

ABSTRACT

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Lessons Learned: Parent Policy Feedback and No Child Left Behind

This study investigates the relationship between policy and politics. I propose revisions to the policy feedback cycle to account for varying levels of policy exposure and knowledge and explain changes in attitudes and actions in policy-related and political outcomes. In part one I use data from an original survey to test my revised model. I ask whether parents' school-based policy exposure influences their knowledge, policy-related attitudes, and political outlook. I find that most public school parents have little policy-related knowledge. Low levels of knowledge have different consequences for those whose children attend failing schools and those with children at higher performing institutions. I also find that school-related attitudes and political views vary with exposure to policy sanctions.

Policy sanctions apply only in schools identified for improvement. School status is not randomly assigned, therefore, causal claims about the relationship between status and school-based and political outcomes must be made with caution. In part two, I present the results of a survey experiment designed to assess the potential for sanctions to influence the target population's views toward school and government. Parents in schools identified for improvement either receive additional policy-relevant information prior to completing an attitudinal survey or not. Treatment parents are more likely than parents in the control group to express policy familiarity and correctly identify the policy status of their child's school. Treatment parents are also more likely to hold negative views about the state of resources, tests and standards in our schools and disapprove of federal involvement in education. The treatment has a positive effect on subjects' internal efficacy. Focus groups with a diverse group of Seattle parents add context to both empirical pieces of the dissertation.

“Government policies can play a crucial role in shaping the things publics believe and want, the ways citizens view themselves and others, and how they understand and act toward the political system” (Mettler and Soss 2004). This study provides greater insight into the influence of policy exposure and knowledge on these attitudinal and behavioral effects. Findings hint that greater attention to policy framing and implementation may encourage civic and political participation.