Aust. Educ. Res. (2016) 43:55–73
DOI 10.1007/s13384-015-0187-y

# Orchestrating policy ideas: philanthropies and think tanks in US education policy advocacy networks

**Christopher Lubienski[1] · T. Jameson Brewer[1] · Priya Goel La Londe[1]**

Received: 1 February 2015 / Accepted: 26 July 2015 / Published online: 6 October 2015


**Abstract** While think tanks are a global phenomenon, their role in shaping US policy offers an instructive example of think tank influence on policymaking due to the immensity of resources directed towards those ends, with education policy serving as a prime example. Focusing on a distinct set of "incentivist" education policies, this analysis describes the think tank-philanthropy linkage in US education policymaking. We offer examples of how philanthropists provide financial, empirical and political resources to advance think tanks' policy ideas through advocacy networks; describe the multiple functions performed through advocacy networks of intermediary organisations, noting the diffusion of form and function around tasks such as knowledge production, political and media support; and we highlight the ways in which US venture philanthropists and think tanks connect around "idea orchestration" in order to advance ideas in policy processes. We suggest that, especially in the realm of incentivist policies, think tanks do not appear to produce or incubate but rather promote ideas, and actually often only a single idea. The concluding discussion considers advantages evident in idea orchestration and the implications of private control of public policymaking.

**Keywords** Think tanks · Venture philanthropy · Education policy · United States · Privatisation

Think tanks are a global phenomenon in education as in other sectors, reflecting co-ordinated efforts to shape public policy. Some 6618 think tanks operated around the globe in 2014 (McGann 2013), and each one reflects funders' significant efforts to project particular ideas into the public and policy arena. Hosting nearly 28 percent

✉ Christopher Lubienski
club@illinois.edu

[1] College of Education, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1310 South Sixth Street Room 338, Champaign, IL 61820, USA

of these organisations, US think tanks share noteworthy similarities with other think tanks around the globe. First, US think tanks represent a range of ideological impulses. For instance, education policy think tanks in Washington advance the interests of teachers unions, publishing companies and conservative billionaires. Second, US think tanks serve as an interface between policymakers, academics and thought leaders. These organisations thus offer shelter and sustenance for both ideas and employing former and future officials intimately involved in education policymaking.

What distinguishes and makes US think tanks a particularly interesting case is that these organisations reflect the rapid infusion of private interests and influence upon public policymaking. Supported by immense resources, particularly from the venture philanthropy sector, US think tanks reflect policymakers' commitment to unregulated political speech, the ideas of money as speech, and corporations having the same free-speech rights as individual citizens. Through think tanks, such ideas permeate and shape American political and policy processes. The nexus of private–public interests in US public policymaking raises a range of important considerations and implications. In this environment, independent expertise must coexist with private interests, which seek to shape evidence in order to promote their own agendas. Independent expertise must also compete with private interest evidence in new media and thus in shaping public conversation. Perhaps most importantly, the very foundation of democratic, "public" policy is altered when issues and organisations, like think tanks, are infused with private interests. In this essay we take up these key considerations.

## Overview

We begin by outlining recent changes in the think tank landscape and the rise of venture philanthropies in the US. Thereafter, we describe examples of how these organisations work in orchestrated, discernible policy networks that operate around particular policy ideas. Citing funding support as reported by foundations' websites and annual reports, tax forms required of these organisations, independent watchdogs such as SourceWatch, and news reports, we note connections to funders and specific functions that are served by think tanks and other elements within these networks. Lastly, we describe the process of idea orchestration—the arrangement of financial, empirical, political, and institutional support through networks to advance policy ideas—through examples of two distinctive policies, parent trigger laws and opportunity scholarships (i.e. vouchers). Parent trigger laws and opportunity scholarships are recent innovations in the "incentivist" education policy realm, as they are premised on the idea that individuals and organisations can be subjected to incentives in order to produce desired outcomes (Lubienski et al. 2011; Reckhow, 2013). Both policies position parents as consumers. Parent trigger laws allow parents to force change upon school districts, whereas vouchers allow parents to force schools to respond to competitive incentives.

The concluding discussion considers the advantages of idea orchestration through venture philanthropy and think tanks and returns to the consideration of the

implications of private control of public policymaking. While think tanks are a global phenomenon, their role in shaping US policy offers an instructive example of think tank influence on policymaking due to the immensity of resources directed towards those ends, with education policy serving as a prime example. We suggest that, especially in the realm of incentivist policies, think tanks do not appear to produce or incubate but rather promote ideas, and actually often only a single idea.

### Think tanks in US policymaking

The US has a long tradition of non-governmental organisations whose self-imposed purpose is to generate ideas and evidence to inform and influence public policymaking. Well-established examples of idea orchestration among US think tanks include the 100-year old Brookings Institution, ranked top think tank in the world (McGann 2013), and the Rand Corporation, which originated through the aerospace and defence industry company. (McGann 2013). Although labelled "private," think tanks have traditionally provided analyses, evidence and other services to governments, particularly at the national level, while also securing private and philanthropic funding. Brookings, RAND and the US think tank sector at-large have been reshaped by at least three relatively recent developments. Below we explain each of these developments and their respective impacts on the think tank landscape.

## Proliferation of conservative think tanks

In the 1970s and 1980s, under the perception of having been excluded from academic research, elements of the conservative political movement turned to think tank infrastructure and invested in new outfits such as the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and Cato Institute, which would later supply the ideas and house the individuals who would lead the consequent conservative revolution (Rich 2005). Rich (2004, p. 20) notes: "As the ranks of think-tanks generally exploded during the 1980s and 1990s, the rate of formation of conservative think tanks (2.6 per year) was twice that of liberal ones (1.3 per year)." This trend reflects both the notable expansion of private funding in US politics as well as the infusion of explicitly ideological and political purposes into the think tank sector.

## Increase of state and local level think tanks

Subsequently, state and local level think tanks expanded. In 2014, the University of Pennsylvania identified 1830 think tanks in the US, which was more than any other nation and more than all of Europe combined (McGann 2013). Nearly 80 percent of these think tanks are located outside of Washington, DC. Many are state-based entities and part of the state policy network (SPN), a group of free market-oriented think tanks in every state in the US.

