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Introduction: What We Know About Our Schools

By Michael J. Boskin

The Tennenbaum Program for Fact-Based Policy gathers, analyzes, and disseminates facts and data on the nation's most highly debated policy issues. It generates essays by prominent experts from diverse policy perspectives, such as those influential in different political parties. It then provides easy-to-digest shorter written summaries and videos in order to disseminate reliable information to the broader public. The topics are chosen based on nationally representative surveys conducted by YouGov soliciting the policy areas where respondents believe they would most benefit from receiving more accurate and reliable information and analysis.

The Hoover Institution's Tennenbaum Program for Fact-Based Policy is pleased to present *What We Know About Our Schools*, a comprehensive essay by Nora Gordon of Georgetown University and Paul E. Peterson of Harvard University. The quality of K-12 education is a prime determinant of not only the success of each individual, group, and cohort, but the nation's economic prosperity, for it determines the quality of our future labor force. Widespread concern that many children are not receiving a quality education has been a staple of public and political discourse for many decades. That concern takes numerous forms, but stripped to its essentials, it involves the determinants of how successful our students are in school, in preparation for their lives thereafter.

Gordon and Peterson cover a wide range of important issues: achievement, teachers, federalism, spending, desegregation, regulation and accountability, school choice, and early childhood education. On each of these important interrelated topics, they survey the evidence, stripped of ideological preconceptions. What do we know from the data, evidence, and research from specific case studies on charter schools, choice, merit pay, and teacher quality? On these issues and more—for anyone interested in understanding the current and likely future state of our schools and our children's education; and the facts and evidence that can lead to better policy, better schooling, and better outcomes for our students—this is the place to start. In addition to the outstanding essay, the Tennenbaum Program provides brief summaries of the authors' key points on each of these subjects.

We hope you will engage with this important work and that it will help inform you about the facts and evidence at the core of understanding how to improve educational outcomes. The Tennenbaum Program will be following up with short videos, social media posts, and other opportunities for additional audiences to be informed about this work.



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The Tennenbaum Program for Fact-Based Policy is a Hoover Institution initiative that collects and analyzes facts, provides easy-to-digest nontechnical essays and derivative products, and shares reliable information on the nation's highly debated policy issues.

