

Will Policy Allow Demand To Be the Driver?

Curtis Johnson
Education | Evolving

cjohnson@citistates.com

And

Ted Kolderie
Education | Evolving

ted@educationevolving.org

Draft: Please do not cite without permission from the author.

Prepared for the American Enterprise Institute Conference, “More Than Just Schools: Rethinking
the Demand for Educational Entrepreneurship”
December 7, 2009

The collected papers for this conference can be found at <http://www.aei.org/event/100146>.

In the ongoing struggle to improve the educational level of the American population, policy makers must get beyond just school. Policy in many states has relied on the classic supply-side strategy of expanding choice, assuming that more choice will breed greater ‘demand’ for school opportunities and produce an ever-widening supply of better schools. Almost implicit is the notion that progress lies, mostly if not entirely, in getting the right supply of the right kinds of schools.

What if policy shifts to demand and widens the scope about what may be demanded -- asked-for, looked-for? A conscious policy focus on the demand for *learning* could prove a powerful driver of what might offered and the conditions -- the rules -- under which more education opportunities might be offered.

Clearly, at least within school, parents and students cannot choose what is not offered. And the school industry will likely not over time get by with offering what is not wanted. Inside those converse realities lie the mysteries of demand.

Policy conferences, if they focus on demand at all, almost invariably define it as demand for *reform of schooling*. This demand is usually about getting to different arrangements – perhaps out from under bureaucracy’s thumb, or liberated from constraining union contracts, or finding yet another way to link performance to pay. Reform pushes have value, but most remain too far downstream from the core question. What matters fundamentally is a focus on the demand for *learning* – in the fullest sense of the term. If that demand can be assessed, understood, and molded into a driver for change, then the ‘reform’ question follows naturally. The system will face the pressure to change in order to respond to the demands for learning that are present and growing. The scope for innovation and entrepreneurship will be far wider.

Further, we suggest that broadening the focus to take in the full scope of demand for learning exposes the nation's currently narrow definition of what needs to be learned. The persistent prime target is language and math, with a heavy focus on content mastery, as opposed to skills development. Despite the nobility of its intentions, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) statute has been implemented in a manner that has resulted in school district decisions to concentrate resources on what is being tested. A pattern of shedding other areas of interest and forms of learning is now discernible. Much of high school curricula increasingly looks susceptible to what NCLB critics call 'test prep.' Meanwhile, whatever demand there is for learning is absolutely not confined to the narrow goals to which NCLB has been practically reduced. The gap-closing needle on achievement may have moved slightly, but another gap between the nature of demand for learning and what is offered may have widened.

Any serious examination of demand should get beyond what is required for 'accountability' purposes. It also must escape the confines of the school itself. In this rapidly evolving information technology age, young people are connecting with knowledge earlier and faster than any previous generation. They are learning every day, and some significant proportion of what they are seeking and learning is happening outside the framework of formal schooling. Is it not obvious that the demand for learning exceeds the demand for schooling?

In this chapter, we will describe the wider world of learning it is now possible to observe, how 'customers' for learning might be better understood, signs of a nascent shift in what teachers might demand, and how policy makers can use demand to design a system that accommodates the way young people learn and stimulate the supply of schools aligned with their needs. If policy welcomes entrepreneurial, innovative designs for learning, demand can be a constant driver for improvement.

Most Learning is Outside School

Consider first the raw economics. If ‘learning’ were a discrete industry, it would log in at some \$2 trillion (some claim a much higher figure; no one really knows) a year. Compare that with the formal K-12 and post-secondary systems, collectively a \$700 billion a year sector.¹ Data about the gap may be elusive, but clearly there is more to what is spent in search of learning than booked and paid for through the formal system or through the institutions that are public or publicly financed.

Then consider the myriad of other institutional sources on the supply side. Once they are in the workforce, young people encounter how American business sponsors a huge and growing education sector, consciously designed to meet its own demands for developing human talent. The military runs a major education track. Unions and other associations run their own training and apprentice enterprises. Of course most of this is aimed at people beyond their nominal school years (business aims at earlier years and later education), but clearly these sponsored-learning arrangements augment if not actually supplant what is done or not done in earlier years.