While these organisations follow the American think tank sector approach of offering evidence, analyses and insights for national-level discussion, organisations dealing in education policy issues at the state and local-levels are quite evident for two key reasons. First, US education governance and spending remain largely decentralised, with states being the primary authorities in education, and devolving much of that to local education agencies. Indeed, with an estimated $788.7 billion (USD) to be spent on primary and secondary education in the US in 2015, the bulk of these resources are available at the local level, and thus draw the attention of reformers, philanthropists, and profit-seekers (Fang 2014).

Second, in a process of "disintermediation" state and local authorities are often willing to serve as "pilot" sites for philanthropists' reforms in exchange for resources (Au and Lubienski, under review; Lubienski 2014). The Annenberg Challenge (CAC) and Race to the Top (RttT) exemplify this intermediation. In the former case, the Annenberg Foundation initiated a five-year, matching grant of 49.2 million USD in private donations and 49.2 million USD in public funds toward public school reform in 18 national sites, one of which was Chicago Public Schools. Annenberg's public–private partnership also helped seed a local successor organisation, the Chicago Public Education Fund. More recently, the Obama Administration's RttT four-phase competition encouraged states to compete for the 4.35 billion USD funds in exchange for a commitment to adopt the Common Core State Standards, use data systems to track student achievement, implement standardised assessments such as Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), allow teacher evaluation based on value-added models, and remove caps on the number of charter schools allowed in each state (Layton 2014). The recent shift in the US education policy climate points to the increasingly important role of private donors in funding research, reform, and advocacy in public education, especially by funding local and state-level think tanks' production of ideas and evidence around such reforms. This reality is exceedingly problematic as it (1) challenges traditional understandings of democratic participation and oversight of schooling; and (2) can force school officials to cater the delivery of curriculum or alter the culture of the school to accommodate the corporate interests of those who gain influence by donating money and swaying research away from the neutral and more toward the ideological.

## Expanded functions of advocacy and "research"

Finally, the US think tank sector has seen a notable diffusion of function, with new groups offering "research" and advocacy services, while more established think tanks have added other services to their menus. The role of think tanks in bringing ideas and evidence to the public sector is hardly new in the US, as is evident in the evolution of education policy over the last two centuries. The model of what came to be known as "public schooling" developed in cities like Boston and New York, largely due to the efforts of elites working in free school "societies" to reform education provision (Kaestle 1973; Ravitch 1974). Often, these groups referenced overseas models of education, for example conducting visits to learn more about the

Prussian school system, or collecting other evidence to support their agenda for expanded access to state-supported schooling (Lubienski 2001). Centuries later, think tanks like the Centre on Education Policy and the Fordham Institute remain devoted specifically to education policy, while others such as the conservative Manhattan Institute, AEI, and the liberal Economic Policy Institute have broader portfolios that explicitly include distinct efforts in education (for a survey of the institutional landscape of these organisations, see DeBray-Pelot et al. 2007; Scott et al. 2015).

## The rise of venture philanthropies

As with American think tanks, the US has a long history of private philanthropy, service, and local-level private giving and non-profit organising. Much of this is attributable to the rise in systemic wealth inequality that came with twentieth-century industrialism, thus leading to social problems that philanthropies and non-profits sought to solve. Drawing on their surplus of wealth, philanthropists began to "give back" to the working class by funding individuals and entities including universities, elite social organisations, and civic efforts such as museums, symphonies, hospitals and other institutions.

However, this profile of philanthropic giving evolved during the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. Saltman (2010) contends that the twentieth-century experienced two distinct forms of philanthropy. The first iteration, "scientific philanthropy," was grounded in the belief that the giving of excess wealth arose from the notion of social obligation and included components of conservative hegemony. In this form of philanthropy, funders maintained distance from end-recipients of the money, as the wealthy neither reserved control of funds nor dictated how the money could or would be used. This type of early philanthropy predominantly came from the Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation, with the Ford family eventually disaffected by the liberal inclinations of its namesake.

In contrast, the more recent "venture philanthropy" exhibits a radical shift away from the scientific philanthropy in that giving is seen as a "social investment"—not a social obligation—and necessarily seeks to maintain control of the money as well as direct its use, often into think tanks. In the education sector—once targeted at the local-level where school authority has historically been located—venture philanthropists increasingly fund organisations that engage in advocacy and research at the national level in an effort to "influence the political process and policymaking" (Reckhow and Snyder 2014, p. 187). This giving focuses on providing money to support "jurisdictional challengers" that aim to provide alternative forms of education reform (e.g., charter schools, alternative certification for teachers) as well as "produce reports and policy recommendations, maintain a paid staff, and have a presence in Washington" (Reckhow and Snyder 2014, p. 188). It is these organisations that produce research to support ready-made policy solutions that are used as ammunition towards philanthropists' ideological aims (a point explicated below).

US philanthropic donations have grown significantly over the past decade. In 2014 alone, private citizens gave US$356.38 billion, corporate donations amounted to US$17.77 billions and foundation giving was US$53.7 billion according to the National Philanthropic Trust (2015). In particular, The Bill and Melinda Gates, Walton Family, Michael and Susan Dell, Robertson, Eli and Edythe Broad Foundations and Doris and Donald Fisher Fund are known as the "big six" philanthropies because of their dominance in U.S. education policy funding (Reckhow and Snyder 2014). As a result of Warren Buffet's $31 billion (USD) donation in 2006, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is the largest philanthropic organisation in history and represents more than double the amount of the combined money associated with both the Carnegie and the Rockefeller Foundations (Saltman 2010, p. 33).

Notably, these organisations take an active role in promoting what we and some others are calling an "incentivist" agenda—that is, a set of policies and normative perspectives premised on the idea that individuals and institutions in education are too often shielded from competitive forces, and should be "incentivized" toward particular behaviours and outcomes (Lubienski et al. 2011; Scott and Jabbar 2014; Stern 2008). Thus, while these "big six" philanthropies offer critical support for other efforts such as the small schools initiative and the Common Core State Standards (Layton 2014), these philanthropies all find common ground in actively supporting advocacy and research around charter schools (e.g., Green Dot Charter Schools), parent trigger laws (see Rogers et al. 2015), merit pay schemes for teachers (e.g., The New Teacher Project), and alternatives to state-based teacher licensure (e.g., Teach for America). The confluence in their assumptions and support represents a "significant overlap in the agenda and policy goals of top education funders" (Reckhow and Snyder 2014, p. 190). For example, in 2010, the top recipients of convergent philanthropic giving from the 15 largest K-12 foundations were the Charter School Growth Fund ($46 million, 6 funders), Knowledge Is Power Program ("KIPP," $24 million, 9 funders), D.C. Public Education Fund ($22 million, 5 funders), New Schools Venture Fund ($18 million, 10 funders), and Teach For America, deemed "the most dramatic example of convergence (with) grants from 13 of the 15 largest K-12 foundations" (Reckhow and Snyder 2014, p. 191).

