

The Evolution of the Center on Education Policy: FROM AN IDEA TO A MAJOR INFLUENCE

During hearings in the late 1980s on education legislation, the frustrated chairman of the Education and Labor Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, Rep. Gus Hawkins (D-CA), would sometimes lean over to his chief counsel and ask: “Why can’t these people agree on the facts? If they did that, we could solve these problems quickly.”

That question planted an idea in the counsel, John (Jack) Jennings, which took him into a second long career as founder and CEO of a unique fact-gathering initiative, the Center on Education Policy (CEP). Launched in January 1995, CEP began with ambitious, if somewhat unformed, intentions and little money. Its first forays into educating the public about public education were modest and almost totally grassroots. Seventeen years later, a December 2011 report on Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act reached millions of listeners and readers through media channels that stretched from Maine to Alaska, from the *New York Times* to the local newspaper for San Francisco’s Russian community.

How did a small staff that shies away from provocation and simplistic comments become a trusted source of information for the media, policymakers and the public about federal education policy and its effect on states, districts and schools? As Jennings retires from this second career, it is a good time to record the history of CEP and assess its work.

The story begins with the people involved.



THE CORE STAFF OF CEP

Jack Jennings is an ultimate student of politics, beginning with his years as an undergraduate history major at Loyola University (an interest expressed in his many writings about the history and role of public education). He had hands-on experience in local politics while in law school as a precinct captain in Chicago for Rep. Roman Pucinski (D-IL). On November 30, 1967, he was admitted to the Illinois bar; one day later, on December 1, he became staff director of Pucinski's Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education in the U.S. House of Representatives.

For 27 years, Jennings was at the center of federal education policymaking—first, as staff director for Pucinski; then as the subcommittee staff director and also as a full committee counsel for Rep. Carl D. Perkins (D-KY), who chaired the full committee and took over as subcommittee chairman when Pucinski left the House in 1972; then in the same two roles for Chairman Hawkins, who assumed his posts when Perkins died in 1984; and lastly as general counsel for education for Chairman Bill Ford (D-MI) who took over the full committee after Hawkins retired. Having such influential posts under four different chairmen is not common on Capitol Hill. Installing him in these positions shows the extreme confidence of the lawmakers in Jennings' leadership because staff members work at the pleasure of the chair. There is no job security on Capitol Hill.

Especially important was the tutelage Jennings received under Perkins, a canny legislator and forceful advocate for the poor. In those years Jennings honed his skills at negotiation and compromise to help shape the rapid growth of Congressional involvement in education. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was just being implemented when Jennings came to Washington, DC, and its importance grew with each reauthorization. At the same time, the scope of education policy expanded to include special education, support for more rigorous learning standards and other issues that called on Jennings' political expertise.

Jennings' leadership depended on the support of a capable team. A key member of this team was Diane Stark Rentner, who joined the subcommittee staff as a legislative aide in 1988 at age 26 and, after a two-year stint on the staff of the House Postsecondary Education Subcommittee, returned to work with Jennings on the full committee staff in 1992. Toni Painter was the organizing backbone of the subcommittee and full committee staff, taking care of logistics for Jennings for 25 years. Nancy Kober served as a legislative specialist with Jennings on the subcommittee staff from 1975 to 1987.

At the end of 1994, after discussing ideas with friends and colleagues for several months, Jennings, Stark Rentner and Painter left Congress en masse and formed CEP. They remained CEP's core staff, which never exceeded six full-time people and in 2011 included Jennifer McMurrer, Shelby McIntosh, Alexandra Usher, and Susie Pamudji, along with Jennings and Stark Rentner. Other critical contributors to CEP's work were Kober, who rejoined her former Hill colleagues as a CEP consultant in 1995 after working as a freelance writer, and consultants Naomi and Victor Chudowsky and Caitlin Scott.

THE CONTEXT

Jennings, who was being wooed by law firms, chose to start a new and different information center for several reasons. He was concerned that the media, and eventually the public, relied on negative sources of information and commentary about public education from both the left and the right ends of the political spectrum.

