

The Politics of Knowledge

Why Education Research Does (or Does Not) Influence Education Policy

Frederick M. Hess

The American Enterprise Institute

May 21, 2007

The collected papers from this conference are available online
at www.aei.org/event1455.

Why School Leaders Use (and Don't Use) Research in Decision-making

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Key Questions

- Do school leaders use research in decision-making?
- If so, in what ways?
- If not, why not?
- What barriers exist and what can be done to improve research utilization?



Data Sources

- Extensive review of research literature
- Review of professional trade journals
- 5 superintendents, 4 district/central office administrators, 5 principals, and 5 program evaluators



Major Findings

- Research utilization by superintendents and principals is uneven
- Significant barriers exist:
 - Unclear, conflicting findings - few unambiguous effects
 - Too much poor research - lots of “noise”
 - Skepticism and mistrust - relevance & advocacy



Barriers to Research Utilization

- Professional expertise & regional/peer adoption
- Decision-making isn't always rational - politics
- Personal beliefs
- Lack of time & expertise
- Lack a “culture of inquiry”
- Lack of communication between leaders & researchers



Incentives to Improving Research Utilization

- NCLB
- Restructure school day
- Restructure school culture
- Link evaluation to performance
- Make research relevant and accessible
- Change the reward structure
- Create more localized research consortiums

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