

The Illinois Report 2009

Chapter 5: Promising Strategies for Improving K-12 Education in Illinois

Transcript of video interview with author Benjamin Superfine

“In 2008, The Illinois Report focused on increasing and equalizing the amount of funding in Illinois. Given the recent economic downturn, we figured it would be a good idea to focus on making the funding more efficient or more cost-effective. So, we focused on what we thought was one of the most important strategies for doing this, which is making a more robust educator work force policy. So, by educator, this includes teachers and this includes school leaders.

“There are a variety of ways that we could potentially make educator work force policy better. We could focus on a variety of practices. These include practices such as those that will prepare teachers and school leaders better for when they go into schools, practices that will focus on credentialing and licensing and practices that will focus on developing these people when they’re actually in schools. Practices that will focus on incentive systems to keep them there, practices that will focus on placing educators in the proper school site, even practices that focus on supervision, and hiring and firing at the end.

“What’s not just important, though, is all these practices by themselves, what’s really important, as the educational and business research shows, is that we have systemic and strategic combinations of these practices. In other words, that they’re going to coherently align with each other, that they all aim towards the same goals and work towards similar purposes. And this is very different than what we have going on in Illinois right now.

“Right now, we have a hodgepodge of practices that are piecemeal and aren’t coordinated with each other at all. So, by focusing on making these practices more coherent, more systemic, more strategic at the same time, and remedying this uncoordinated nature of these practices, we can hopefully achieve a lot of cost savings.

“And it’s really important to do educator work force development for a couple of reasons in terms of cost. One is because it’s one of the biggest expenditures we have in schooling in the state, so we’d be managing one of the biggest expenditures. Two, it’s because it’s a very high-leverage point. The educators come in contact with kids and with schools every single day. So we think that if we really focus on improving our educators we can improve school achievement inside of schools, and we can especially enhance learning opportunities for kids in low-income schools and for kids in racially isolated schools. And finally, we think that compared to other possible strategies, such as class size reduction, it would require a comparably modest investment.”