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Review of *The School Staffing Surge, Part II*

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Summary of Review

The School Staffing Surge, Part II is a companion report to a 2012 report called *The School Staffing Surge*. The earlier report argued that between 1992 and 2009, the number of full-time-equivalent school employees grew 2.3 times faster than the increase in students over the same period. It also claimed that despite these staffing increases, there was no progress on test scores or drop-out reductions. The new report disaggregates the trends in K-12 hiring for individual states and responds to some of the criticisms leveled at the original report. Yet this new report, like the original, fails to acknowledge that achievement scores and dropout rates have steadily improved. What it does instead is present ratios comparing the number of administrators and other non-teaching staff to the number of teachers or students, none of which has been shown to bear any meaningful relationship to student achievement. Neither the old report nor this new one explores the causes and consequences of employment growth. When a snapshot of hiring numbers is not benchmarked against the needs and realities of each state, it cannot illuminate the usefulness or wastefulness of hiring. The new companion report, much like the original one, is devoid of any important policy implications.

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Review of *The School Staffing Surge, Part II*

Joydeep Roy, Teachers College, Columbia University

I. Introduction

A 2012 report, *The School Staffing Surge: Decades of Employment Growth in America's Public Schools*,[1] authored by Benjamin Scafidi and published by The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, analyzed the growth in public school personnel relative to the increase in students since 1992. It argued that between FY 1992 and FY 2009, the number of K-12 public school students nationwide grew 17%, while the number of full-time school employees increased 39%. Among school personnel, the number of administrators and other non-teaching staff rose at a faster rate compared with that of teachers. In February 2013, a companion report was released, titled, *The School Staffing Surge: Decades of Employment Growth in America's Public Schools, Part II*,[2] and also authored by Benjamin Scafidi and published by The Friedman Foundation. This new report further disaggregates this employment growth by individual states. In addition, it contains a host of new ratios related to the magnitude and cost of this hiring "surge" and also contains a response to criticisms of the 2012 report, including a response to an earlier review by this author, published by the National Education Policy Center.[3]

Understanding spending on K-12 education is useful as part of larger efforts to improve overall national performance and to close achievement gaps. From this perspective, a report that explored the causes and consequences of faster growth of teachers, staff and administrators, examining the variation across states and over time, could have made a significant contribution. The original report, however, simply documented the employment growth, labeled the growth as problematic, and then recommended certain favored policies (i.e., vouchers and school choice). The original report also mistakenly argued that there has not been any measurable student progress in the U.S. over the last few decades.

The new companion report does more of the same: It disaggregates the employment growth by state and highlights different indicators related to how much money might have been saved in hypothetical scenarios where personnel hiring did not go up by as much. None of these indicators have been shown to have any meaningful relationship with student achievement. Finally, the report, like its predecessor, proffers expanded school choice, in the form of more charter schools vouchers for private schools, as a remedy; yet

there is little evidence that private schools and charter schools favorably differ from traditional public schools along these dimensions.

II. Findings and Conclusions of the Report

The new report includes statistics on the "staffing surge" for each state except South Carolina. Some of the notable highlights in its conclusions are as follows (p. 2):

- Nationally, states could have saved more than $24 billion annually if they had maintained the same proportion of administrators and other non-teaching staff as they had in 1992. A quarter of these savings would have come from Texas, where public schools would have saved almost $6.4 billion. Virginia would have had an extra $29,007 to spend per teacher.
- There are very large differences in the employment of non-teaching personnel across states.
- Twenty-one "Top-Heavy States" employ fewer teachers than other non-teaching personnel, with Virginia at the top (60,737 more administrators and other non-teaching staff than teachers in its public schools).
- There are also significant differences in total employment ratios across states.

The author also repeats the assertion that *nationally* there have not been any positive returns to students as measured by test scores or graduation rates—that is, the increases in public school employment since 1992 do not appear to be associated with any positive effects on test scores whatsoever (pp. 2, 10). He suggests that we should pursue school choice, which will purportedly alleviate the cost increases and increase achievement (p. 15).

III. The Report's Rationale for Its Findings and Conclusions

The new report relies on data from the U.S. Department of Education—in particular, various editions of the *Digest of Education Statistics*, published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at the U.S. Department of Education. These statistics are available for all individual states; the author omits South Carolina, however, because of possible inaccuracy in the reported data.