The think tanks that sprung up, especially after the Reagan Administration took office, tended to produce resources at the extremes. Getting lost in this tennis game of education ideas was an understanding of the historical and fundamental importance of public education. Moreover, Jennings wanted policymakers and the public to have reliable, nonpartisan information for decision making. An interest in this latter function also was growing in the foundation community. Some of the early foundation support of CEP materialized because foundation officers were concerned about the paucity of reliable information on education policies and were interested in moving the foundation community toward investing in policymaking and away from investments in sporadic programs, according to former George Gund Foundation executive director David Bergholz.

CEP was not conceived as the “middle ground” between the extremes. Rather, it was to be a unique source that, according to Kober, “reminded people of the cornerstones of public education and produced trusted information.” Although CEP does not have a reform agenda, it does make recommendations to improve federal and state policies based on its research results. Its publication scope also includes ample resources that promote an awareness of the role of public education in American society.

For Jennings, CEP also represented an outlook for his philosophy that politics and policymaking need each other. Policymaking, on its own, is too abstract, he says, and only in the context of a robust political process can it be meaningful. He brought to CEP perhaps the most expert knowledge of federal education politics available anywhere.

After setting up CEP, Jennings sought to learn what was happening beyond Washington by accepting speaking invitations around the country. During these travels, he took a “dip stick” of the mood of the public and educators about education reforms and came to find that support for public education was fragile and fraught with skepticism. Writing a review of his first year of travels (80,000 miles) in a 1996 article in *Phi Delta Kappan*, he attributed his finding to four factors:

- The extreme negativism of major news media toward education, coverage that most of the public relied upon and that seldom noticed the real improvements taking place
- A demoralized teaching force that had given up trying to explain the changes underway
- A misleading but constant hammering on public education by the Far Right that contributed to public apprehension about schools
- A lack of consensus about the role of public schools and a weak commitment to higher achievement

These conversations around the country convinced Jennings that CEP, first of all, needed to give people resources to help boost public support for education. With one of its initial foundation grants, it also focused on what was happening to education legislation on Capitol Hill, especially the growing interest in raising standards for student learning. For the CEP staff, this was a major transformation. “We went from making legislation to monitoring it,” notes Stark Rentner. And Jennings, who always had preferred a behind-the-scenes role, became an upfront spokesperson and eventually one of the nation’s most widely quoted experts on education politics and federal policies.

THE EARLY LOGISTICS

Adopting the name “The Center on National Education Policy,” CEP spent an incubation period at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) at the invitation of its president, Michael Usdan. He and others helped CEP reach out to funders, a different challenge for the CEP founders. Usdan was anxious to provide support for CEP, partly because he admired the fact that Jennings never acquired the Washington hubris of being aloof from those carrying out policies: “He has always been interested in listening to people.”

With some basic foundation support in hand, CEP became independent of IEL after two and a half years, opened an office in the same downtown building, incorporated and changed its name. It dropped the word “national” from the title, Jennings says, because his travels convinced him that people interpreted “national” as “federal,” and he wanted CEP to have a wider scope. Also, he says, “it seemed pretentious to call ourselves ‘national’ when we were so small.” Contributing to this grassroots sensitivity was a series of more than 40 community forums, sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa and the PTA, for which Jennings served as chair or background resource.

At this point, it was up to Toni Painter to organize the functions, make travel arrangements, set up a filing system, and research the budget needs of a small, start-up nonprofit. “I wished we had some mentoring to help us,” she recalls, “but it came out well,” despite difficulty in fund raising.

GETTING SUPPORT FOR THE WORK

CEP has a policy of not seeking federal money. It develops priorities through Jennings’ assessment of the need for information-gathering in certain areas and then asks for support from foundations; about 70% of its grants over the last 17 years have been to support certain projects.

CEP’s work began with seed money grants from several foundations—Gund, Phi Delta Kappa, MacArthur and Pew. The general nature of these first grants contributed to the early success of CEP, according to one of its reports to funders, because it enabled CEP to explore how it could impact education policy and to pursue those goals with mid-course corrections.

