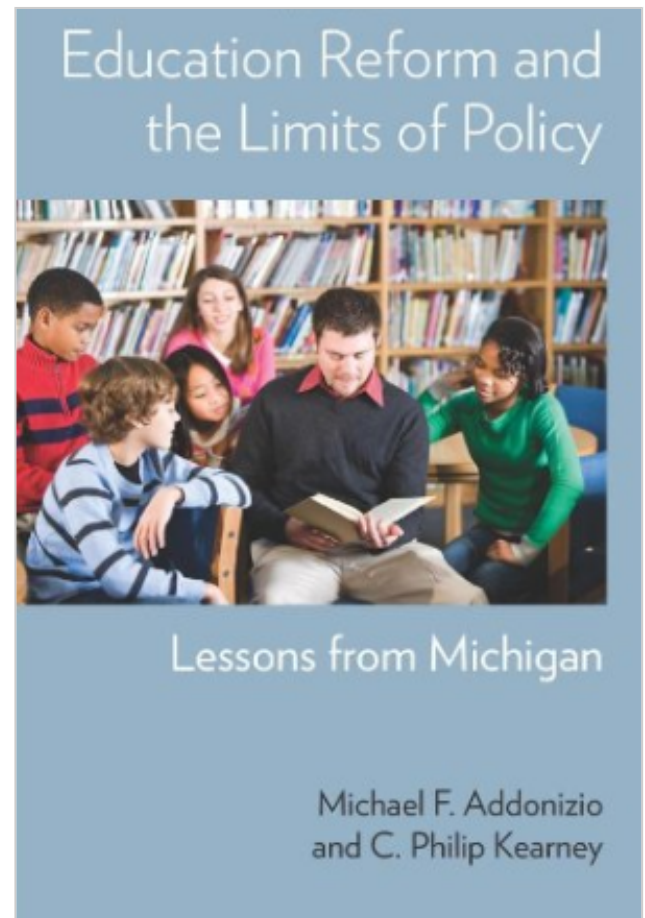


Reforms in education: the challenges in Michigan (and elsewhere)

Education Reform and the Limits of Policy: Lessons from Michigan. By Michael F. Addonizio and C. Philip Kearney, Kalamazoo, MI, W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2012, 297 pp., \$18.00/paperback

The past several decades have seen a number of reforms in education at both the state and federal level. In *Education Reform and the Limits of Policy: Lessons from Michigan*, authors Michael F. Addonizio and C. Philip Kearney explain why they feel the results have been mixed (at best). Honing in on educational reform policies enacted in Michigan and on federal education policies that have affected Michigan since 1973, Addonizio and Kearney provide insight into three important questions: (1) What was the nature of these reforms? (2) What were their specific goals in terms of what they hoped to accomplish? (3) How successful were they? Addonizio and Kearney's book adds value to the existing literature by focusing on the issue in a specific locality: Michigan, a state that, despite experiencing higher unemployment rates than the national average, could nonetheless be considered a microcosm of the nation at large.

Addonizio and Kearney first provide a historical overview of educational reform in Michigan going back nearly 200 years; included are discussions of the University of Michigan's founding in 1817 and its early attempts at an accreditation program, the formation of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement in 1895, and court rulings over the years that have allowed individual states to levy taxes to support their own system of public education. More recent events they discuss are ramifications of the launching of Sputnik and how rising fears during the Cold War led to the creation of the National Defense Education Act in 1958. Each of the events considered has had important



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consequences, and together they highlight the prominent role the state of Michigan has played in shaping the future of educational reform since the 1970s. Simultaneously, they tackle one of the most controversial topics in educational reform: the impact of money on schools and on student achievement. Frankly put, do schools perform better with additional funding? In particular, Addonizio and Kearney examine how property taxes, state budget crises, and Michigan's high unemployment rate affected education during the 2000–2009 timeframe. Their findings replicate those of others: additional funding in and of itself hasn't proven to be the answer. Too often, money appropriated is wasted on programs that are quickly realized to be ineffective and are therefore discontinued, to be replaced by a new policy that might or might not be more effective. At the same time, the authors caution against reducing educational funding so much that the outlook for schools in the poorest districts, which are already struggling under difficult circumstances, appears even more dismal after the cuts. Their conclusion is that Michigan's fiscal difficulties have harmed not just the educational outcome of the children, but also the health and well-being of families and communities all over the state.

Addonizio and Kearney also focus on policy, specifically (1) the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2003 and how well it aligned with adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements and (2) EducationYES!, a system used by the state of Michigan to measure performance in 2007–2008 in which schools receive a grade of A, B, C, D-Alert, or Unacceptable. The authors explain both policies in great detail, ensuring that even a reader with no previous knowledge gets a good understanding of their inner workings. They conclude this section by talking about what the future holds for state accountability programs in Michigan. They argue that there are four specific questions that need immediate attention: (1) What are the consequences if Michigan (or, indeed, any state) fails to meet the AYP NCLB goal? (2) What if a state meets its internal goal but fails to meet the AYP NCLB goal? (3) How will recent "resurgences of curriculum" arguments play out? (4) If the resurgences are accepted, will there be an increased diversity in courses offered to high school students on the basis of their personal interests or will schools hold fast and continue to demand that rigorous high school graduation requirements be met?

Addonizio and Kearney move on to cover topics such as charter schools and school choice. They find mixed results in terms of the success charter schools have had improving academic achievement. Regarding school choice, the authors find it to be a zero-sum game: the benefits of gaining quality nonresident students in one district are offset by the costs incurred by the district losing these students.

What helps differentiate this book from others in the field is the microlevel of research that it provides. This kind of analysis can be seen throughout the book; however, it is highlighted exceptionally well in a chapter focusing on the Detroit public schools. The authors provide a well-written history of these schools, noting how and why this once exemplary school district has become not only the lowest in reading and math scores for the fourth and eighth grades in the nation but, on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, the lowest in the history of the 40-year testing program. (The authors do find mitigating circumstances, however: from 1960 to 1980, Detroit lost more than a quarter of its population (falling from 1.67 million to 1.2 million), including many of its best and brightest, who sought employment elsewhere). Addonizio and Kearney then guide the reader through a chronological history of reform programs designed to bring Detroit back to its former glory. After explaining why these programs failed, the authors round out this section by projecting the future for Detroit public schools, factoring in a number of concerns, such as Michigan's continued high unemployment rate.

Education Reform and the Limits of Policy: Lessons from Michigan provides an indepth look at the history of the Michigan school system and the educational reform movement in a clear and convincing style that doesn't get lost in confusing statistics or complicated formulas. Any individual who is interested in the formation of the Michigan school system and/or the negative impact that school reform policies have had on the very systems they seek to reform should consider reading this excellent book.