The new report presents an array of new comparative staffing ratios, contrasting the rates of hiring of teaching and non-teaching staff across states and highlighting how much money states could have saved if they had cut down on their hiring. No evidence is presented showing these indicators bear any relationship to student achievement, however. An implicit rationale behind the new companion report is that instructional expenditures are more effective in raising student achievement, and the trend of higher

growth in non-teaching personnel over the last two decades is indicative of bureaucratization and "non-productive" spending. The report also cites a few references to reiterate the claim, made in the earlier report, that there has not been any measurable progress in student achievement and graduation rates during the last few decades.

IV. The Report's Use of Research Literature

The report's use of research literature fails to provide an adequate and comprehensive view in several instances.

Claimed Lack of Progress in Student Achievement

The author again argues that there has been no improvement in student achievement in K-12 public schools during this period (pp. 10-12). This is simply incorrect. There has been significant progress both in overall student achievement and in closing of achievement gaps by race or ethnicity. Between 1973 and 2008, the Black-White gap has declined by almost half in reading and by more than a third in mathematics. These findings were detailed in my review of the original report and by other sources.[4] Both high school graduation and college enrollment are at all-time highs.[5]

The data presented in Table 1 clearly show that

Table 1. NAEP Performance by Public School and Private School Students, 1980 (or 1978) to 2008

Average Score in NAEP reading	*1980*	*2008*	*Change in Scores*
Students at age 9 in			
Public Schools	214	218	4
Private Schools	227	237	10
Catholic Schools	226	235	9
Students at age 13 in			
Public Schools	257	258	1
Private Schools	271	275	4
Catholic Schools	270	275	5
Students at age 17 in			
Public Schools	284	284	0
Private Schools	----	----	----
Catholic Schools	300	303	3
Average Score in NAEP mathematics	*1978*	*2008*	*Change in Scores*
Students at age 9 in			
Public Schools	217	242	25
Private Schools	230	252	22
Catholic Schools	230	251	21
Students at age 13 in			
Public Schools	263	280	17
Private Schools	279	295	16
Catholic Schools	279	293	14
Students at age 17 in			
Public Schools	300	305	5
Private Schools	----	----	----
Catholic Schools	309	317	8

Source: Rampey, B.D., Dion, G.S., and Donahue, P.L. (2009). *NAEP 2008 Trends in Academic Progress* (NCES 2009–479). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

there have been significant gains by public school students since 1978. Moreover, for both students at age 9 and age 13, the gains in mathematics have been larger for public school students than for private school students. Of course, this sort of cross-sectional data look at different students each year, so the comparisons are undoubtedly influenced by which students enroll in private schools. But combined with other research,[6] this table does suggest that little would be gained from following the report's recommendation for private school choice. Bearing in mind that private schools start at a higher place due to the differences in the student body, the fact that private school students progressed at about the same rate as their counterparts in public schools belies this effectiveness assertion. In other words, if private schools, by virtue of their competing in the marketplace for students, have figured out the ideal input-mix, we would expect them to have higher gain scores, particularly in math, where school effects tend to be stronger. This is not the case.

Claimed Lack of Progress in Graduation Rates

As was the case with his first report, the author again relies on a 2008 study by economists Heckman and LaFontaine to argue that public high school graduation rates have not increased since 1970 (pp.11-12). This assertion is misleading, however, and it is worth analyzing the claim in some detail.

First, over the last few decades there has been a significant strengthening of high school diploma requirements. As Jeffrey Mirel has pointed out,[7] following the 1983 manifesto *A Nation at Risk*, 45 states and the District of Columbia raised high-school graduation requirements, 42 increased math requirements, and 34 boosted science requirements. Mirel further points out that in 1982, for example, only 32% of all high-school graduates took four years of English, three years of social studies, and two years each of math and science. By 1994, however, the number of graduates who followed that regimen of courses had shot up to 75%, and the percentages for African American (77%) and Latino (78%) graduates were marginally greater than for whites (76%).