Academic eyebrows might rise skeptically, but some claim that organized sports is a response to demand for learning, and that as much is learned there relevant to success in life as in the regular school curriculum. More than a decade ago, ethnographer Herb Childress spent a year observing more than a hundred teens in a northern California high school. In a memorable essay published by *The Kappan*, he described the stark contrast he found between the behavior in-school and out among so many clearly talented students.² More boredom than learning happened at school. Outside school, he was astounded at the energy and focus these same teens put into everything from video games (even then, requiring mastery of intricate rules and

capacity for rapid decision-making) to jobs to sports. Teachers, he found, wrote off poor performance as teenage lassitude, even moral laxity. Childress suggested that rather than ask why teens are so immature as not to invest as much interest and time in algebra as they do in out-of-school activities, the system should pose the opposite question: “What is it about school that makes it unworthy of that kind of devotion?”

While he might have picked music or theater to press his point, Childress chose something for which he admits he had absolutely no affection: football. “I hate football,” he confessed. But unfolding a list of attributes he found in teens’ participation in football, he offered the provocative conclusion that football looked like a superior learning regime, compared with school academics. In football, the teens are “contributors,” not passive recipients. In football, the drill is constant improvement – practicing until you get it right or drop from exhaustion (not 50-minute periods, shifting to something else when the bell rings). Football offers a full menu of recognition, along with the reality that it is a group undertaking – one player can help the team rise up and one player can let the team down, compared with the traditional academic focus on individual outcomes. Players largely choose the roles they believe fits them; the better players help those who have less skill or need longer to develop. And players, as well as their coaches have the opportunity and the imperative to show off their work at regular intervals.

What Childress was on to is hardly limited to sports. Just Google for “student competitions” and stand by for the deluge of descriptions of youth competitions – from Lego construction to robotic applications to chess. Students do not spend extraordinary time each week on these activities because they have nothing to do, or even for social reasons. There is a lure of learning alive in these activities.

Parents consistently seek “learning” opportunities for their children outside of school. A Minnesota policy enacted in 1997 offers one window through which to see this push. A tax credit program has allowed lower-income parents to claim tax credits up to 75 percent of tax due for expenses outside of school for supplementary courses, for tutoring, books, musical instruments, even computers and software – almost anything except tuition in private schools. The average credit is only \$274, but the number of claims has been consistently above 50,000.

Even if nothing else were affecting demand for learning, a revolution in information technology has been accelerating over the past decade. Schools are now populated by a whole generation of young people who have never known a world without cellular phones and Internet access. The latter may be yet unevenly accessible, but a condition of universal access can hardly be far off. That young people are learning more, earlier, and faster than any generation in history might have seemed a startling declaration back in 2001 when Marc Prensky’s essays called today’s generation “digital natives.”³ Surprise would be out of order today, as the differences in today’s teens – extended even to neurological evolution – is routinely acknowledged.

In 2006 The MacArthur Foundation launched a five-year research effort, backed by a \$50 million commitment, aimed at better understanding how digital media affect learning and how these remodeled brains of today’s teens were operating. This MacArthur investment naturally attracted a sizeable number of scholars and organizations with similar interests. One such scholar, Katie Salen, Associate Professor in Design and Technology at Parsons - The New School for Design, reported on MacArthur-sponsored research for members of the Cleveland Conference at a recent Chicago gathering.⁴ Salen said that more interactive design is increasingly moving into the “space for learning.” Not rapidly, though, largely due to misunderstanding and resistance from educators who are not among the digital natives.

Today's young people, Salen said, migrate a predictable path that starts understandably with just "hanging out" on the Internet, including some emailing, Instant Messaging, surfing, and checking things out. For many, though, this phase rapidly graduates into a stage of "serious tinkering" starts – downloading software, manipulating or "mashing-up" video, creating new websites, etc. For some, there comes then, energized by a compelling interest in some subject, real "geeking out". This amounts to a deep dive into the universe where the young person's passion lies – whether that's metaphysics or motorcycles. It's an "old thought," she said, that deep learning of this sort requires the direct assistance – or even the presence – of someone we call a teacher. Critics see this as a solitary journey; more often, she said, it is highly interactive and involves complex social contacts.

Since almost all of this activity resides in a universe that is outside school, a potentially permanent separation may evolve between the way young people are driven to learn and what school is.