Thus, US venture philanthropy is distinguished by both the immense scale of the resources involved *and* the confluence of these philanthropies' confluence and active involvement in strategies, interests, and perspectives on incentivist policy issues. These philanthropies orchestrate processes in order to reshape and facilitate policy, politics and their vision of social problems in specific ways that are aligned with the funders' agenda and perspective. In this orchestration, as we will note in the following two sections, think tanks play a key role.

## Orchestrated networks in the emerging policy landscape

The volume of venture philanthropy funding and influence, combined with the confluence of philanthropic interests on the abovementioned incentivist policies has reshaped the US education policy landscape in that we increasingly see new

organisational forms and functions emerging and operating in ways that align, overlap and complement each other in order to shepherd policy ideas through reconfigured policymaking processes. Stephen Ball's (2009) notion of "heterarchy" is one useful way to conceptualise the new, venture philanthropy-driven era of education policy, as multiple non-state actors assume overlapping and significant policymaking roles from traditional state entities. The orchestrated networks we describe reflect this idea of numerous actors representing many organisational forms supplementing and supplanting traditional state-oriented governance, but highlight the centrality of major funders acting in concert with think tanks to shape these networks. Even as philanthropies and think tanks are essential elements in providing resources and research for facilitating US education policy development, they frequently go beyond scientific philanthropy's traditional funding and research functions in their own work, as well as in policy networks they shape as they seek to not only influence, but direct policymaking.

In this regard, venture philanthropists operate in concert with associated organisations to channel resources, seed infrastructure for knowledge production, manage public perceptions and support, facilitate media coverage, and broker ideas to policymakers (Scott and Jabbar 2014). For example, the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) seeks to circumvent public input while providing ready-made legislation crafted through, and by, ALEC's language, often propagating policies that elevate privatisation and individualisation over notions of the collective good. This shift away from traditional conceptions of "the public" can also be seen in education—namely through the influence that think tanks and venture philanthropists had in the development and subsequent pushing of the Common Core State Standards (Savage 2014). Indeed, while think tanks like Brookings and Rand traditionally played a role parallel to universities as established knowledge producers, the new landscape is marked by a shift in both the forms and functions of different organisations in American education policy, with philanthropies serving as catalysts in this process, think tanks as conduits, with the traditional constructions of the democratic and public state consequently reimagined.

In particular, we are seeing the rise of new policy networks of intermediary organisations (IOs) such as Centre for Education Reform (CER) and Network for Public Education (NPE). Supported by particular venture philanthropies to convey research evidence created by knowledge producers such as think tanks into policymaking discussions (DeBray et al. 2014; Scott et al. 2014), these IOs' key function is to collect, package and promote, but not necessarily produce, research evidence aligned with the agendas of their funders. At the same time, not only are distinct IOs operating in the policy networks shaped by these large philanthropic funders, but these philanthropies themselves often play multiple roles that can include not only funding but research production and promotion as well. The main point is that, whether knowledge production services are performed in-house or outsourced to an IO which relies on funding, venture philanthropies have created integrated policy networks in which funding provides the financial, empirical and political resources to accomplish the multiple tasks necessary to see their agendas implemented. Think tanks and similar knowledge producers associated with these

concerted policy networks then provide the intellectual support, working with the philanthropies in what might be termed "idea orchestration" to advance proposals through reshaped policy processes.

## Key roles in orchestrated policy networks

As with the notion of heterarchical governance, we see orchestrated policy networks as representing complexity, with overlapping, competing and coexisting forms emerging in and shaping policymaking processes. However, for purposes of illustration of the *functions* we are seeing IOs play in these networks, we here undertake somewhat of an artificial exercise in conceptualising policymaking as a linear, evidence-based process of distinct tasks—similar to how these organisations position their efforts.[1] The following schema serves simply to illustrate some of the key roles performed in these orchestrated policy networks.

### Research production

As think tanks and universities continue to serve as sites of knowledge creation in education policy and other areas, this role is becoming more complex and commodified in a competitive climate (Slaughter and Leslie 1997). As US universities compete with think tanks for funds, often from agencies that seek to both illuminate and prescribe solutions for a given issue, funders are increasingly purchasing structural influence within these institutions. For instance, instead of simply donating to universities, some venture philanthropists are offering resources in exchange for influence on hiring practices, undoubtedly with an eye toward approving employment for researchers predisposed to embrace the questions (and answers) of interest to the funders (Miller and Bellamy 2012). Indeed, venture philanthropists also extend this approach to think tanks. For instance, the pro-voucher Walton Foundation supports the Fordham Institute and (reportedly) the Heartland Institute,[2] which tend to conduct research that puts vouchers in a positive light. But these same venture philanthropists are also funding reconfigurations of university infrastructure to support their agendas. For example, the Walton Foundation is a prominent supporter of Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) and the Centre for Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, and Walton also gave a multi-million dollar gift to the University of Arkansas to start what has been called "the strangest academic department in the world" (Glass 2014)—the Department of Education Reform (DER). Led by PEPG associates, DER's research typically finds advantages for vouchers and charter schools, key elements of the Walton agenda.

[1] Here we draw on findings from DeBray et al. 2014 and Scott et al. 2014.

[2] The Heartland Institute is not legally required to disclose its funders, and thus has a policy of privacy to shield them from potential criticism. However, SourceWatch reports that the Walton Foundation has donated some $400,000 (USD): http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Heartland_Institute.