Second, each state uniquely defines what it means to complete high school, including graduating with a diploma. The number and types of exit options available differ significantly from state to state, and this heterogeneity is particularly true for special education students.[8] Roy and Mishel (2008) illustrate the pitfalls of comparing state-level high school graduation rates by using the example of pairs of states—Georgia and Arkansas, and North Carolina and South Carolina.[9] They show that even states performing similarly on national NAEP tests can have large differences in graduation rates due to differences in requirements and definitions. Massachusetts, whose students regularly score at the top nationally,[10] is often ranked *below 25th* by recent studies that use state-level graduation rates—an almost absurd ranking.[11] The upshot is that comparing high school graduation rates across states is like comparing student proficiency rates across states based on *state* tests and *state* cut scores—the results are unlikely to reflect true student performance.[12] We should thus be cautious in using the national graduation rate, which is just the average of state-defined graduation rates, lacking a uniform standard.

Third, the author refers to some states diluting their standards in the 2000s, after the passage of the No Child Left Behind law (p. 12). Note, however, that the Heckman and LaFontaine estimates pertain to the period 1960-2005 or 1970-2005—for the most part before the NCLB law really came into effect and during which there was a *strengthening* of graduation requirements, as Jeffrey Mirel notes. Second, even during the late 1990s and 2000s there was a strengthening of graduation rates in many states, particularly with the imposition of mandated exit exams.[13]

A new study also comprehensively details public high school graduation rates in the U.S. since 1970, showing that there has been a significant increase in graduation rates in the post-2000 period (accompanied by a corresponding increase in eighth-grade NAEP test scores).[14] And a recent report from the U.S. Department of Education also posits similar trends; contrary to what might be expected, the overall graduation rate stood at 78.2% in 2009-10. Asians and Pacific Islanders received a diploma at the highest rate (93.5%), while the rates for other groups were 83.0% for White students, 71.4% for Hispanic students, 69.1% for American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 66.1% for Black students.[15] While both these reports are subject to some of the criticisms mentioned above in comparing state-defined graduation rates over states and across time, they suggest that overall the rates have increased even though many states have adopted higher graduation standards. No causal inferences can be made from such data, but it is possible that this growth in both achievement and high school completion has been aided by the growth in school personnel over the last few decades pointed to by the two Friedman reports. If so, then this would almost certainly be a productive use of resources for boosting student learning. To draw a conclusion one way or the other would require that the researchers undertake a real *causal* analysis, something lacking in the report under review.

Importance of Instructional Spending Vis-à-vis Other Forms of Spending

One cannot evaluate the consequences of a higher growth in teaching personnel compared with non-teaching personnel without a careful accounting of where the additional money is going. Much of the money may be going to pay for programs that, although of great value along several dimensions, may not show up in immediate test score gains. These may include Title IX; anti-bullying, substance abuse, dropout prevention, or alternative education programs; the hiring of psychologists, teacher aides, special education aides, teachers for English learners, or school-based police; or the addition of AP courses. A growing literature in education is finding that many interventions, particularly those aimed at older children, are often more effective at improving their non-cognitive skills than their cognitive skills.[16] The importance of such non-cognitive skills in the labor market has long been recognized in the literature,[17] but it is likely that the benefits of hiring additional non-instructional staff would only manifest later in life in outcomes such as significantly higher earnings.

The key point here is not that increases in staffing are necessarily beneficial. Rather, the point is that the report is wrong to assume, based on limited and flimsy evidence, that those increases had no benefit. As repeatedly emphasized, there is no consensus yet in the

research literature as to the proper balance between instructional expenditures and administrative expenditures, and in fact there is unlikely to be one if the purposes of the latter are not well measured by a standardized test. A comprehensive literature review a few years ago concluded that the best empirical research on this topic tends not to show *either* negative effects of administrative expense or positive effects of instructional expense on student outcomes when addressed as internal shares of total budgets.[18] That is, there appears to be no systematic relationship between these spending proportions and student outcomes

Non-Instructional Spending in Charter Schools and Private Schools

Further, studies of charter schools and of private schools reveal that both generally spend at least as much on administration, if not more, compared with traditional public schools.[19] Why do these schools do so, when they are presumably bound by the discipline of the market? If we are really concerned about the rising importance of non-instructional spending in K-12 education, would not school choice—with its focus on private schools and charter schools, make the problem worse?