This is what academic analysis considers "discontinuity," according to Lauren Resnick, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh. In a seminal essay back in 1987 based on her presidential address to AERA, she managed to collapse the problem into one summary paragraph:

"Briefly, schooling focuses on the individual's performance, whereas out-of-school mental work is often socially shared. Schooling aims to foster unaided thought, whereas mental work outside school usually involves cognitive tools. School cultivates symbolic thinking, whereas mental activity outside school engages directly with objects and situations. Finally, schooling aims to teach general skills and knowledge, whereas situation –specific competencies dominate outside."⁵

The swell of learning beyond school, outside the curricular boundaries, invites a predictable riposte: how do we know young people are in fact becoming more literate, more aware of how

Draft: Please do not cite without permission from the author.

the world works, better acquainted with numbers and measurement, more appreciative of history, savvy about basic science? As other chapters have pointed out, the art and science of assessment badly lags the nascent reformulation of what achievement means. Bill Tucker of Education Sector puts the problem plainly and suggests where assessment is headed:

“These new technology-enabled assessments offer the potential to understand more than whether a student answered a test question right or wrong. Using multiple forms of media that allow for both visual and graphical representations, we can present complex, multi-step problems for students to solve, and we can collect detailed information about an individual student's approach to problem solving. This information may allow educators to better comprehend how students arrive at their answers and learn what those pathways reveal about students' grasp of underlying concepts, as well as to discover how they can alter their instruction to help move students forward. Most importantly, the new research projects have produced assessments that reflect what cognitive research tells us about how people learn, providing an opportunity to greatly strengthen the quality of instruction in the nation's classrooms. Other fields, such as military training and medical education, are already using technology-enabled assessment to enhance teaching and learning.”⁶

Further, technology, through software with metrics and data, is feeding a small revolution in formative assessment and individualization of learning that helps those with learning difficulties catch up and succeed.

Students Have Their Say

Marie Gentile, who represents the Siemens Westinghouse competition in math, science and technology, told our Education|Evolving colleague Kim Farris-Berg that young people participate in this competition year after year because it taps their motivate to compete. “They aren’t playing computer games,” she said, “they’re writing them. They’re not playing with electronic toys, they’re buildings them . . . they do six-hour math marathons because they enjoy it.”

Choirs and chess, along with organized sports, are familiar activities living at the margin of school and the outside world. But the universe of competitions and projects that are essentially academic in character and content is not only outside the program perimeter of most schools, they exceed what inside-school typically accomplishes in tapping the intrinsic motivation of young people.⁷

Project Tomorrow does focus groups on what students think about school. Julie Evans, its CEO, told Farris-Berg that too many students “see school as something they have to get through to get somewhere else . . . though most love school as a social place.” They see a stronger connection with what they learn outside school in getting them ready for 21st century skills than inside. Evans shakes her head at what she hears at education conferences, that students are not ready for, and do not really want to get into a on-line platform for their schoolwork. She says back, “Students are interested in learning, They’re not interested in the way you are presenting it.”⁸

A freshman from Southwest High School in Minneapolis shared her project over an out-of-school project with Farris-Berg. She had joined a social justice filmmaking group called TVbyGIRLS, helping to produce a documentary called the Greatest Girls in collaboration with the Minnesota History Center. “I learned tons of history,” she said, which made what she studied in class seem “so much more relevant.”

While interest in actually listening to students (as customers) seems to be rising, exemplified by the Citizens League SpeakOut project⁹, it remains a small part of the policy picture. What industry with a eye to a better future is not engaging in market research? How will innovators and entrepreneurs design better forms of learning, absent what is always gleaned from market research?

The Dilemma for School Districts

The state and federal governments set standards for achievement, along with the arrangement for resources and the regulatory framework. School districts are in the business of responding, complying, trying to do what is expected. But the educators in school districts could set themselves apart by agreeing to get expected results, but arranging “school” to elicit the maximum discretionary effort from both students and teachers.

Let us assume that there is no stopping the expanding world of learning opportunities showing up outside of traditional arrangements for school. How long will it be before the ‘demand’ arrives at the doorstep of boards of education and superintendents of schools to devise or adopt a system by which young people can demonstrate what they already know? The calls for certifications of competency have a long history, but voices seem to be growing louder and more impatient. And more sophisticated capacity for such assessments is emerging.¹⁰

Some scholars, notably the psychologist Robert Epstein, take the case further – questioning the very cultural foundations of the Western notion of adolescence. Indeed, this country has less than a century’s history with the notion of required high school. American schooling finds itself in a century of stark new realities, burdened with a school arrangement still essentially custodial in nature and still mostly tied to an agrarian calendar.

