chiefs are unlikely to achieve all of their most important goals during their own term of office. Those who groom successors and leaders for other positions can have influence after they leave.

Chiefs who groom successors and leaders for other positions can have influence after they leave office. Like presidents, chiefs are unlikely to achieve all of their most important goals during their own term of office, even if it is a long one. Though it's not always possible to hand the job directly to the best-prepared person, chiefs can influence the more distant future by populating the candidate pool with their mentees. Only a few chiefs have done this; [Chiefs for Change](#) is also encouraging current and former chiefs to mentor aspiring ones.

Experienced chiefs understand that strategies to improve schools are complex and take time. Few expect to see “the promised land” during their tenure, and hope that the best of their initiatives will continue. Those we spoke with hoped clarity about goals and strategies would help coalition partners pick up the work, and that future chiefs would build on progress rather than rejecting all that went before. One chief told us about building a task force to work across state agencies on economic development, workforce preparation, and retraining mid-career workers threatened by technological change. This task force was commissioned to work for several years and to present its final report after the current governor, and likely the chief, left office. “We wanted to make it easy for a new governor to see a way to make progress right away. This was far better than doing something quickly that we could take credit for but wouldn't last.”

Building and Demonstrating Skill

Many of the actions described above require judgment and personal touch: chiefs who build their professional reputations by being persistent and imaginative in pursuing their goals must also be able

to assess situations, anticipate others' reactions, manage conflict, and deal smoothly with people. Thus, tenacity and skill, though conceptually different, are often found together in practice.

There are, however, some aspects of skill not touched on above. Chiefs need to understand the interests of others well enough to frame plausible appeals and offer workable bargains. They also need to know their potential opponents well enough to take actions that might divide them. No chief can be in office for very long without knowing what agendas unions and school board associations support, and what they will hotly oppose. It takes more skill and effort, however, to know where key groups' internal divisions are, distinguish between bluffs and earnest threats of action, and understand what trades they will consider.

Chiefs also need to pay attention when new local school board members are elected on platforms other than defending the status quo. Some local board members, in big cities and smaller places alike, have members who think the district schools need to do a better job, whether in general or for particular groups. Chiefs need to be alert to the possibilities for innovation in such localities, and look for ways to help, whether by reinforcing members' messages, helping them build allies, or fixing state regulatory snags.

Recognizing these opportunities, building working relationships with key local board members and others who can help them, and discriminating between forms of state action that can help and those that can cause a local firestorm require skill. They also require time and attention: the chief is getting to know people, looking for opportunities, and reaching agreements about how to act and how local allies will respond.

Finally, chiefs need to make sure others keep bargains with them. Take, for example, a district that amended its ESSA application in a negotiation with the chief. Someone in the chief's office must regularly ask the district for evidence that it is following through. If the district is not following through, it triggers a call from the chief. Some bargaining partners will backslide nonetheless; the chief must communicate consequences for future bargaining over grants or other benefits under the chief's control.

The remainder of this section explores three ways chiefs can build and demonstrate skill: controlling subordinates, controlling their own time, and using their personal prestige.

Controlling Subordinates. The vast majority of chiefs are heads of their state education agency, and thus inherit many employees. Virtually all of these employees have their own career tracks and loyalties. Some are long-time teachers union members, district central office staff, or specialists in administration of federal programs. These facts can affect whether different individuals will promote, ignore, or work against the chief's initiatives. As one former chief recalled, "The chief can't do much if he accepts it when others say 'can't.' Your bureaucrats might be good at their jobs but they can trap you because they have tunnel vision and are always searching for constraints. Finding reasons why something can't be done is their basis of influence, but you don't want to be captured."

Many chiefs try to restructure their agencies, change incentives, and reorient staff. CRPE's website has a set of resources on how this might be done.¹⁸

Chiefs can typically make only a few new appointments to top staff positions. These individuals must be the ones to represent the chief's priorities to the legislature, districts, and advocacy groups. Experienced chiefs hire people whose primary motivation is to help and extend influence. If a potential staff member is an admired educator or known to key groups, all the better. But Paul Pastorek in Louisiana demonstrated the value of hiring professional staff people (for example, a former White House Fellow) who knew education issues but were dedicated to advancing the chief's priorities and influence.