V. Review of the Report's Methods

Much of the new report is concerned with detailing trends in employment of full-time employees in public schools in individual states—disaggregated into teachers on the one hand and administrators and other non-teaching staff on the other hand. The report does not go *beyond* comparing this growth to the corresponding growth in student enrollment, however. As pointed out in the earlier review, a useful guide for policy would take the next step, presenting a comprehensive study that relates each state's growth of teachers, non-teaching personnel, and spending with key changes in that state's context and circumstances. This would likely include changes in educational, economic, demographic, political and policy circumstances. In fact, as discussed in section VI below, superficial arguments can be misleading; even after the relatively higher growth in the number of teachers compared to the number of students in the post-world war II period, class sizes in public schools in the U.S. are significantly higher than those in private schools and are also higher in terms of international comparisons.

A cursory ranking of states in terms of gross staffing indicators—most of which do not have implications for reported student outcomes—does not help us understand whether the growth has been excessive or deficient. It also does not help us understand whether there might have been better ways of spending the money. Not surprisingly, some states have had higher growth rates, and some have had lower growth rates; it is quite plausible that some of the higher rates of growth were too low (from an efficiency perspective), while the low rates of growth in other states may have actually been too high.

For example, Table 6 in the new report ranks states in terms of their ratio of students to non-teaching staff in FY 2009 (p. 9). This statistic has no direct bearing on student learning. Ultimately, the number of non-teaching staff a school or district hires depends upon myriad factors like organization of the school in grade levels, enrollment size, backgrounds of students, family preferences in school staff, broader labor market conditions like alternate employment opportunities, and revenues available to the school or district—only one of which

Table 2. Student-Teacher Ratios in Private Schools by State, 1993-94 and 2009-10

	1993-94			2009-10		
	Students	*FTE Teachers*	*Student-Teacher Ratio*	*Students*	*FTE Teachers*	*Student-Teacher Ratio*
United States	**4,836,442**	**338,162**	**14.3**	**4,700,119**	**437,414**	**10.7**
Alabama	72,630	5,424	13.4	78,351	8,775	8.9
Alaska	5,884	476	12.4	4,426	529	8.4
Arizona	41,957	2,796	15.0	44,559	3,896	11.4
Arkansas	29,011	2,023	14.3	23,889	2,392	10.0
California	569,062	35,170	16.2	539,726	45,741	11.8
Colorado	53,732	4,115	13.1	48,545	4,793	10.1
Connecticut	70,198	6,345	11.1	64,384	7,431	8.7
Delaware	22,308	1,780	12.5	22,758	2,064	11.0
District of Columbia	15,854	1,544	10.3	15,667	1,873	8.4
Florida	233,743	16,842	13.9	287,689	20,591	14.0
Georgia	97,726	8,283	11.8	130,263	13,246	9.8
Hawaii	30,537	2,144	14.2	33,536	3,044	11.0
Idaho	8,019	552	14.5	14,507	1,364	10.6
Illinois	293,038	17,550	16.7	243,405	20,289	12.0
Indiana	91,986	6,139	15.0	104,169	8,420	12.4
Iowa	50,602	3,291	15.4	39,694	3,218	12.3
Kansas	37,045	2,382	15.6	40,252	3,367	12.0
Kentucky	58,058	3,815	15.2	61,384	5,282	11.6
Louisiana	145,512	9,286	15.7	131,866	10,061	13.1
Maine	16,999	1,535	11.1	16,933	1,885	9.0
Maryland	112,481	8,646	13.0	126,415	13,230	9.6
Massachusetts	126,744	11,329	11.2	119,112	14,917	8.0
Michigan	187,741	11,322	16.6	134,125	10,888	12.3
Minnesota	86,051	5,595	15.4	78,389	6,424	12.2
Mississippi	58,655	3,995	14.7	47,361	4,507	10.5
Missouri	117,466	7,973	14.7	105,548	9,028	11.7
Montana	9,111	684	13.3	7,987	880	9.1
Nebraska	39,564	2,575	15.4	34,819	2,658	13.1
Nevada	10,723	654	16.4	20,108	1,601	12.6

is the size of the student boy.