Epstein argues forcefully that these arrangements sequester teens from adults and “infantilize” them all while expecting an epiphany of adult attributes at adolescence’s end. His data assert that roughly the same proportion of adult attributes are present among teens as are found among age-defined adults.¹¹

The GED test has been around a long time but is age-constrained; it cannot be taken until students reach the age of normal graduation; so in a sense it is a protectionist policy for high school enrollments, though this does not appear to diminish the propensity to quit school. What if the GED were made more rigorous but offered at an earlier age, say, 16?

Further piling on this pressure are the nation's employers, who are, for the most part, not filtering for facility in quadratic equations as much as looking for people who know how to get information and work with modern media, how to work with others, how to think critically and solve problems – the so-called soft skills, which on reflection are anything but soft – along with a competent command of core subjects.

But witness the furor over the embodiment of this notion in the work of the “21st Century Skills” project. The project, seeking a balance between subject knowledge and skills needed in work and life, is often portrayed as not tough-minded enough, just a dodge around rigorous standards.

Government of course is the ultimate demander. While the federal government seeks to leverage its eight percent support of schooling into the demand for higher proficiency in reading and math, states remain the staging ground for the multiple demands by parents, by employers, by elected representatives, and to some degree, by students themselves. State governments – the legislature and the governor – are essentially the board of directors for the schooling enterprise. They establish the goals, set the regulatory framework, write the rules, and provide, directly or indirectly, the resources. This fabric of state control is often characterized as a web of constraints. Certainly true. But state direction is equally capable of becoming a platform for innovation, for aligning how school is arranged with the demands for learning.

Motivation as Evidence of Demand

Undeniably this is a learning generation. But concerns persist over whether young people are learning what they will need to get work they can succeed with, enjoy doing, and have the kind of education that prepares them to live in a democratic culture.

What ought to be clear as day is that motivation is key. Not the easy, reflexive kind, nearly always demonstrated by people who are hungry, desperate, anxious, but the intrinsic kind. Without setting whatever conditions it takes for students to pursue learning, all reforms of schooling simply re-arrange the furniture, tinker with structure, tease with promises.

Mary Metz puts plainly what is at stake with student motivation – that students essentially “hold a veto over all reforms.”¹²

The late professor and educational leader Jack Frymier was even more direct. “Students learn when they’re motivated to learn. If they want to learn, they will. If they don’t, you probably can’t make ‘em.” He went on to say, to a group assembled in St. Paul back in 1999, that “any successful effort to improve learning will therefore be fundamentally about improving students’ motivation Different kids are motivated by different things. No effort at motivation will succeed unless it works with these differences.”¹³

Educators often complain about this general condition: that students are just not motivated enough. Some of the reason for this may lie upstream from the usual discussions. It may have much to do with why they come to school, and even more, what educators think they’re coming for. To explain, let’s take a page out of Clayton Christensen’s research on innovation. A professor at Harvard Business School and author of multiple books about “innovation,” Christensen always points out that at least 75 percent of all the new products and services introduced every year are failures. People (i.e. the market) reject them. Providers

typically conclude that the product or service was not good enough, so they scramble to make improvements. More often than not, the market still fails to materialize.

Why is this? Christensen concludes that it is fundamentally a failure to understand what the “customer” is looking for and this failure starts with how industries think of the market segments they serve. Here’s an excerpt from Christensen in a yet-to-be-published essay:

Most marketers behave as if the world is structured by product category or by customer category. Auto companies, for example, typically segment their markets by product category: there are sub-compacts, compacts, mid-sized and full-sized sedans; minivans, SUVs, luxury cars, sport cars, light trucks, and many more. They can tell you how big each segment is, how fast it is growing, and who has what market share. Other companies (and these are not mutually exclusive) frame their market’s structure in terms of customer characteristics by using demographic attributes like age, gender, marital status and income level. Business-to-business (B2B) enterprises typically use corporate demographics like small, medium and large enterprises or industry “verticals” to define the structure of their markets. The reason these choices are salient to innovation is that they define the targets, in terms of customers and competitors, for the innovation. Slicing markets along these dimensions makes sense because when you’re inside the company looking out on the market, this indeed is how it appears to be structured. What is more, when data are collected about the size of markets, it comes structured by product and customer category, because that is the easiest way to collect and analyze data.