Experienced chiefs described using three kinds of skills in dealing with subordinate staff. First, they communicate, explicitly and often, not expecting staff members to automatically know about or understand what the chief's goals are. Second, they identify incumbent staff members who show real interest in the chief's priorities and find ways to use their skills through special assignments, promotions, and the like. Third, they pay attention to staff statements and actions in public and deal directly with any clear cases of sabotage. With tenured staff this can involve meetings, reprimands, and memos for the record. With other staff, it can involve second chances under the threat of firing. This last option has a cost—lost skills and possible opposition from the external groups with whom the errant staff member is connected—but is also highly effective and needn't be used often.

Chiefs should be extremely careful about making an appointment to appease a particular group. As one warned, "One thing you know about such a person is that he or she will never really work for you."

Controlling the Chief's Own Time. Many chiefs, especially those from the largest states, report that they could spend every waking minute in regularly scheduled meetings within the SEA, with unions and other highly organized groups, with federal regulators, litigants, and in trips to show the state's commitment to particular local school systems. Governors can also occasionally require chiefs to attend meetings and interact with groups. All these activities are important; no chief can be both influential and reclusive. But chiefs need to guard time for their own initiatives—to formulate ideas, get to know other state Cabinet officers and launch joint initiatives, look for allies in the legislature, and get to know superintendents, mayors, and other key actors in localities ripe for transformation.

Finding this time can be difficult; groups accustomed to frequent meetings to present their own views and grievances will complain.¹⁹ However, as one chief told us, "Spending all your time in mandatory meetings prevents you doing anything...which is exactly why [those groups] want to dominate your time."

Chiefs, like presidents, need to control their calendar, often via a gatekeeper who protects blocks of time the chief has set aside to work on their own initiatives.

Like any executive, how chiefs use their time signals their priorities. Chiefs committed to visiting every school district in the state each year can accomplish some things, but they must then give up on spending much time with legislators and other state agency heads. Much the same is true for chiefs who feel they must meet with a list of ten or twenty interest groups every few weeks. There is no single right way for a chief to use time, but extreme commitments to one activity push out others.

Chiefs whose states have a relatively small number of school districts have an advantage compared to those in states with hundreds. However, all chiefs need to set priorities and emphasize relationships with districts that stand out for some reason: their problems are the most egregious, local politics are most ripe for change, many other districts will be affected by their example. As one former chief said, "There is no clearer way to communicate your priorities than to be obviously willing to say yes and no" to demands for time.

Using Personal Prestige. When it comes to turning prestige into power, chiefs are not in the same ballpark as presidents. Chiefs can seldom talk over the heads of others in the state Capitol to mobilize voters. Presidents can at least try to do this, but they can also fail.

Presidents are constantly covered by the media; everyone in the country has an opinion about them, so presidents can readily turn popularity into votes. Chiefs are seldom well known or covered by the media, and though their title commands respect, citizens seldom turn to chiefs for cues about what to think or how to vote. Even when chiefs do accomplish something notable, credit often goes to the governor.

A few chiefs (for example, John White in Louisiana, Mitchell Chester in Massachusetts) have public images and some following from their earlier careers. This can translate to an unusual, but at most moderate, degree of prestige-derived influence over others.

Still, chiefs can make arguments in public and try to educate citizens about issues under their purview, for example, the links between spending and school quality, or the desirability of standards, testing, charter schools, and the like.

If chiefs were to follow Neustadt exactly, they would not neglect the key leadership function of making meaning for issues and events. A chief's ability, for example, to educate citizens about the link between rigorous elementary mathematics courses and college readiness, or to make professional buzzwords meaningful, is a key resource. A chief who can transcend a discussion about accountability by explaining that the goal is to make sure no child wastes a year in an environment where they are not likely to learn will have an advantage in bargaining and coalition building.

We have discussed how reframing issues (for example, graduation rates as factors in economic development, rather than merely as problems to be fixed within the K–12 system) can create new leverage and attract new sources of support. Explaining particular ideas and events in detail also influences grassroots educators whose interest in issues—student safety, bullying, coding, overuse of suspensions—relates to what people in power are talking about.²⁰

Chiefs can also develop and use their prestige as a resource in particular localities. As discussed previously, chiefs' declarations about the performance of local schools, the need for improvement, or the possibility of state takeover can make news and put pressure on local officials.