David Bergholz, while at the Gund Foundation, discussed the idea for the center early on with Jennings, and his foundation consistently supported CEP’s work (for a total of \$2.5 million between 1998 and 2011). “The reason the foundation stuck with CEP,” he says, “is because of its steadiness, the importance of the work it was doing and its status.” In his opinion, CEP has fostered policy work that is challenging, nonpartisan, honest, clear-headed, broad and based on data and information. “It helped add vitality to the conversations around education policies, and to do it powerfully. It is one of the 10 best grants I was involved with.”

Despite such praise, there was a time when Jennings thought he would have to close the doors. The work of CEP on building public confidence in the schools was important but also vague to foundation officials. Lack of sufficient funding hampered CEP’s goal of monitoring the impact of federal policies on states, districts and schools. Bergholz stepped in and contacted several other foundations, amassing enough support to persuade Jennings to keep CEP open.

A breakthrough came when one of the early funders, Atlantic Philanthropies, modified a small grant application from CEP and instead advised it to ask for much more in order to expand its capacity to provide reliable, nonpartisan information on education policies and the state of education. “We felt there needed to be a stronger voice for the public schools amidst the increase in the quantity and volume of conservative views,” says Angela Covert, program officer at Atlantic Philanthropies at the time. “All we were hearing was a cacophony from the right wing.” Because of the size of the grant—\$1.5 million over three years—CEP was able to garner additional foundation support to provide the required matching funds for the first year.

Stark Rentner has had a major responsibility for follow-through on grant proposals to foundations and oversight of the grants. She finds the process “tricky” because funding depends on knowing the interests of the foundations. For example, CEP “does better on funding when a Republican is in the White House because foundations want to help balance the information.” Also, the interests of foundations shift. For several years, they enthusiastically supported CEP’s work on assessing the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Now, they are more interested in efforts to improve teacher evaluation systems. Similarly, CEP’s nine-year tracking of high school exit exams has evolved into a broader study of changes in high school assessment policies, a reflection of the Lumina Foundation for Education’s interest in assessment policies that accommodate the national focus on success in college and career readiness.

Overall, from its inception in 1995 through 2011, CEP raised almost \$18.5 million. (See list of funders in the Appendix.)

DEVELOPING AN IDENTITY

From the beginning, CEP has presented an enigma to media members who are savvy about federal education policy. CEP has been described variously as “private,” “a think tank,” “a moderate think tank,” “a liberal Democratic tool,” “a research group” and “policy analysts.”

For Jennings himself, separating his Democratic Party roots from the image for CEP has often been a problem. Several newsrooms have grappled with the challenge of using his remarkable expertise on federal policymaking while honoring the center’s emphasis on being nonpartisan. “We would identify him as a Democrat even though we knew him as a straight shooter because our readers didn’t always know that,” says David Hoff, former reporter for both *Education Daily* and *Education Week*. “But we didn’t describe him as a Democratic mouthpiece.”

“If I thought Jack had a bias, I would not have quoted him as much,” notes Sam Dillon, who was national education reporter for the *New York Times* (he retired at the end of 2011). From 2003 through 2011, Dillon quoted Jennings in 21 stories, using him consistently more than any other source, especially in coverage related to NCLB and its reauthorization. “He is brutally honest about the federal role, and perhaps more generous about what is going on in the states,” he says. Dillon gradually trimmed down partisan descriptions of Jennings, but returned to the mode in his coverage of the December 2011 report from CEP, written by CEP research assistant Alexandra Usher, about the number of schools failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress under NCLB. Because the CEP figures were far lower than previous ones announced by the Obama Administration, Dillon couldn’t help but identify Jennings as a Democratic lawyer—it made a better story.

One CEP report by Jennifer McMurrer on the neglect of subjects other than reading and math because of NCLB spawned major news stories and follow-up local ones across the country. Then Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings condemned the report, but not long after that, another CEP report that cited some posi-

tive effects of NCLB on state assessment scores was praised by President Bush as a reliable, nonpartisan assessment of the program.