Segmentation schemes such as these are static, in that customers’ behaviors change far more often than their demographics do. The segment between the ages of 18-34 is often used in consumer marketing, for example. But it lasts 17 years—during which time attitudes, behaviors and needs change dramatically. Demographic data cannot explain why a man takes a date to a movie on one night, but orders in pizza to watch a DVD from Netflix the next.

The reason why it often seems difficult to explain whether a customer within a given demographic category will buy a new product from within a given product category is that from the customers’ perspective, **the market is not structured by product and customer category**. Rather, customers just find themselves needing to get things done. Jobs arise in their lives that demand resolution, and they hire products or services to help them do these jobs. Marketers who seek to develop products and services that their customers will buy predictably need to see the world through the eyes of those customers. This means that they need to understand the basic job that their customers are confronting and the results they need to achieve for which their products

might be hired as a solution. In other words, the *job*, and *not the customer or the product*, should be the fundamental element of a marketer's understanding.¹⁴

But nothing like that seems true in K-12 education. The “customer” is not the student, or even the family. And not even the employers, certainly not the economy. The customer role is played out by the political expressions of the adults who preside over the system. And that system is not driven by student motivation.

So, to play with Christensen's parlance, what is the job students might hire school to do? “A core reason why so many students languish unmotivated in school or don't come to class at all is that education isn't a job that they are trying to do. Education is something they might choose to *hire* to do the job – but it isn't the job,” insists Christensen.

Christensen suggests there are good reasons to hypothesize, given what school is today, that the job teens have in mind is to feel successful and have opportunities for good experiences with friends. School has to compete with everything from clubs (or gangs) to video games to get this job done. Pointedly, most of the arrangements associated with school that appear to do this job best are the athletic teams, music groups, debating societies, clubs for hobbies like chess – all explicitly not a part of the curriculum; they are *extra-curricular*. It is the content of the curriculum that wears the badge of importance, and good grades are reserved for those who achieve in that framework. All others are invited to consider themselves failures. Why would a self-interested adolescent ‘hire’ school to do that?

If we assume that many students have the motivation gene, but see school as something other than a facilitator of their success, would we not suspect a *design* problem? That we need somehow to integrate knowledge and skills development with the realities of adolescent motivation? Even as school fails to connect with close to half its ‘customer’ base, the nation's

Draft: Please do not cite without permission from the author.

mood reflects an opposite reasoning: that school is all right, but students (and teachers) are just not performing well enough. We must hit them with the cold bath of rigorous standards, frequently confront them with assessments, label them as making it or not. The assumption must be that motivation will be aroused through fear and threat.

We (as a matter of implicit policy) further assume that ‘achievement’ means the same thing for every young person. What if LaKeesha loves dance more than dictionaries? What about Robert who, finding school slow and boring, wants to pick up the pace and looks to Sylvan or K12 or Capella to catapult him into the next level? Jack has a passion for motorcycles – not just riding them, but building them, working on them, using his natural sense of mechanics and discovering how things work; can he learn what he needs to know from this starting place?

What if school as it is predominantly defined and arranged is badly out of alignment with the job the “customer” would want to be done? Perhaps there is abundant demand for learning, for acquiring knowledge and skills, but not enough takers for the way school is arranged, offered to students and parents?

Latent Demand from Teachers

The nearly 40 percent of teachers who quit in their first five years of service make the easiest case for a demand-driven system. Teachers just entering the system, expecting to find a motivating environment and an opportunity for a professional career, find a dominating management-labor model that tells them what to do, how to do it, and when it will be evaluated. Some sizeable proportion of these teachers, plus veteran teachers long frustrated by the arrangements they work in, are a potential force for change. The evidence: every teacher-led

Draft: Please do not cite without permission from the author.

school created in the past decade elects a different learning model, reflecting almost directly a market demand for a wider variety of learning strategies.