To maximize influence via prestige, chiefs should issue press releases about their actions, including legislative testimony and issue reports. They should hold press conferences and give speeches on their priorities whenever possible. They should seek to have a public image and to be identified as the person leading the fight for some goal (for example, standards, accountability, innovation). And, of course, chiefs should avoid negative publicity based on their personal behavior.

But in the long run, chiefs are more likely to exercise influence with skillful use of their formal powers, their central position in multiple information networks, and their professional reputation, than through their prestige.

Chiefs who were career educators might consider themselves novices in using such skills. Though these skills are partly innate, they are also learnable. Lawyers are trained to assess their own bargaining advantages and those of their opponents, and to anticipate possible moves by all parties. Business leaders are taught how to control subordinates and to guard time for their own initiatives. Current and aspiring chiefs can learn these skills even if they weren't born with them. At the end of this paper we point out some existing and potential initiatives that can help current and future chiefs learn the skills they need to maximize their influence.

Making Decisions to Maximize Power

Chiefs who work hard on goals, tenacity, professional reputation, and skills are likely to have a great deal of power. Does Neustadt's exhortation to a president to "always to see his power stakes" add anything to what has been discussed here? The answer is yes, a little. Neustadt urges presidents to consider the future implications of present decisions, and not to delegate thinking about their power stakes to anyone else. His exhortation has some obvious implications:

Don't make decisions that:

- Shock, disillusion, or undermine your allies.
- Exhaust your credit so that you are just a caretaker in the future.
- Are likely to be overturned quickly by the legislature or courts.

- Assume that other officials will take positions that can cost them their jobs.
- Are likely to get you fired.
- Give mixed signals to your subordinates.

Do make decisions that:

- Will leave your allies wanting to work with you again.
- Lead incrementally to a string of successes that you can sustain by future decisions.
- If challenged in court or the legislature are likely to be sustained (thus further weakening opponents).
- Share credit and build up the support bases of those you want to work in the future.
- Buttress support for the governor or whomever appoints you.
- Make it clear what your subordinates and people in localities should do.

These exhortations are obvious, but some chiefs (and presidents) can run afoul of them. Some chiefs gain a reputation for agreeing with the last person they saw, or for making agreements one day and acting unpredictably the next. Others move and forget to bring their supporters along. In the past decade, a chief in Idaho, against the advice of important allies, promoted three initiatives on accountability, teacher careers, and technology use that voters considered excessively harsh and mean-spirited. After his initiatives were voted down resoundingly, the once highly influential chief had lost his professional reputation and could accomplish little. Others insult or outrage legislators: in Washington state, a chief publicly took an adversarial position against the legislative majority on state funding, buttressing his support from within the K–12 system but abandoning any chance of future legislative successes. Another persisted in pressing for a teacher evaluation plan long after it had become politically unviable; he lost his job as a result.

Neustadt documents similar instances of presidents getting in their own way by giving subordinates mixed messages and then being horrified by what happens next, taking actions that once invalidated by the Supreme Court they could never threaten to take again, and making statements that undermined their own bargaining positions.

There are also positive examples of chiefs carefully assembling coalitions in support of bold Race to the Top Proposals, building consensus on behalf of higher standards, and incrementally building support for charter schools. In such cases, chiefs were in stronger positions after these decisions were made than before. In contrast to chiefs who would never return to a subject again after defeat, these chiefs built power by keeping coalitions together and coming back better prepared than the last time.

Beyond these generalities, Neustadt’s exhortation urges a long-term approach to agenda-setting and action. Chiefs need to see any decision as one in a continuing series. When blocked in one area of policy, they must succeed in another to continue improving their positions. If the forces are against a chief on teacher evaluation, they can work elsewhere, for example, on improving math and science instruction. Success there might gain him allies (business, higher education) who would strengthen his hand on teacher evaluation. Similarly, some chiefs determined to improve inner city schools have found one community responsive and others intractable. They focused on the first and deferred the second, expecting that success in one place could open up new possibilities in other localities.

Decision-making for important legislative proposals have critical sequels; many bills can be passed only after multiple legislative cycles in which their sponsors gradually refine the language and gain support.