“You can’t cook the facts,” says Stark Rentner. “We report faithfully what we find, whether we agree with it or not.”

Jennings has been very careful to protect the integrity of CEP. For example, unlike some other Washington-based think tanks, he has sought differing points of view for CEP’s executive board and reviewers of its research. The first board chair (until 2001) was Chris Cross, who was Jennings’ counterpart on the Republican staff under Rep. Al Quie (R-MN). Jennings and Cross fundamentally disagreed on major policy issues (e.g., whether to use poverty or achievement figures for formula distribution of federal dollars), “but we soon learned to treat each other as professionals and colleagues,” says Cross. “I have valued that relationship and always use it as the prime example of how important it is to not let policy and political differences become the most important factors in one’s life.”

In Cross’ opinion, CEP has established itself as the “go-to organization” specifically because of Jennings’ reputation for being objective, independent and reliable.

Even though the media knew Jennings’ background, it also recognized that he had good, sound analysis of the impact of federal policies on states, districts and schools, according to Matt Maurer, who helped CEP with dissemination of its work while he was with the firm CommunicationWorks. He started with CEP as it was beginning to analyze NCLB’s effect beyond Washington, DC. “CEP had information that no one else had because there was not a great deal of reporting on and scrutiny of federal policy. The center had quality information that was unique. It could inform the debate without a spin.” Although there were times when Maurer would have liked the reports to be presented in more headline-grabbing ways, “we got pushback from Jack. He was not interested in which way the debate went with the information. He wanted to provide the debate with reliable information.”

Consequently, says Maurer, CEP became known as a source to trust. In fact, by 2006, when *Education Week* conducted a national poll to determine what organizations were considered the most influential in the education policy world, CEP was named in the top ten. The others included the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, the Gates Foundation, and the two national teacher unions. All the other nine organizations had much greater budgets and larger staffing than did CEP.

CHANGES IN THE CONTEXT—AND THE FOCUS

In the 1970s when the Democratic majority on the House Education and Labor Committee beat down a Quie proposal to use test scores instead of the number of poor children in a school district for its aid formula, the Committee Chair, Carl Perkins, told Jennings that Quie needed some kind of win. The loser’s prize was to be the first major evaluation of Title I, a three-year endeavor conducted by the National Institute of Education. Its recommendations reached Congress at a time when energies were diverted to creating the Department of Education, but later the research was used by Congress to make changes to Title I such as providing a greater concentration of funds on the poorest schools.

This was research conducted with bipartisan support, and its ability to effect change stayed in Jennings’ mind when he decided to make research central to the next phase of CEP’s work. Through a strategic planning process, the CEP staff concluded that although their resources to promote an understanding and support of

public education were valuable, the staff's expertise really centered on federal policies and their impact. Moreover, people in the field told them that CEP needed to conduct its own research.

Consequently, in 2002 CEP began a series of annual reports on high school exit exams, an effort now led by CEP research associate Shelby McIntosh, with support from Naomi and Victor Chudowsky. That same year, CEP also initiated a series of major studies on the effects of NCLB, authored by Kober, Stark Rentner, Scott, and the Chudowskys. Four years later, this same team and CEP research associate Jennifer McMurrer began frequent analyses of state-level achievement data, with technical support from the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO). For these and later studies, CEP developed research protocols to ensure its products were balanced and of high quality. These included:

- Creating advisory panels for key areas of research. For example, an advisory panel for its student achievement studies, composed of people with diverse viewpoints (Robert Linn, James Popham, Laura Hamilton, Rick Hanushek and Rick Hess), developed the rules for analysis. Once the protocol for the survey work was established, the achievement advisory panel focused more on reviewing CEP's draft reports that analyzed the survey data—what had been left out, what could be said better. “We discuss who are the best minds on this subject whenever we create a review panel,” says Stark Rentner. “We have rarely been turned down.” The review panels always reflect Jennings' emphasis on impartiality. In addition to the researchers listed above, members of various panels have included Linda Darling Hammond, Russell Rumberger and Tom Payzant, among others.
- Developing reliable contacts at state departments of education, usually the deputy superintendent, and learning to utilize a growing state data base. Often, says Stark Rentner, CEP helped states analyze their own data because they did not have the expertise or staff to do it themselves.
- Hiring research groups such as Policy Studies Associates and HumRRO to help design surveys and compile survey or testing data that would be analyzed by CEP staff and consultants.
- Conducting case studies in a select group of states and school districts on such issues as NCLB implementation. A major effort over several years, led by consultant Caitlin Scott, followed state and local implementation of federal requirements to improve low-performing schools.
- Using data bases for deeper analyses of such issues as NCLB effects, the annual status of funding for Title I, and changes in state-level student achievement results.
- Submitting draft reports to outside experts for peer review.