Meanwhile, as a wave of boomer-led retirements looms, there are repeated reports that the nation has a teacher recruitment problem. Demonstrably not true. A cursory look at turnover in teacher ranks and the underlying causes behind it suggest that recruiting is not the problem, but retention. If Richard Ingersoll is right, the root cause is the recognition, especially by the newest to arrive at teaching, that for most aspiring young professionals, it is not a very good job. Few want to make a career out of an unsatisfying job.

No one has studied this problem more than Ingersoll, a professor of education and sociology at the School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Ingersoll is a data-hound, constantly on the look-out for evidence among the statistics for what others merely argue over. When it comes to why teachers – particularly those who have a wider range of career choices – do not stick with education, his data offer a clear explanation. Controlling for age, seniority, school size, geography, finance – you name it – the teacher’s “sense of power” (or lack of it) determines whether a teacher will want to stick with the job. Most professionals – consultants, architects, attorneys, accountants – have a reasonable amount of control over their work. If they had a management structure organized to tell them what and how and when to do everything, those professions might look like they also had a retention problem. If teachers can control their work, the results are better performance and lower turnover, according to Ingersoll.¹⁵

Anticipating disbelief, Ingersoll’s research had a robust sample and used advanced statistical methods to control for all the factors usually associated with teacher turnover – age, seniority, school size, geography, finance, poverty characteristics – you name it. He concluded

that his correlation between the degree to which teachers control their work and the likelihood of turnover was “as clean and overwhelming as any you will ever see.”

Back in the mid-1990s, in a small community in south central Minnesota, a group of teachers, using Minnesota’s statute governing cooperatives, organized themselves to run schools.¹⁶ They could hardly have known they were starting a movement. Today that coop, called EdVisions, can point to several dozen schools formed with the expectation that teachers will be in charge.¹⁷ While there are fewer than a hundred teacher-run schools in total, it is a growing segment of schooling. While most of these schools were founded as chartered schools, there are 13 inside the Milwaukee public school district, operating with a memorandum of understanding with the teachers union. Nearly all such schools make some kind of arrangement to get administrative work done that teachers decide they cannot or prefer not to do; but in no case, do they revert to the still-dominant management-labor model. And it is striking to see that none of these schools to date has elected the conventional course-and-class learning model. Many are project-based schools, but all are different as they work to line up with what today’s students need.

The Policy Response: New Schools

If the demand for learning is the policy challenge, new forms of school are the logical response. Up to the 1980s, American schools continued to become more alike even as the American population was becoming more diverse. Then came the chartering movement, with its promise for greater diversity of learning opportunities. State after state in the 1990s withdrew what was an exclusive franchise, through which only the local school district could offer public education.

Chartering schools, as a means of getting new and potentially different schools from which to choose, had its origins in a 1991 Minnesota law, with the first such school opening in St. Paul the following year. Chartering spread rather quickly to what is now 40 states and the District of Columbia; there are nearly 5,000 such schools enrolling over a million students each year.

But much misunderstanding persists over what chartering is and what it means. Research almost always falls into the trap of regarding chartered schools as a type of school. This generates worry over whether chartered schools do better than district schools, or district schools do better than chartered schools – which is like comparing getting a fishing license to catching fish. Chartering is a means of creating a school, and it tells you nothing about the type of school it will be or what the learning model will be. Will it be organized along the highly structured, high-expectations model of the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP)? Or be a Spanish immersion school? Or perhaps an International Baccalaureate (IB) model?

With its statutory assurances to operate somewhat outside the usual regulatory framework, chartering is essentially a platform for trying things. It is a kind of R&D sector for education, a potential source of innovation. This is true despite the relatively low percentage of chartered schools that are substantially different from the traditional district school.

Over the past decade a second platform for new schools has taken root. In mostly large urban areas such as Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, and Los Angeles, a new-schools sector seems to be finding a home inside the structure of school districts. Boston's Pilot Schools date back to 1994, essentially begun by leaders of the Boston Teachers Union as a competitive response to the growing popularity of chartered schools. These schools have special autonomy within the district and teachers, still members of the union, sign annual "work agreements" which memorialize the

Draft: Please do not cite without permission from the author.

understanding that their school may operate differently from the practices contemplated either by the central administration or the master labor contract.