Chiefs who sponsor ambitious bills must make repeated decisions to keep them on the table, but wait to make a major push until the time is right—as events dramatize the need or dedicated opponents leave the legislature.

Chiefs need to judge when simply to frame problems, when to quietly build local support, and when to push hard for action.

Much the same is true of engagement with localities—to preserve their own power chiefs need to judge when simply to frame problems, when to quietly build local support, and when to push hard for action. New state authorities to take over struggling districts and schools make dramatic action possible, but prudent chiefs carefully decide when to criticize without threatening, when to threaten action, and when to take action.

Chiefs who follow these principles—strategically delaying action in one area while pursuing another, aggressively pushing an idea only after they have gathered a potentially winning coalition—are sure to be criticized by single-issue groups for being too cautious, or worse. Chiefs need to be forthright with foundations and advocacy groups about why they are acting in some areas and building toward action in others. Chiefs told us that such groups, including foundations that hope to buy quick action with large grants, also need to consider whether insisting that everything happen fast is in their own long-term interest.

Conclusion

Any chief who says, “This political stuff is not for me,” limits their ability to improve education and serve children.

The traditional vision of the chief as an instructional leader who works mainly within the community of professional educators and stays out of politics is grievously limiting. So is the image of the chief as a pure administrator who works within a fixed institutional structure and sticks to prescribed duties. So, of course, is the image of the chief as ideologue or political careerist who does not know or care about what happens in schools. Chiefs are both educators and politicians; those who know only one aspect of the role need to get out of their comfort zones.

No matter the direction chiefs hope to lead, no matter their thinking on topics like education reform, accountability, and school choice—they will only succeed if they marshal their power and influence.

This paper is a starting point for those who want to make chiefs more effective. No matter the direction chiefs hope to lead, no matter their thinking on topics like education reform, accountability, and school choice—they will only succeed if they marshal their power and influence.

Circumstances in individual states will define chiefs’ problems and opportunities. How chiefs are chosen is one variable: chiefs in states with small numbers of school districts will have options that those in states with hundreds of districts won’t. Governor-appointed chiefs

will have potential allies that others don’t, but also potentially fickle bosses; they, like other chiefs, will need to build other sources of support to survive. Elected chiefs are hard to fire, but they need to build coalitions to reduce dependence on union money and voter turnout. A state’s politics, size, and its district and education authority structure are among the many factors that account for other differences in the challenges chiefs face. But one challenge is uniform: all chiefs face the problem of building freedom of action and finding leverage in their limited formal authorities.

We hope this paper is a resource for current chiefs, aspiring chiefs, and groups offering pre-service training. It is hard to prepare for a role that is not well understood. We believe this way of thinking about the role will help attract and prepare people from inside and outside education who want to do all of the chief’s job, not just a familiar part of it. And we hope this paper will provide a path for effectiveness even among those who find it uncomfortable. Any chief who says, “This political stuff is not for me,” limits their ability to improve education and serve children.