In sum, CEP's small internal staff produces a broad mix of reliable resources by using long-term consultants, advice from external experts with different viewpoints, and research companies.

While CEP surveys collect impact data from all 50 states and its analyses look at state achievement data, CEP has avoided making state-by-state comparisons. State testing data is not comparable, so the CEP analyses track improvements in overall achievement and gaps in achievement within states. CEP, however, has produced more detailed reports on several states. As part of its tracking of NCLB, CEP collected data from 33 schools for several years. In addition, CEP has conducted long-term studies of school improvement efforts in Michigan, Maryland, Ohio, California and Georgia. Its study of classroom time devoted to reading and math used data from Rhode Island, Illinois and Washington State. Moreover, the individual state profiles that accompanied its achievement studies covered all 50 states, with data from 2002 to 2009 for most states.

As the CEP research reports began to attract more attention in the media and by policymakers, it was inevitable that its research methods would be criticized by those more wedded to negative coverage of the public schools.

An example is a 2006 article in *Education Next* that disputed survey and interview data as valid research and accused CEP of promoting “the public school system’s party line.” The author was a senior Fellow at the strongly pro-voucher Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

On the other hand, media pros see CEP in a different light. Virginia Edwards, current chair of the CEP board and president of Editorial Projects in Education, which publishes *Education Week*, has chastised her reporters for quoting Jennings so much (520 times between 1995 and 2011), but she wholeheartedly supports CEP’s work because “it has stood up as independent with a research base.” Using a large base of data and information, CEP has presented it in accessible and digestible ways, putting a frame around issues instead of being a “fire hose.” In her opinion, “you have to give Jennings a lot of credit for what he pulled off.”

Jennings’ work also has been recognized by the research community. In 2011 the prestigious National Academy of Education elected Jennings to membership, with its president Susan Fuhrman noting that he “has had a profound effect on education policy in the United States.” Moreover, Jennings received an award for public service from the American Educational Research Association.

WHAT HAS CEP ACCOMPLISHED SO FAR?

Documenting causal relationships between CEP research and resources and the development of more well-informed policymaking would require structured, intensive research and analysis. This report cannot make those connections, but a review of CEP archives (press clippings, annual reports to funders, etc.) and interviews with more than a dozen people familiar with the work of CEP clearly indicate that CEP has made a mark on education policy. Policymakers, the media and the public consider it trustworthy, and its work has become part of important discussions, planning and policy decisions.

Even as its energies focus on producing major reports that document the impact of federal policies, CEP has remained true to one of its original goals—helping teachers and the public understand the intrinsic value of a strong public education system. It has been something of a nag on this point. With a supplemental grant from the Gund Foundation at the beginning of its work, CEP produced two highly popular documents: *Do We Still Need Public Schools?*, which explains the history of American public education; and *The Good—and the Not So Good—News About American Schools*. Within a few months, more than 150,000 copies of the documents had been distributed to local chapters of Phi Delta Kappa and local PTA groups, and they were used as conversation-starters at the community forums across the country.

Jennings and/or Stark Rentner contribute regularly to education publications, especially *Phi Delta Kappan*. Also, Jennings makes frequent commentaries on current education issues in a blog on the *Huffington Post* or in columns for local newspapers. Examples include a guest column in the *Dallas Morning News* that gave advice to the community about the qualities to look for in hiring a new superintendent, and a *Huffington Post* commentary that chided policymakers for citing international achievement statistics that show American students being outperformed by their peers in several nations without looking at the differences in education policies between the U.S. and higher-achieving countries.