Student-Teacher Ratios in Private Schools

As Table 2, based on U.S. Department of Education data, shows, there is significant variation in student-teacher ratios *even among private schools* across the U.S. states. In 1993-94, while private schools in 10 states had fewer than 12 students per teacher—the national average for private schools being 14.3 students per teacher—five states had more than 16 students per teacher. Does it mean that

Table 2 (continued)

	1993-94			2009-10		
	Students	*FTE Teachers*	*Student-Teacher Ratio*	*Students*	*FTE Teachers*	*Student-Teacher Ratio*
New Hampshire	18,386	1,742	10.6	20,807	2,611	8.0
New Jersey	195,921	14,281	13.7	188,307	19,018	9.9
New Mexico	20,007	1,569	12.8	20,548	2,041	10.1
New York	473,119	34,771	13.6	430,605	41,959	10.3
North Carolina	69,000	5,746	12.0	98,582	9,962	9.9
North Dakota	7,577	529	14.3	6,732	585	11.5
Ohio	246,805	14,872	16.6	222,218	16,787	13.2
Oklahoma	25,837	2,250	11.5	28,159	2,936	9.6
Oregon	34,092	2,254	15.1	47,123	4,372	10.8
Pennsylvania	342,298	21,880	15.6	265,399	23,699	11.2
Rhode Island	23,153	1,835	12.6	21,871	2,296	9.5
South Carolina	51,600	3,989	12.9	49,203	5,058	9.7
South Dakota	9,575	707	13.5	9,394	849	11.1
Tennessee	84,538	6,684	12.6	87,754	8,579	10.2
Texas	211,337	16,726	12.6	245,568	25,659	9.6
Utah	9,793	749	13.1	18,038	1,849	9.8
Vermont	9,107	945	9.6	9,542	1,317	7.2
Virginia	84,438	7,391	11.4	103,076	11,357	9.1
Washington	70,205	4,798	14.6	77,024	6,957	11.1
West Virginia	13,539	1,085	12.5	12,321	1,279	9.6
Wisconsin	141,762	8,927	15.9	115,985	9,580	12.1
Wyoming	1,919	167	11.5	1,998	270	7.4

Source:

1993-94: Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1996, March). *Private School Universe Survey, 1993-94* (NCES 96-143). Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education.

2003-04: Broughman, S.P., Swaim, N.L., & Hryczaniuk, C.A. (2011). *Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2009-10 Private School Universe Survey* (NCES 2011-339). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

states in the latter group were managing their resources more efficiently, while states in the former group were being unnecessarily wasteful? Similarly, does just the fact that student-teacher ratio in private schools fell steeply between 1993-94 and 2009-10—from 14.3 students per teacher to only 10.7 students per teacher for the country as a whole—really provide great insight into the causes and consequences of this?[20] The only reasonable answer is "no." Until and unless we can conduct a full scientific analysis, both private and public school staff variation is essentially meaningless in terms of providing policy guidance. Note that we do not have comparable data on administrators and other non-teaching staff in private schools, but it seems likely that states would show similar divergence in student-administrator ratios as they show in student-teacher ratios.

Salaries for Teachers and Administrators

It is true that salaries for teachers in the United States have been lagging compared with similar workers (particularly college graduates),[21] and it is possible that higher salaries might attract better graduates to enter teaching. In a recent *New York Times* article, Rick Ginsberg, the dean of the School of Education at the University of Kansas, laments the difficulty of recruiting qualified mathematicians and scientists, arguing that a person in his or her first year as an engineer will earn more than a teacher will ever earn over a 30-year career.[22]

What is less well known is that salaries for school administrators have been lagging behind, too. A RAND study of school leaders found that the real hourly wage of school administrators saw little change between 1984 and 1999 and remained close to that of managers generally—far below that of medical professionals or of lawyers and judges.[23] Further, the same study reports that there has actually been a narrowing of the earnings gap between public school administrators and private school administrators. In 1984, public school administrators earned on average approximately 40% more per week than private school administrators did. By 1999, however, this gap had narrowed to 12%.[24]

It is important to keep this perspective in mind while commenting on a "surge" in administrative spending in public schools in the last two decades.

Misleading Designation of "Top-heavy" States

The new Friedman report asserts that "21 states in FY 2009 employed fewer teachers than administrators and other non-teaching personnel" (p. 8). These are labeled as "Top-Heavy States." Given that the author readily admits that there is no research literature justifying the assignment of such a pejorative term (p. 14), this is an unsubstantiated assertion. That is, if we do not know the best ratio of teaching personnel versus other employees, how does one define top-heavy?