In the spring of 2009 Minnesota became the first state to enact the authority for any school district to approve new, autonomous schools (charter-like, not charter-light) within the district. Districts can issue Requests for Proposals (RFPs). A group of teachers and parents might take the initiative to start a new kind of school. If districts agree to allow a new school the degree of autonomy spelled out in the law, and the local union chapter agrees to its members deciding themselves on work practices, then the school has the same relative freedom from state regulations enjoyed by chartered schools.

Under this new law, all the state and local support, except for a negotiated percentage for central services such as facilities, insurance and transportation go directly to the school's budget. The educators there decide how to use their resources, what learning strategy they will select, who works there, along with the mechanics of the length of the school day and year. In effect, they are getting authority and accepting accountability. No teacher would be there who is not wanted or who does not want to be there. And for students, these are schools of choice.

Think of the new Minnesota statute as opening up a second platform for innovation, challenging every school district to allow educators in these new schools the right to control their work, and to be judged strictly on results. If the results are unsatisfactory, close the school. This movement lacks a single label, though Minnesota-based Education|Evolving now tracks the development of these schools nationwide on the website: www.newschoolsamerica.org. Baltimore's effort is an Office of New Initiatives. New York City has "portfolio" schools. Chicago and Los Angeles have been closing failing schools and allowing new ones to open. In Los Angeles, Green Dot has taken over some failing schools and radically restructured them.

Green Dot actually secured authority from the state to establish a separate chapter of the teachers union and negotiated a contractual agreement with considerably more flexibility – consuming only about 30 pages compared to the Los Angeles Unified School District’s contract approaching 700 pages.

Slowly states, even those with chartering laws, have recognized that chartering as policy is not sufficient to getting enough new and different schools. Legislators hear from educators who have ideas for new schools, but who do not want to go the charter route; they hear from superintendents that districts ought to have a shot at the level of flexibility enjoyed by charters. West Virginia, one of the hold-out states on chartering, passed in 2009 a policy for “innovation zones,” extending to the 55 districts in the state a new opportunity to create schools which operate under different rules. The law is devastatingly top-heavy with layers of approvals required to get this permission, but it is a start. Colorado passed a somewhat stronger law in 2006. The Denver school district has opened an Office of School Reform, through which it approved in late 2008 the district’s first school to enjoy special autonomy and be run entirely by the teachers who organized it. Opened in the fall of 2009, this school emphasizes math and science and serves a largely Latino lower-income part of the city.

Scaling Up the Demand

Scaling up, in the context of the nation’s education goals, is not merely more of anything, including new schools, but a direct response to demand for more variety of learning opportunities.

Innovation – trying things, finding what works better - is not worth much if improvements are stuck at the margin of the school industry, small islands of success that attract

visiting delegations but little replication. Sometimes of course, replication itself is seen as innovation, which it is usually not. But the question is, always, how might scaling up happen? What role does demand play in the likelihood and velocity of scaling?

Pressure is predictable to scale any improvement up rapidly. Grants are at stake. Lately federal money has been a primary lure. Patience is running thin, and all the rhetoric reinforces a new urgency. There is a kind of yearning for big organizational approaches. Much of this push may prove misguided. Scaling up happens, in nearly every industry known, from a gathering cascade of small changes. In consumer markets, despite a persistent bias against small buyers, scaling from these roots seems to happen at great speed. Something happens. Then a growing number of small enterprises try out variations on the idea. Some succeed. Others fail. Only gradually do the successes consolidate into large organizations. In education, the notion persists that the scaling to large organizations happens right away.

What is clear though is that demand is the fuel that drives the scaling. And if that is so, space in which changes can happen is the oxygen without which no level of demand will have measurable effects. It is important to note the growing demand for learning. And it is helpful to see parents pushing for more choice, business employers urging a more robust effort, government finally getting religion on this vital dimension of the entire nation's positioning in the world. But demand alone will be just that – alone – without the space for expression. State policymaking remains the key to defining that space.

To get the most from demand, states must keep the system open to creating new schools, put a stop to the narrowing of what is needed, broaden the definition of achievement, and be sure that the door is open to innovation.