Endnotes

- 1 Ashley Jochim, Betheny Gross, and Paul Hill, [*The SEA of the Future: Maximizing Opportunities Under ESSA*](#) (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, November 2016). We are grateful to Alex Medler for suggesting this “hard vs. soft power” distinction, which ultimately led to this paper.
- 2 Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: the Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1990).
- 3 Daarel Burnette II, [“Steep Learning Curve on K–12 as State Leaders Take New Seats,”](#) *Education Week*, February 14, 2017.
- 4 Neustadt quoting Harry Truman, commenting on the challenges former General Eisenhower would encounter in the presidency. He also quotes Franklin D. Roosevelt, a former Secretary of the Navy: “To change anything in the Navy is like punching a feather bed. You punch it with your right and you punch it with your left until you are finally exhausted, and then you find the damn bed just as it was before you started punching.”
- 5 Neustadt doesn’t argue that the president’s unilateral authorities should never be used. He approvingly quotes Franklin D. Roosevelt telling his aides, “Find me a bill to veto: I want them to remember that I am still around.” However, he points out that Roosevelt wanted to veto one bill only to strengthen his hand in future bargaining with Congress.
- 6 We think Neustadt would agree that any person the president would bargain with also relies on his or her own professional reputation, and that it could be assessed in the same way.
- 7 Thus, for example, analysts claimed that President Obama’s failure to back up his own “red line” declaration on chemical weapons in Syria damaged his professional reputation, both in Washington and with other world leaders.
- 8 Just as Neustadt argued that his book could be useful for executives in other settings, including both government and business, we think this analysis can also be applied to local superintendents. However, drawing implications for local superintendents will require a separate paper.
- 9 On how chiefs’ authorities have grown incrementally, see Dominic Brewer and Joanna Smith, [*Evaluating the Crazy Quilt: Education Governance in California*](#) (Los Angeles, CA: Center on Educational Governance, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California, 2007).
- 10 For an example of unifying agenda-setting, see California State Board Chair Michael Kirst’s article, [“California Must Move Ahead on a New Approach to School Accountability,”](#) *EdSource*, August 26, 2016. For other potentially unifying state board agendas, see Robin Lake, [“Encouraging Districts and Charters to Link Arms to Solve Problems,”](#) National Association of State Boards of Education, January 2017.
- 11 Daarel Burnette II, [“In Some States, a Tug of War Over ESSA Plans,”](#) *Education Week*, December 13, 2016.
- 12 Julia H. Kaufman, Lindsey E. Thompson, and V. Darleen Opfer, [*Creating a Coherent System to Support Instruction Aligned with State Standards: Promising Practices of the Louisiana Department of Education*](#) (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016). Alex Medler has reminded us that grassroots educators can also thwart a chief’s initiative that the vast majority of them fear or oppose. The movement in many states to use student test score gains as major elements in teacher evaluation and pay-setting failed in the face of near-universal teacher opposition. Under teachers’ influence, resistance spread among parents and has since generalized to opposition to testing in general.
- 13 Ashley Jochim, [*Measures of Last Resort: Assessing Strategies for State-Initiated Turnarounds*](#) (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, November 2016).
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Neustadt argues that presidents can maximize their influence by using their hard powers sparingly (firing subordinates, vetoing bills, issuing orders, initiating federal administrative actions), just enough so that everyone he deals with is aware these powers exist and will be used.

- 16 Kaufman, et. al., 2016.
- 17 For governor-appointed chiefs, this relationship can be a two-edged sword: positive if the governor expects to get credit for the chief's action, negative if the governor threatens firing the chief if he takes a particular action.
- 18 See for example, Betheny Gross, Ashley Jochim, et. al, *The SEA of the Future: Building Agency Capacity for Evidence-Based Policy Making* (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2015); Betheny Gross, et. al., *The SEA of the Future: Building the Productivity Infrastructure* (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2014); Patrick Murphy and Ashley Jochim, *The Capacity Challenge: What It Takes for State Education Agencies to Support School Improvement* (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2013); Betheny Gross and Paul Hill, "The State Role in K–12 Education: From Issuing Mandates to Experimentation," *The Harvard Law and Policy Review* 10, no. 2 (2016) 299-326.
- 19 Neustadt discusses President Eisenhower's unprecedented decision not to allow Cabinet members to meet with him whenever they wanted. He and future presidents also let staff members accumulate meeting requests until it was possible to pull together groups that had similar concerns. These changes were not welcome, but once made they were accepted.
- 20 For a discussion of "making meaning" and its implications for presidential influence see Andrew B. Whitford and Jeff Yates, *Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- 21 Adapted from Vincent Scudella, *State Education Governance Models* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2013).

About This Report

Acknowledgments

This paper was funded by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. We thank the Foundation for its support. The ideas presented here are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Foundation. We also thank the past and current state chiefs who provided examples and suggestions on this paper, and Alex Medler and Patrick Murphy for challenging and helpful reviews.

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Through research and policy analysis, CRPE seeks ways to make public education more effective, especially for America's disadvantaged students. We help redesign governance, oversight, and dynamic education delivery systems to make it possible for great educators to do their best work with students and to create a wide range of high-quality public school options for families. Our work emphasizes evidence over posture and confronts hard truths. We search outside the traditional boundaries of public education to find pragmatic, equitable, and promising approaches to address the complex challenges facing public education. Our goal is to create new possibilities for the parents, educators, and public officials who strive to improve America's schools. CRPE is a nonpartisan, self-sustaining organization affiliated with the University of Washington Bothell. Our work is funded through philanthropy, federal grants, and contracts.

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