Additionally, venture philanthropies fund newer, non-university organisations that present themselves as research-producing think tanks, even if they just re-package and promote evidence for policy discussions. For instance, the Friedman Foundation, created to advance vouchers, regularly releases reports that find advantages for "opportunity scholarships" (i.e. vouchers), but the reports generally include little new data or analyses (e.g., Forster 2007, 2009; Friedman Foundation for Education Choice 2012). CER, supported by several of the "big six" foundations, offers similar services, with its "research" tending toward compilation and promotion, rather than creation, of evidence (e.g., Centre for Education Reform 2000, 2001, 2010, 2013). Thus, these groups serve a role in orchestrated networks characterised by blurred distinctions between traditional organisational forms. The strategic position of IOs within orchestrated networks can obscure the knowledge production function, so that groups that present themselves as knowledge-producing think tanks actually package, rather than produce, evidence for policymakers.

## Dissemination

In the process of idea orchestration, evidence must be conveyed to appropriate audiences, whether particular policymakers or the broader public. Typically, efforts within these policy networks reflect a desire to promote and publicise research produced within the network (Jabbar et al. 2014; Malin and Lubienski 2015), as opposed to ensuring that evidence is "used" in a particularly substantive or symbolic way (Davies and Nutley 2008). While policy networks still draw on traditional media such as press releases, or commentary and opinion pieces in newspapers, more recently actors are using new media outlets such as the Web, social media and videography to cultivate wider support for policy ideas (Goldie et al. 2014; Malin and Lubienski 2015). Think tanks, funded by venture philanthropists, can be instrumental in facilitating this.

As an illustrative example tangential to education policy, the Marshall and Heartland Institute—which also promotes an incentivist education agenda—house and sponsor prominent scholars to place opinion pieces in national media outlets questioning the scientific consensus behind climate change, even when that is not their area of expertise (Oreskes and Conway 2010). Within US education policy, many organisations serve this function in emerging education policy networks. Since local media offers many opportunities to place opinion pieces, state-level think tanks such as Illinois Policy Institute (IPI) and Michigan's Mackinac Centre for Public Policy[3] publish pieces lauding favourable "research" on the opinion pages of local papers, especially in state capital cities. In fact, in view of the economic pressures on newspapers forcing staff reductions for journalists, IPI has started its own state news service to provide content—typically favourable to its agenda—to cash-strapped local papers in the state. Nationally, CER in Washington, DC, is a prime example of this function, placing opinion pieces in media outlets and sponsoring individuals with considerable media acumen, but perhaps with less research expertise, to appear in videos, films, and news pieces (Malin and Lubienski

[3] Neither of these think tanks discloses funding sources.

2015). Other philanthropies promote their policy agendas through financial support for documentaries and feature films aimed at popular audiences, such as the pro-charter documentary *Waiting for Superman* and the pro-parent trigger drama *Won't Back Down*. Such films were funded directly from the Gates and Broad Foundations, or from IOs such as Get Schooled that receives funding from Gates, and promoted through a "social action campaign" funded by the Fisher and Walton Foundations.

### Generating political support

Shaping the thinking of popular audiences is important but insufficient, especially when orchestrated networks are able to directly influence policymakers as well. Because idea orchestration integrates multiple functions, there are many points where political influence can be leveraged. Certainly, creating popular pressure on policymakers can be useful, such as through the designation of "School Choice Week," or asking parents to protest in favour of charter school expansion (Bergner 2014). In addition, network actors target policymakers through research briefs, expert testimony at hearings, and events to support the release of reports. Besides hosting report release events, think tanks, such as AEI, also host panel discussions that include key policymakers and like-minded researchers.

Though the Gates Foundation is perhaps more widely known for its success in promoting its research and messages, as particularly evidenced by the case of the Common Core (Layton 2014), the IOs that it funds are instrumental in advancing the Foundation's policy agenda. For instance, Stand For Children Director Jonah Edelman is forthright about his ability to use resources to strategically leverage key policymakers to support Gates-approved incentivist policies (Miller 2011). Likewise, Parent Revolution (which receives support from Walton, Gates, and Broad Foundations—the three largest venture philanthropists involved in U.S. education policymaking) was extremely successful in getting California lawmakers to adopt the nation's first parent trigger law, which allows parents to force change on a district school (Rogers et al. 2015). More specifically California's parent trigger, for example, allows a parent whose child attends a chronically failing school to petition the school district to close the school, reconstitute the failing school into a charter school, turnaround the school through terminating and rehiring leadership and teachers, or transform the school through curricular and program modifications.

In another approach, former Washington D.C. Public Schools Superintendent Michelle Rhee's Students First makes direct political contributions to candidates likely to support their agenda—which is about school choice through charter schools, vouchers and removing job protection for teachers. On the other end of the political spectrum, NPE supports political candidates who oppose such moves and are generally in favour of the agenda supported by teachers unions. Demonstrating yet another type of connection between venture philanthropists and policymakers, ALEC brings together philanthropic and corporate interests with conservative state lawmakers. While not necessarily emulating a think tank model, ALEC publishes "research" reports (see Ladner and Myslinski 2013) and serves as a clearinghouse for policy ideas including incentivist proposals in education. For instance, ALEC

offers legislative templates on issues such as charter schools, so that member-lawmakers can add the name of their state and submit these as legislative proposals.

## Grassroots, grass-tops, and pesticides

Closely related to the need for generating political support is the advantage garnered by creating the appearance of widespread popular support for a policy agenda promoted through an orchestrated network. In this respect, the financial and institutional support of venture philanthropy can be crucial, as can the institutional legitimacy provided by think tanks and related organisations. Policy networks in the US have been associated with a number of organisations that describe themselves as grassroots—that is, community-based organisations and movements representing broad-based support. However, whether those organisations emerge organically from community concern or are cultivated by seed money from venture philanthropists and their IOs is not always clear, causing some to label these as "grass-top" efforts.