And teachers are the actors with hands on either the brake or the accelerator. Whether in unionized settings or not, teachers are in a position to *demand* a change in how they are seen and what they can do. Innovation proceeds with great speed in arrangements where work and ownership are combined. One only has to recall the amazing innovations in American agriculture to see this. There was huge demand for better machinery, better animal husbandry, better cropping practices, and better seeds because farmers had a stake in making their operations more productive and thus more profitable. Their demand spawned an explosion in the supply side, as McCormick, Deere, DeKalb, and other companies grew and a new consultancy was born.

It is now in the interest of teachers particularly – and their unions – to demand a different arrangement of relationships and responsibility. Teachers might, as some are already doing, offer responsibility for the quality, the success of outcomes, in return for real authority over the conditions and terms that contribute to success. The “deal” society has with teachers today is, “We don’t give your authority; in return, you don’t give us accountability.”

Reversing those terms has the power and capacity to bring demand to scale. Money will always matter. But there is already enough money in the system if state policy will allow, and educators will respond, with a system that runs on the demands of both professionals and young learners.

Demand-Oriented Policy Questions

1. Since the capacity for imagination and innovation is nearly unique in that it cannot be commoditized in the global economy, why would the United States cling to a narrow definition of achievement, as currently implied by NCLB?

2. If Christensen is right, that today's students will "hire" schooling only if it aligns with their goals, would not some serious market research be on the nation's education agenda? Do we not listen to the "customer" for schooling because we do not really consider young people the customers? What sort of new segmentation might that research turn up?
3. Given the remodeled brains of today's generation and the emergent preference for meshing education with real world experience, will project-based learning models flourish, or be even more under siege from those insisting on 'best practices' derived from traditional models?
4. How can the new orthodoxy around "evidence-based" approaches to teaching and learning be reconciled with widening differences in interests and aptitudes, along with the obvious variety across learning styles, types of intelligence, and paces of learning?
5. Might teachers unions, lately the object of severe criticism from multiple sources, find new roles in facilitating more professional opportunities for members who want to accept more accountability in return for real authority over the school?

¹ Estimated by Professor Doug Lynch, University of Pennsylvania, at a spring 2009 conference, while admitting that this figure is nearly impossible to calculate definitively. Total expenditures in the public K-12 and higher education sectors are about \$760 billion; with private institutions added in, the total is a little less than \$900 billion.

² Herb Childress, "Seventeen Reasons Why Football is Better than School," Phi Delta Kappa International, March, 1998.

³ Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," *On the Horizon*, NCB University Press, Vol. 9 No. 5, October, 2001.

⁴ Katie Salen, speech to the Cleveland Conference, Sofitel Hotel-Chicago O'Hare, December 5, 2008.

⁵ Lauren B. Resnick, *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 16, No. 9, December, 1987 (16).

⁶ Bill Tucker, "Beyond the Bubble: Technology and the Future of Student Assessment," *Education Sector*, February, 2009.

⁷ "How Do Students Learn Outside School?," posted June 30, 2008, http://www.map150.org/sso/pdf/SSOIssueBrief_LearningOutsideSchool.pdf

⁸ From an interview conducted by Kim Farris-Berg, *Education|Evolving*, October 2009, http://www.tomorrow.org/speakup/speakup_reports.html

⁹ Student SpeakOut project, Citizens League, St. Paul, Minnesota, www.studentsspeakout.org.

¹⁰ Dennis Carter, "'Credit by exam' expands student options," *ESchool News*, November 13, 2009, <http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/index.cfm?i=61781&page=1>

¹¹ Robert Epstein, *The Case Against Adolescence*, 2007, Quill Driver Books.

¹² Mary Haywood Metz, *Classrooms and Corridors: The Crisis of Authority in Desegregated Secondary Schools*, University of California Press, 1978.

¹³ Discussion with Frymier at Hamline University, October 28, 1999, as reported in an article by Ted Kolderie, *Minnesota Journal*, November 19, 1999.

¹⁴ Clayton Christensen, an unpublished addendum to *Disrupting Class*, Clayton Christensen, Michael Horn, and Curtis Johnson, McGraw-Hill, 2008.

¹⁵ Richard M. Ingersoll, *Who Controls Teachers' Work?*, Harvard University Press, 2003

¹⁶ Edward J. Dirkswager, editor, *Teachers as Owners*, Scarecrow Press, 2002.

¹⁷ EdVisions Cooperative. <http://edvisionscooperative.org/>