A similar example of biased interpretation can be found in the report's Table 2, where the author compares the total number of non-teaching staff hired between FY 1992 and FY 2009 to the growth in student population during this time (p. 5). He refers to the

difference as the "extra" number of administrators and non-teaching staff in each state (p. 1). As mentioned elsewhere in this review, and in the earlier review, there are two issues here. First, the proper or ideal balance between the number of non-teaching staff and students is likely to depend on factors not addressed in the two reports, such as the institutional structure and organization of schools, student demographics and academic backgrounds, and preferences of families. Second, the reader does not know whether the hiring that took place between 1992 and 2009 represents a move towards the ideal balance or away from that balance. A snapshot of hiring numbers, which are not benchmarked against the needs within each state, its future requirements, or both, is unable to illuminate whether the hiring in question was long overdue, generally necessary, or inefficient and wasteful.

VI. Review of the Validity of the Findings and Conclusions

The main thrust of the report is that the expansion of payrolls at American public schools has been wasteful, with the key evidence being that there has been a larger increase in hiring of "non-productive" administrators and other non-teaching staff. This simple fact alone does not imply that such spending is wasteful, however; nor does it alone support a conclusion that student achievement would have been higher if the additional money were spent otherwise. While documenting the state-level employment trends, there is no attempt in the report to causally link these trends with test scores or any other social or school measure. Added to this is the fact that due to historical reasons or current demographic trends, states may be far from their ideal mix of students, teachers and non-teaching staff; the trends as documented might simply reflect a catch-up for these states. Thus, the resulting analysis is devoid of serious policy implications. Finally, though we have only modest evidence regarding administrative costs in private schools and in charter schools, the sparse literature that exists suggests such costs are actually higher, as a share of total costs, in these types of schools than in traditional public schools.

Public schools in the U.S. have *larger* class sizes, not smaller ones, whether the basis of comparison is other OECD countries or U.S. private schools.[25] Similarly, though comparable data on non-instructional staff are hard to obtain, data from the OECD show that the United States spent 81% of its current expenditure on compensation of all staff, very close to the overall OECD average of 79%.[26]

The author asserts, based on a faulty reading of the underlying data, that no progress has been made regarding student achievement in the U.S. over the last few decades, and therefore any benefit of the growth of personnel in K-12 education—particularly the growth in the number of administrators and other non-teaching staff—is non-existent. To the contrary, there has been progress on multiple fronts over the last 40 years. Thus, it could just as plausibly be argued that the "staffing surge" was a wise investment.

The new report also argues that it "does not imply classroom expenditures are better or worse" (p. 14) compared with spending on administrators and other non-teaching

personnel in public schools. If that is indeed the case, however, then the whole set of tables comparing growth of teaching personnel with growth in non-teaching personnel, and the rankings of states in teaching personnel per student and non-teaching personnel per student (Tables 6 and 7, p. 9), makes little sense. At any given point in time, states face different situations regarding student needs and supplies of teachers and administrators, and they should be free to experiment with different combinations of students, teachers and non-teaching staff, which is exactly what the data reflect.

Of course, this is not asserting that states are always doing the right thing. Rather, the point is that arbitrary criteria like those set out by the author and his reports are exactly

> *Arbitrary criteria like those set out by the author and his reports are exactly that: arbitrary and without much relationship to student achievement.*

that: arbitrary and without much relationship to student achievement. We could have done exactly the same exercise with doctors and nurses, and say that if 10,000 doctors had not been hired, costing at least $100,000 in annual salaries each, the country would have saved upwards of a billion dollars. This would be literally true, but does not imply that this would have been the wise or proper thing to do.

The report lists 21 states as "top-heavy"—states that in FY 2009 employed fewer teachers than administrators plus other non-teaching personnel. A careful look at these states shows that many of them are top performers; in fact, three of the top five states in the nation in fourth-grade performance in mathematics in NAEP 2011 are categorized as "top-heavy" (New Hampshire, Minnesota and Vermont). Generally speaking, these states vary widely on NAEP scores—the average rank in fourth-grade math (NAEP 2011) of the 21 "top-heavy" states is 25.0, virtually indistinguishable from 25.2, the average rank of the 30 non-topheavy states.

Concerning high school graduation rates, consider Virginia, which leads the list of top-heavy states by a wide margin. *Education Week* reports that Virginia school districts like Loudoun County and Fairfax County had some of the highest graduation rates in the nation.[27] This reinforces the inappropriateness of adopting an arbitrary criterion; rankings based on such indicators will scarcely have any predictive power for student performance.