Examples of these organisations include Parent Revolution, the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), and Hispanic CREO, all of which present themselves as representatives of marginalised communities and are funded by many of the "big six" venture philanthropies in education. Although the specifics of organisations' policy agendas is mostly unclear to general audiences, these organisations are successful at portraying their efforts as responding to wider discontent (of the marginalised communities they represent) with the status quo, or to a failure of traditional civic and civil rights groups to support drastic change. Yet, some are concerned that such "grassroots" organisations hire outside political organisers and operatives to manage their campaigns (Rogers et al., in press), participate in events and media activities for think tanks and IOs with whom they share funders, and staff their Boards of Directors with representatives with close connections to the relevant policy network. For example, the seven-member Board of the BAEO includes a CEO of a charter school fund, vice president of the Charter School Growth Fund, head of a private school and voucher advocacy group, partner at NewSchools Venture Fund, and the Executive Director of a state-level Students First group. While community members are seemingly absent from leadership, the BAEO Board holds close ties to venture philanthropists and "big six" funded IOs such as the Charter School Growth Fund and the NewSchools Venture Fund. These community-associated groups can also serve an important role in eliminating or pre-empting unwanted opposition from community-based groups that might oppose the agenda of their funders. For instance, the BAEO (2014) countered moves by Louisiana teacher unions to stop some funding for charter schools by claiming that the teachers were working in opposition to the low-income families BAEO represents.

Overall, in this illustration of elements of idea orchestration, philanthropies and think tanks act to nurture the various organisations and roles within a network to bring an idea successfully into the policy discussion and, ultimately, implementation. Venture philanthropists provide support to groups like think tanks to accumulate and arrange the evidence needed to legitimise an idea. They then also

cultivate capacity in favourable organisations in the IO sector to advance the idea into policy discourse—for example, by creating press releases or reports that repackage the evidence into more accessible language, or by launching concerted campaigns through established or new media. Finally, these philanthropists and think tanks attempt to re-shape policy processes in ways that are favourable to advancing their policy proposals, often by contributing to and enlisting the support of key policy players.

## Orchestrating incentivist policy ideas

Examples of idea orchestration in these vertically integrated policy networks are plentiful. The well-documented efforts of the Gates Foundation with respect to the Common Core serve as an excellent example of this phenomenon, as the Foundation adopted a policy idea, hired researchers who produced evidence on its effectiveness, found and supported key policymakers willing to embrace it (often funnelling the resources through IOs), and even funded states in creating their plans to adopt the standards (Layton 2014). Here we discuss two additional incentivist-oriented policy cases in the US that are particularly illustrative of the above described elements orchestrated in advocacy networks and currently receive less attention: vouchers and parent trigger laws. Vouchers are a policy proposal advanced by multiple think tanks at the local, state and federal levels in the US as a way to empower parents as consumers and force schools to respond to the competitive incentives generated by those consumer-style choices. Drawing from the virtually unregulated private sector, vouchers attract a somewhat (but not completely) different set of supporters in the philanthropic and think tank sectors than do other forms of choice. Parent trigger law, on the other hand, is a relatively new, state-level policy innovation that explicitly seeks to empower parents, but effectively looks to charter schools to ameliorate ineffective schooling. Parent trigger law has little track record on the actual impacts on students, but there is some evidence on advocacy and implementation of this policy—two issues of greater interest in our current concern. Since it appears to work within the state sector, parent trigger law has attracted attention from policy networks that offer a contrast to voucher advocacy networks, including in the orchestration of the idea.

### School vouchers

The modern conception of school vouchers was introduced by Friedman (1955) in an obscure essay as a proposal to push back the role of the state in schooling and allow for greater consumer control of school choices. A few American liberals and leftists in the 1960s and 1970s championed vouchers as an avenue to equalise educational opportunity (Coleman 1966; Coons and Sugarman 1978). Friedman Foundation (n.d.) explains vouchers as follows:

> Vouchers give parents the freedom to choose a private school for their children, using all or part of the public funding set aside for their children's

education. Under such a program, funds typically expended by a school district would be allocated to a participating family in the form of a voucher to pay partial or full tuition for their child's private school, including both religious and non-religious options.

However, aside from a failed pilot program in California, it was not until the 1990s that a combination of political, free-market conservatives and frustrated African-American community activists were able to implement the idea in Milwaukee and Cleveland, and through private funding in other cities. While the political alignments necessary to introduce the idea in these local programs have been documented, of greater interest here is the ways in which philanthropies, working through groups like AEI, Cato, ALEC, and the SPN think tanks, managed evidence to maintain the viability of the idea through legal challenges and scale it up for further expansion elsewhere. As the director of education policy at AEI described this process: specific foundations "were instrumental in getting the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program passed—the first real voucher model in the country. They were then instrumental in providing political air cover for the program. They found and supported researchers to document it, and they helped promote it nationally. The Walton Foundation has done the same thing with charter schools…" (Barr et al. 2008). Indeed, evidence on the effectiveness of these and subsequent programs was extremely contested, and key claims about the outcomes never went through normal peer review process, but were instead released directly by think tanks like Brookings and PEPG (Lubienski et al. 2009).

But rather than looking into the strength of the research claims, as has been done elsewhere (Lubienski et al. 2009; Rouse and Barrow 2009; Usher and Kober 2011), it is important to note here how voucher advocates successfully used evidence produced by allies in associated think tanks to shape policy discussions supporting vouchers. In fact, some of the original research favourable to these programs was funded by the Walton Foundation and conducted by PEPG, a university-based think tank funded by Walton and other foundations orchestrating voucher advocacy, including the Bradley, the Annie E. Casey and Olin Foundations. Reports lauding PEPG's research then appeared in policy briefs from affiliated think tanks and advocacy organisations such as the conservative Heritage Foundation (e.g., Watkins 2006), which receives funding from the four sources that also fund PEPG, and also subsequently appeared in the wider media (e.g., Thomas 2006). Indeed, the repetition of the (questionable) results reflects outlines of the network of IOs, both knowledge producers and brokers, that advocates for vouchers (Goldie et al. 2014). Market-oriented venture philanthropist funding is also evident in the creation of additional policy and political support, including events, publications, new advocacy organisations, new research and research outfits, newsletters, and Political Action Committees, such as StudentsFirst, that operate on the state and national level. For example, the Fordham Foundation—now Fordham Institute—has also drawn upon this approach, seeking to produce research that supports the Institute's stated commitment to market-based education reforms like school vouchers by creating a pronounced presence through podcasts, webinars, and social media, and not just through reports and press releases. Upon the creation of knowledge that

seemingly supports the positive effects of vouchers, the Fordham brand legitimises education policies that increase the use of such market-based reforms despite challenges raised to their research methods and logical assumptions (Lubienski and Brewer 2014).