From the beginning, CEP also has monitored the politics and policies generated on Capitol Hill. It began publicly reporting on federal issues through a *Washington Newsletter* distributed by Phi Delta Kappa to about 125,000 readers. In its first years, CEP produced information bulletins on specific issues such as the impact of the Contract with America on education policy and the debate about eliminating the U.S. Department of Education. These reached 300,000 readers, primarily parents and teachers.

As CEP moved into research-based reports on federal and state policies, its dissemination efforts grew wider. In addition to the media coverage, print copies of reports were sent to a mailing list of about 7,000 people—Congress, state education leaders, school administrators in the 500 largest school districts, and parent and teacher groups. The scope of dissemination is now greater because of the Internet. Users download an average of 12-14,000 documents every month from the extensive CEP website, which also provides current information about federal legislation, progress in the standards movement and other issues. As an example, the annual reports on high school exit exams are downloaded about 100,000 times each year and, according to CEP, are studied by state legislators, governors' offices, state boards of education and U.S. Department of Education officials. Also, as he was finishing his work on Capitol Hill and beginning to focus on CEP, Jennings wrote a book on the politics of national standards and assessments, *Why National Standards and Tests?*

The most-requested CEP reports show the breadth of CEP's interests. Heading the list is its *Public Education Primer*, which includes important facts about the U.S. public education system, including student distribution and demographics, governance, funding, achievement and the teaching force. As of the end of 2011, the other most popular reports included:

- Multiple reports on state and district implementation of the Common Core State Standards
- *Improving Low-Performing Schools: Lessons from Five Years of Studying School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind*
- Periodic reports on Adequate Yearly Progress
- *Ten Big Effects of NCLB*
- *Are Private High Schools Better Academically Than Public High Schools?*
- A series of reports on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or the economic stimulus package

Away from the media spotlight, CEP's presence has been extensive. Early on, it saw a need for policymakers to talk over issues together. For Joel Packer, then on the policy staff at the National Education Association, CEP's small meetings with people with different viewpoints on such issues as special education and English-language learners were refreshing and useful. "No one else was doing that," he recalls. Most of these meetings were open; a few, such as a forum to look at research on vouchers, were closed. In addition, CEP has organized full-day seminars around some major reports such as the compilation of commissioned papers on the federal role in education policy that became CEP's base for recommendations on reauthorizing NCLB.

CEP staff often provides background and advice to state and organization officials. An example of how its expertise on the junction between federal and state policy has been used occurred in Maryland, where CEP case study research of federal school improvement efforts in that state found problems with the technical support received from the state on turnaround options in NCLB. Consequently, state officials changed their policies. When CEP produced a student achievement study with data on Pennsylvania, the governor invited Jennings to participate in the press conference and news media briefings about the report. CEP researchers also have become resources in other states. One CEP researcher's testimony regarding studies of high school exit exams before the Oklahoma legislature preceded state approval of such exams. Another researcher addressed California's Little Hoover Commission on the role of the state government in improving schools. In addition to speaking engagements, Jennings has brought CEP research into conversations with state and local school boards and other organizations. While heading the Learning First Alliance, Judy Wurtzel would ask Jennings to speak to her board because "he provided helpful, credible ways to talk about education."

CEP reports are part of the discussions about legislation and policies within the U.S. Department of Education and Congressional staffs, according to interviews. When Wurtzel was working for current Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, she found “the staff interested in CEP’s findings and thought them to be fair and straight, even though Jennings sometimes was tough on the Administration.” The reports were some of the pieces used by the department in its policy work, she says. Both Duncan and Rep. George Miller (D-CA), now ranking Democrat on the House Education and Workforce Committee (formerly the Education and Labor Committee), have cited CEP reports publicly.

