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Incentives, Capacity, and Implementation: Evidence from Massachusetts Education Reform

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, most of the states and the U.S. federal government have

enacted policies based upon the theory of standards-based education reform. These policies attempt to use incentives to overcome the difficulty of implementing policy in a loosely coupled system. This article presents a case study of the implementation of standards-based reform in Massachusetts. The case study shows how poorly thought-out incentive structures, lack of capacity, and lack of trust impeded implementation of the reforms. The Massachusetts experience has implications for the education reform movement nationwide, because Massachusetts has been a leader in the movement. Analysis of the Massachusetts case also contributes to the literature on how context affects policy implementation.

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