Recently, two US Republican senators reintroduced a federal plan for vouchers, unveiling their proposal at AEI, a think tank which has received support from the Bradley and Gates Foundations (American Enterprise Institute 2014). At the same time, elements of the network actively work to counter any potential opposition to their agenda, including through the use of grass-tops strategies. For instance, PEPG and its affiliated publication, *Education Next*, quickly publish rebuttals when any evidence emerges that casts vouchers in a poor light (Peterson and Llaudet 2006; Wolf 2014). Likewise, groups claiming to represent marginalised minority communities, such as BAEO, put out information intended to show benefits of vouchers, question the motivations of opponents, and place associates in policy positions (Robinson 2005).

## Parent trigger

Despite the long tradition of local control of schooling in the US education system, the idea of parents voting to "take-over" their school and force school districts to close, turnaround (i.e., change leadership and staff), transform (i.e., change curriculum and programs), or charter chronically failing schools was relatively novel when introduced in California in 2010. Similar to the idea of schools "opting out" of local control in England and Wales a quarter-century ago, parent trigger is a state-level policy that allows parents at low-performing schools to sign petitions that force dramatic governance and management changes at their school. Depending on the particular state legislation, these changes could include reorganisation, dismissal of staff, or closure. However, despite the variation in the legislation across states, the default trigger option involves turning over the public school to a charter school management organisation. Parent trigger law is thus presented as a post-ideological approach to solving entrenched issues of organisational ineffectiveness, particularly in urban schools. As with the voucher case, our concern here is not with the empirical basis of that assertion, nor with the consequent effectiveness of school reorganisation sparked by parent trigger laws (indeed, the reform is too recent to evaluate the empirical record). Instead, of interest here is the way that elements in the policy process have been orchestrated to advance the idea of parent trigger laws.

Most closely associated with parent trigger is its key advocacy organisation, Parent Revolution, which closely resembles a grass-tops group (Rogers et al., in press; Lubienski et al. 2012). Parent Revolution is based on the ideas of parent empowerment and school effectiveness, emerged from a charter management company, and receives funding from the Walton, Broad and Gates Foundations. Ben Austin, Parent Revolution founder and a former aide to President Clinton, worked with then Democratic Senator and Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Gloria Romero and former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a proponent of charter schools and community empowerment, to build bi-partisan support for the idea in the California legislature. At the time, Romero campaigned for election as

California's Superintendent of Public Instruction and received campaign contributions from the Fisher and Broad families, as well as from prominent members of the charter school sector (Libby 2010). Since its implementation in California, parent trigger has proliferated to six other states, promoted by the advocacy of Parent Revolution, but also given intellectual cover by the Heartland Institute, a conservative think tank with ties to the Walton Foundation, with its parent trigger Campaign that includes a four-step checklist for parents to pull the trigger. While virtually no empirical evidence supports the parent trigger, Heartland, with its Fellows and affiliated faculty at academic institutions and other think tanks, offers the patina of scholarship on the issue. Parent trigger has enjoyed positive attention in the media, including through newer venues such as the "Dropout Nation" blog, the liberal MSNBC television network, and the feature film *Won't Back Down*, which was funded by the conservative activist Philip Anschutz (Ratigan 2011).

These examples demonstrate how particular policy issues can be orchestrated, as financial and political support are arranged to advance an idea toward implementation. In these cases, philanthropists played important roles in championing the idea with policymakers, generating favourable attention, creating community support (or the appearance thereof), and funding think tank attention to the issue. Notably, in neither case did the idea originate with a think tank. Instead, think tanks like Heartland, Heritage (or quasi-think tanks like PEPG) got involved *after* the idea was a policy reality, thus not serving as the source of the idea, but as sources of empirical or institutional support and legitimation.

## Conclusion

Even with the immense amount of resources at stake in American public education, school operations, administration, and the policymaking apparatus around schools are marked by diminishing public-sector funds and influence. As private-sector resources, whether money, ideas, or analyses, increasingly penetrate the education policy space, we are observing a diffusion of institutional forms and functions in orchestrated policy networks. Multiple organisational types are appearing, orchestrated by major funders around particular policy issues; traditional functions such as research production in these networks are ever more elusive; and knowledge producers like think tanks (and universities) are often more useful for lending legitimacy rather than empirical evidence or analyses to an issue.

In fact, in many cases, think tanks are simply not intended to *produce* knowledge. In the American model, many simply *promote* ideas, or a single idea—often the idea of market solutions for social problems. Indeed, think tanks may hold greater value in lending the appearance of institutional and intellectual heft to an issue. And this value is something that can be useful to, and purchased by, policy networks orchestrated by venture philanthropists seeking to advance a policy agenda. In this process of orchestration, promotion of an idea can be groundbreaking and serves a key role when integrated with efforts to build constituent and political support. While this also means that the specific roles of the various actors in an orchestrated network—the think tanks and funders, for instance—can be difficult to discern, the

policy networks themselves orchestrated around these policy ideas are often recognisable simply by identifying funding arrangements.

This analysis has focused on the role of US philanthropies and think tanks in orchestrating education policy ideas through policy networks. While our brief review of the interests and influence in American policymaking indicates that private participation is hardly a new phenomenon, the functions of IOs outlined here, operating in networks funded largely by a relatively small set of venture philanthropists, highlights the emergence of concerted efforts to shape not just policy, but policymaking processes. The incentivist cases of vouchers and parent trigger laws only begin to sketch out the shape of these networks in the US, and much more work needs to be done not only on the US on how these networks are increasingly global in scale. Their emergence and expansion raises important questions about issues such as expertise, empirical evidence, and the role of the public in public policymaking.

There are advantages evident in the emergence of these policy networks orchestrated by venture philanthropies. The policy networks can claim to bring much-needed intellectual and financial resources, technical sophistication, and policy acumen to issues. In some respects, the vertical integration of functions that they present offers a full-service alternative to bureaucratically based policymaking. Some would contend that they are giving a voice to marginalised groups, such as chronically under-served students or communities. By moving responsibility away from the state, many individuals in these networks see themselves as de-politicising education policy, focusing on "what works" for children, rather than satisfying adults and institutions (Klein 2014; Kopp and Farr 2011; Ratigan 2011; Rhee 2013).