Perhaps the greatest challenge has been for the work to be acknowledged by Republican staffers on Capitol Hill. Jennings’ association with the Democrats sometimes hinders appreciation of the CEP research, especially by staffers who were not familiar with his political skills, which were considered fair and transparent by those who worked with him from both sides of the aisle. Once younger staffers get beyond the party identification, “they come to see the value of the reports,” according to one interview. For example, CEP’s research on the problems with the four turnaround models prescribed by NCLB—with no research base—was used by staff from both political sides to consider changes.

Another indication of CEP’s influence is the number of inquiries it receives from various sources. Jennings answers two to three news media calls daily, on average. State education officials contact CEP regularly for more details about its reports, and now that it is monitoring turnaround (School Improvement Grants) at the local level, it also has become an information source for school districts. Some state and district officials have requested that CEP dive deeper in its analyses and provide more district information, but, according to Stark Rentner, CEP does not have the funding to do that, and it has pledged to protect the anonymity of state sources in order to receive objective information.

While data-gathering capacities at the federal level have improved, CEP still is able to provide more timely research than government agencies. According to Kober, CEP can often publish research results within about two months of the collection of data, although reports on student achievement take longer.

Another plus for CEP is that it has demonstrated that a small organization can have a large impact. In Usdan’s opinion, it is a “model” for a focused, nonprofit organization that can attract foundation support because of its efficiency. Perhaps CEP makes a large impact despite its small core staff because it did not have to carve out a presence. CEP is Jack Jennings to many people. His reputation and expertise provide a great deal of the substance of CEP, making it unnecessary for it to employ a bevy of policy experts or hire its own communications staff.

WHAT NOW?

Even as data gathering capacities become better at the federal and state levels, none of those interviewed wanted CEP’s work to fade. Unlike official channels, its monitoring of the effect of policies is valued because it is independent and proven to be a reliable check on what happens when the policies play out at the state and district levels. Jennings regrets that during his time as CEO of CEP, it did not have the time or funding to conduct research in several other critical areas: school finance, “an issue that has been pushed off the agenda”; recruiting a higher quality of teachers; and providing a broader and aligned curriculum. Federal programs, he points out, do not address these issues, even though they are fundamental to improving schools.

Still, there are plenty of current issues on the table that need attention, such as the effect of the NCLB waiver policy, results of turnaround policies, reauthorization of NCLB, progress with the Common Core State Standards, and effects of the upcoming new state assessments.

CEP has proven that there is a demand for objective, reliable information about how federal and state policies play out in the states and districts. Moreover, there is an audience for the positive side of reforms in public education.

CEP has produced 10 years of reports on NCLB in all 50 states, 10 years of tracking of high school exit exams, five years of analysis of student achievement data in the 50 states, popular reports on the history and role of public education in the U.S., and in-depth studies of numerous other policy areas. This represents a comprehensive body of work on education policies unequaled by few other groups. In an environment where extremist views on education policy battle for attention, CEP has stayed its course, admirably.

APPENDIX

CEP Board Members:

Virginia Edwards, Chairman
Editor and Publisher, *Education Week*

Robin Willner, Vice Chairman
Director, Corporate Community Relations, IBM

Joseph Aguerreberre
Former President, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

Angela Covert
Education Consultant, New York

Patricia Harvey
Senior Fellow-State Initiatives, National Center on Education and the Economy/America's Choice, Inc. and Carmen Starkson Campbell Endowed Chair for Urban Education
University of Minnesota

Jack Jennings
President and CEO, Center on Education Policy

Arturo Pacheco, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Research on Education Reform

Marla Ucelli-Kashyap
Assistant to the President for Educational Issues,
American Federation of Teachers

List of foundations providing support

- Atlantic Philanthropies
- AT&T Foundation
- Carnegie Corporation of New York
- The Ellis Center for Educational Excellence
- Flora Family Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- William T. Grant Foundation
- Grant Makers for Education
- The George Gund Foundation
- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- IBM Corporation
- The Joyce Foundation
- Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
- Lumina Foundation
- The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- The New York Community Trust
- The Pew Charitable Trusts
- Phi Delta Kappa International
- The Rockefeller Foundation
- The Smith Richardson Foundation
- Spencer Foundation
- DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

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Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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