While allowing schools more flexibility might be a laudable objective, we have seen that over the last 30 years in the U.S. students in private schools appear to have improved their performance at about the same rate as students in public schools. For this and other reason, it is unlikely that the report's suggested solution—school choice—would have a significant effect on student performance. There is nothing in the report that offers evidentiary or logical proof or explanation for how school choice would solve the "staffing surge," save money, or provide better outcomes.

VII. Usefulness of the Report for Guidance of Policy and Practice

The report documents trends in hiring of teaching and non-teaching personnel in each U.S. state between 1992 and 2009, showing that in most cases there has been a faster increase in the number of administrators and other non-teaching staff compared with the number of teachers. Understanding the causes and consequences of these hiring trends on student achievement and school efficiency is a worthy exercise, since the trends do raise essential questions. Unfortunately, the report, while highlighting the growth in personnel spending and the significant variation across the states, does not provide useful insights.

Instead, the report seems designed to convince readers that the growth is a mark of inefficiency and that it somehow provides evidence in favor of increased school choice. It presents various indicators related to employment growth but never explains how any of it is relevant to school or student performance. A comparison of staffing to needs is not provided, which further compromises the report's utility. Consequently, the report does not further our understanding of the issue at hand and is of little, if any, help in guiding policymakers, educators or the public.

Notes and References

1 Scafidi, B. (2012). *The School Staffing Surge: Decades of Employment Growth in America's Public Schools*. Indianapolis, IN: The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, October 2012. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.edchoice.org/Research/Reports/The-School-Staffing-Surge--Decades-of-Employment-Growth-in-Americas-Public-Schools.aspx.

2 Scafidi, B. (2013). *The School Staffing Surge: Decades of Employment Growth in America's Public Schools*. Indianapolis, IN: The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.edchoice.org/Research/Reports/The-School-Staffing-Surge--Decades-of-Employment-Growth-in-Americas-Public-Schools--Part-2.aspx.

3 Roy, J. (2012) *Review of "The School Staffing Surge."* Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-school-staffing.

4 See Reardon, S. F. & Robinson, J. P. (2007). Patterns and trends in racial/ethnic and socioeconomic academic achievement gaps. In H. A. Ladd & E. B. Fiske (Eds.), *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*. New York: Routledge.

Reardon and Robinson argue that black-white achievement gaps narrowed from the early 1970s through the late 1980s, and that this pattern is evident not only in NAEP tests, but also in Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) score trends, and in nationally representative samples of students in other large scale studies from the 1960s through 1992. Further, even though the black-white gap widened in the early 1990s, more recent data from the NAEP confirm the gap has narrowed again since the 1990s, and this is true both for the Main NAEP scores as well as the Long Term Trends NAEP scores.

5 More than 70% of the members of the high school graduating class of 2009 were enrolled in college in October 2010, compared to 45% who were enrolled in college in 1959. See

Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010, April 28). College enrollment up among 2009 high school grads. *The Editor's Desk*. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2010/ted_20100428.htm.

For high school graduation rates, see

Stillwell, R. & Sable, J. (2013). *Public school graduates and dropouts from the common core of data: School year 2009–10: first look* (Provisional Data) (NCES 2013-309). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved March 20, 2013, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch;

Murnane, R. J. (2013). *U.S high school graduation rates: Patterns and explanations* (NBER Working paper No. 18701). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.nber.org/papers/w18701.

6 See Miron, G., Welner, K. G., Hinchey, P., & Mathis, W. (Eds.) (2012). *Exploring the School Choice Universe: Evidence and Recommendations*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

See also:

Belfield, C. R. & Levin, H. M. (2001). *The effects of competition on educational outcomes: A review of the U.S. evidence* (Occasional paper no. 35). New York: National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Teachers' College, Columbia University;

Lubienski, C., Crane, C., & Lubienski, S. T. (2008, May). What do we know about school effectiveness? Academic gains in public and private schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *89* (9), 689-695.

7 Mirel, J. (2006, Winter). The traditional high school. *Education Next*, *6,* (1). Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://educationnext.org/the-traditional-high-school/.