Yet there is also a concern that this approach ignores the political elements inherent in public policymaking, as ideas and interests compete in democratic arenas and institutions. If an idea depends on private—even if well intentioned—patronage and sponsorship, then public policymaking itself may be privatised, or at least reflect the decline of democratic modes of input in favour of a small number of extremely wealthy funders. Obviously, democratic systems are quite susceptible to the influence of private money and influence, and the sector responsible for producing knowledge to address social concerns effectively is hardly immune to influence. US policymaking in particular has always been the interface between public and private interests. Yet, as public policymaking is, in a sense, "outsourced," the transfer of authority toward policy networks orchestrated by venture philanthropists—no matter how well meaning they are—may represent a significant shift toward privatised public policymaking.

**Acknowledgments** The authors thank Professor Bekisizwe Ndimande and the anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier drafts of the paper.

## References

American Enterprise Institute. (2014). Senators lamar alexander and tim scott unveil ambitious proposals to expand school choice [Press release]. Retrieved from http://www.aei.org/events/senators-lamar-alexander-and-tim-scott-unveil-ambitious-proposals-to-expand-school-choice/.

Au, W., & Lubienski, C. (under review). The gates foundation and the role of the philanthropic sector in shaping the emerging education market. In A. Verger, C. Lubienski & G. Steiner-Khamsi (Eds.), *The global education industry*. New York: Routledge.

BAEO. (2014). Louisiana Teachers' Union Is Wrong for Suing to Reduce Education Al Options in the State [Press release]. Retrieved from http://scoter.baeo.org/news_multi_media/20140930-BAEO-Response-to-LAE-Lawsuit-in-Louisiana_9.29.14%5B1%5D.pdf.

Ball, S. J. (2009). Academies in context: Politics, business and philanthropy and heterarchical governance. *Management in Education, 23*(3), 100–103. doi:10.1177/0892020609105801.

Barr, S., Hess, F., Kirsch, V., Klein, J. I., Vander Ark, T., & Tough, P. (2008, March 9). How many billionaires does it take to fix a school system? *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/09/magazine/09roundtable-t.html?pagewanted=all.

Bergner, D. (2014, September 7). The battle for New York Schools: Eva Moskowitz Vs. Mayor Bill De Blasio. *New York Times,* p. MM60. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/magazine/the-battle-for-new-york-schools-eva-moskowitz-vs-mayor-bill-de-blasio.html?_r=0.

Centre for Education Reform. (2000). Charter school highlights and statistics (pp. Retrieved Dec. 1,2000 from the WWW: <http://www.edreform.com/pubs/chglance.htm%3E). Washington, DC: Centre for Education Reform.

Centre for Education Reform. (2001). *What the research reveals about charter schools*. Washington, DC: Centre for Education Reform.

Centre for Education Reform. (2010). *Annual survey of America's charter schools*. Washington, DC: Centre for Education Reform.

Centre for Education Reform. (2013). *Charter School Primer*. Washington, DC: Centre for Education Reform.

Coleman, J. S. (1966). Equal schools or equal students? *The Public Interest, 4*, 70–75.

Coons, J. E., & Sugarman, S. D. (1978). *Education by choice: The case for family control*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Davies, H. T. O., & Nutley, S. M. (2008). *Learning more about how research-based knowledge gets used: Guidance in the development of new empirical research*. New York: William T. Grant Foundation.

DeBray, E., Scott, J., Lubienski, C., & Jabbar, H. (2014). Intermediary organizations in charter school policy coalitions: Evidence from new orleans. *Educational Policy, 28*(2), 175–206. doi:10.1177/0895904813514132.

DeBray-Pelot, E., Lubienski, C. A., & Scott, J. T. (2007). The institutional landscape of interest group politics and school choice. *Peabody Journal of Education, 82*(2–3), 204–230.

Fang, L. (2014, September 25). Venture capitalists are poised to 'disrupt' everything about the education market. *The Nation*. Retrieved from http://www.thenation.com/article/venture-capitalists-are-poised-disrupt-everything-about-education-market/.

Forster, G. (2007). *Monopoly versus markets: The empirical evidence on private schools and school choice*. Indianapolis, IN: Friedman Foundation.

Forster, G. (2009). *A win–win solution: The empirical evidence on how vouchers affect public schools*. Indianapolis, IN: Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.

Friedman, M. (1955). The role of government in education. In R. A. Solo (Ed.), *Economics and the public interest* (pp. 127–134). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Friedman Foundation for Education Choice. (2012). *The abcs of school choice*. Indianapolis, IN: Friedman Foundation.

Glass, G. V. (2014). The strangest academic department in the world. Retrieved from http://ed2worlds.blogspot.com/2014/05/the-strangest-academic-department-in.html.

Goldie, D., Linick, M., Jabbar, H., & Lubienski, C. (2014). Using bibliometric and social media analyses to explore the "echo chamber" hypothesis. *Educational Policy, 28*(2), 281–305. doi:10.1177/0895904813515330.

Jabbar, H., Goel, P., DeBray, E., Scott, J., & Lubienski, C. (2014). How policymakers define 'evidence': The politics of research use in new orleans. *Policy Futures in Education, 12*(8), 1013–1027.

Kaestle, C. F. (1973). *The evolution of an urban school system: New York City 1750–1850*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Klein, J. I. (2014). *Lessons of hope: How courage, grit, and accountability can save our schools* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Harper.

Kopp, W., & Farr, S. (2011). *A chance to make history: What works and what doesn't in providing an excellent education for all*. New York: Public Affairs.

Ladner, M., & Myslinski, D. (2013). *Report card on American education: ranking state k-12 performance, progress, and reform*. Washington, DC: American Legislative Exchange Council.

Layton, L. (2014, June 7). How Bill gates pulled off the swift common core revolution. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-bill-gates-pulled-off-the-swift-common-core-revolution/2014/06/07/a830e32e-ec34-11e3-9f5c-9075d5508f0a_story.html.

Libby, K. (2010, March 8). How to buy a candidate: Gloria Romero for CA superintendent of public instruction: Schools matter. Retrieved from http://www.schoolsmatter.info/search?q=How+to+Buy+a+Candidate%3A+Gloria+Romero+for+CA+Superintendent+of+Public+Instruction.