8 See Guy, B., Shin, H., Lee, S. Y., & Thurlow, M. L. (1999). *State graduation requirements for students with and without disabilities* (Technical Report No. 24). Minneapolis: National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

9 Roy, J. & Mishel, L. (2008). Using administrative data to estimate graduation rates: Challenges, proposed solutions and their pitfalls. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 16*(11). Retrieved March 20, 2013, from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v16n11/.

10 For example, in 2007 the NAEP 8th grade scores (average scale score) for Massachusetts is 298 in mathematics and 273 in reading, both being the highest in the nation.

11 For example, Greene and Winters rank it 28th in the nation for the Class of 2003 and 21st in the nation for the Class of 2002, while Warren ranks it 17th (Class of 2002) and Swanson (2004) ranks it 26th (Class of 2001). See

Greene, J. P., & Winters, M. (2005). *Public high school graduation and college-readiness rates: 1991–2002*. New York: Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_08.htm;

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Swanson, C. (2004). *Who graduates? Who doesn't? A statistical portrait of public high school graduation, class of 2001*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Retrieved March 20, 2013, from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410934_WhoGraduates.pdf.

12 There is a valid reason why educators, policymakers and researchers—including the report being reviewed here—rely on nationally-administered NAEP test results and shun state test results, even when such state results are available for most states going back 15 years or more.

13 In 2011, 24 states required passing a high school exit examination for graduation, and three additional states had legislation instituting such exams in the future. See National Center for Education Statistics (2011). *Digest of Education Statistics,* Table 177. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_177.asp.

14 Murnane, R. J. (2013). *U.S high school graduation rates: Patterns and explanations* (NBER Working paper no. 18701). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.nber.org/papers/w18701.

15 See Selected Findings in page 4 of

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16 See Barrow, L., Claessens, A., &Schanzenbach, D. W. (2013). *The impact of Chicago's small high school initiative* (NBER Working paper no. 18889). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.nber.org/papers/w18889.

17 See Heckman, J. J. & Rubinstein, Y. (2001). The importance of noncognitive skills: Lessons from the GED testing program. *The American Economic Review*, *91*(2).

18 See Baker, B. D. & Elmer, D. R. (2009). The politics of off-the-shelf school finance reform. *Educational Policy*, *23*(1), 66-105.

19 See Arsen, D. & Ni, Y. (2012). *Is administration leaner in charter schools? Resource allocation in charter and traditional public schools* (Occasional paper no. 201). New York: National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/OP201.pdf.

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Miron, G. & Urschel, J. (2010). *Equal or Fair? A Study of Revenues and Expenditures in American Charter Schools*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/charter-school-finance.

For private schools, please see Figures 16a, 16b and 16c in

Baker, B. (2009). *Private schooling in the U.S.: Expenditures, supply, and policy implications*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/private-schooling-US.

Note, though, that as the author himself cautions, part of the difference in administrative expenses across private and public schools might be due to changes in definitions—private school IRS filings categorize expenditures very differently than public school reports—and part of the difference might also be due to the fact that most private schools are relatively small by comparison to public school districts. (Less than a full sample for private schools might also contribute to the divergence.)

20 Further, different states witnessed different rates of change: The declines in student-teacher ratios were much sharper in some states compared to others. Florida, meanwhile, actually witnessed a slight rise in the student-teacher ratio.

21 See

Mishel, L. Allegretto, S. A., & Corcoran, S. P. (2008). *The teaching penalty: Teacher pay losing ground*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.epi.org/publication/book_teaching_penalty/.

22 See Rich, M. (2013, March 19). “Minority Groups Remain Outnumbered at Teaching Programs, Study Reports”, *The New York Times*.Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/20/education/teaching-degree-minority-enrollment-lags-study-shows.html?ref=us

23 See Figure 4.2 in

Gates, S.M., Ringel, J.S., Santibanez, L., Chung, C.H., & Ross, K. E. (2003). Chapter four, movement into and out of the school administrative career field. *Who is Leading our Schools? An Overview of School Administrators and Their Careers*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1679/MR1679.ch4.pdf.

24 Gates, S.M., Ringel, J.S., Santibanez, L., Chung, C.H., & Ross, K. E. (2003). Chapter four, movement into and out of the school administrative career field. *Who is Leading our Schools? An Overview of School Administrators and Their Careers*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1679/MR1679.ch4.pdf.

25 See Roy, J. (2012). *Review of “The School Staffing Surge.”* Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-school-staffing;

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27 See

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