Lubienski, C. (2001). Redefining "public" education: Charter schools, common schools, and the rhetoric of reform. *Teachers College Record, 103*(4), 634–666.

Lubienski, C. (2014a). Re-making the middle: Dis-intermediation in international context. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 42*(3), 423–440. doi:10.1177/1741143214521594.

Lubienski, C. & Brewer T.J. (2014). Review of "pluck and tenacity: How five private schools in Ohio have adapted to vouchers." Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from http://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-pluck-and-tenacity.

Lubienski, C., Scott, J., & DeBray, E. (2011). The rise of intermediary organizations in knowledge production, advocacy, and educational policy. *Teachers college record*, http://www.tcrecord.org ID Number: 16487.

Lubienski, C., Scott, J., Rogers, J., Welner, K. (2012). Missing the target? The parent trigger as a strategy for parental engagement and school reform. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Available at: http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/pm-trigger-2012.pdf.

Lubienski, C., Weitzel, P., & Lubienski, S. T. (2009). Is there a "consensus" on school choice and achievement? Advocacy research and the emerging political economy of knowledge production. *Educational Policy, 23*(1), 161–193.

Malin, J. R., & Lubienski, C. (2015). Educational expertise, advocacy, and media influence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives,*. doi:10.14507/epaa.v23.1706.

McGann, J. G. (2013). *2014 Global go to think tank index report*. Philadelphia, PA: Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania.

Miller, R. (2011, July 21). How stand for children snuck into the statehouse. *Illinois Times*. Retrieved from http://illinoistimes.com/article-8899-how-stand-for-children-snuck-into-the-statehouse.html.

Miller, K. S., & Bellamy, R. (2012). Fine print, restrictive grants, and academic freedom. *Academe, 98*, 17–21.

National Philanthropic Trust. (2015). Charitable giving statistics. Retrieved from http://www.nptrust.org/philanthropic-resources/charitable-giving-statistics/.

Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2010). *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming* (1st U.S. ed.). New York: Bloomsbury Press.

Peterson, P. E., & Llaudet, E. (2006). *On the public-private school achievement debate*. Cambridge, MA: Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University.

Ratigan, D. (Writer) & MSNBC (Director). (2011). Parent revolution: Taking back Compton schools [Television broadcast]. In *Dylan Ratigan Show (Producer)*. New York, NY: MSNBC.

Ravitch, D. (1974). *The great school wars: New York City, 1805–1973; a history of the public schools as battlefield of social change*. New York: Basic Books.

Reckhow, S. (2013). *Follow the money: How foundation dollars change public school politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reckhow, S., & Snyder, J. W. (2014). The expanding role of philanthropy in education politics. *Educational Researcher, 43*(4), 186–195. doi:10.3102/0013189x14536607.

Rhee, M. (2013). *Radical: Fighting to Put students first* (1st ed.). New York: Harper.

Rich, A. (2004). *Think tanks, public policy, and the politics of expertise*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Rich, A. (2005). War of ideas. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved from http://ssir.org/articles/entry/war_of_ideas/.

Robinson, G. (2005). *Survey of school choice research*. Milwaukee, WI: Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Marquette University.

Rogers, J., Scott, J., Lubienski, C., & Welner, K. (2015). Missing the target? The parent trigger as a strategy for parental engagement and school reform. *Teachers College Record, 117*(6), 1–36. Retrieved from http://www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=17881.

Rouse, C. E., & Barrow, L. (2009). School vouchers and student achievement: Recent evidence, remaining questions. *Annual Review of Economics, 1*.

Saltman, K. J. (2010). *The gift of education: Public education and venture philanthropy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Savage, G. C. (2014). Reconstituting "the public" through national reform: A reflection on the development of the Common Core State Standards. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 11*(1), 40–43.

Scott, J., & Jabbar, H. (2014). The hub and the spokes: Foundations, intermediary organizations, incentivist reforms, and the politics of research evidence. *Educational Policy, 28*(2), 233–257. doi:10.1177/0895904813515327.

Scott, J., Lubienski, C., & DeBray, E. (2015). The ideological and political landscape of school choice advocacy. In B. S. Cooper, J. G. Cibulka, & L. D. Fusarelli (Eds.), *Handbook of education politics and policy* (2nd ed., pp. 322–342). New York: Routledge.

Scott, J., Lubienski, C., DeBray, E., & Jabbar, H. (2014). The intermediary function in evidence production, promotion, and utilization: The case of educational incentives. In K. S. Finnigan & A. J. Daly (Eds.), *Using research evidence in education: From the schoolhouse door to capitol hill* (pp. 69–92). New York: Springer.

Slaughter, S., & Leslie, L. L. (1997). *Academic capitalism: Politics, policies, and the entrepreneurial university*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Stern, S. (2008, Winter). School choice isn't enough. *City Journal, 18,* http://www.city-journal.org/2008/2018_2001_instructional_reform.html.

Thomas, C. (2006, November 22). Friedman's greatest legacy: school choice? *Real Clear Politics*. Retrieved from http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/11/the_other_milton_friedman.html.

Usher, A., & Kober, N. (2011). *Keeping informed about school vouchers: A review of major developments and research*. Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy.

Watkins, S. (2006, September 1). Are public or private schools doing better? How the NCES study is being misinterpreted. *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder,* 1–4. Retrieved from http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/09/are-public-or-private-schools-doing-better-how-the-nces-study-is-being-misinterpreted.

Wolf, P. J. (2014). Update on the Milwaukee school choice evaluation dust-up. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/update-on-the-milwaukee-school-choice-evaluation-dust-up/.

**Christopher Lubienski** is professor of education policy and Director of the Forum on the Future of Public Education at the University of Illinois, and Sir Walter Murdoch Adjunct Professor at Murdoch University. He studies the political economy of education policy in terms of both policymaking and effects, and leads a study of the role of intermediary organisations in shaping policymakers' use of research.

**T. Jameson Brewer** is an advanced Ph.D. student of educational policy and Associate Director of the Forum on the Future of Public Education at the University of Illinois. His research focuses on the impacts of privatization and marketization on public education by way of Teach For America, charter schools, and school vouchers.

**Priya Goel La Londe** is an advanced doctoral student of education policy, organisation and leadership at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She studies data and research use, international comparisons of incentivist policy, and social justice education.