



Measuring the Influence of Education Advocacy: The Case of Louisiana's School Choice Legislation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education in the U.S. is in the middle of a transformation from the sleepy policy backwater of the last century to a period of intense public focus and policy change. A new generation of education advocacy groups has emerged with the aim of influencing policy at the local, state, and federal levels. These new groups, heavily funded by reform-minded philanthropies, are reshaping the dynamics of education politics. Their agendas push for change on multiple fronts, including expanding parental choice, promoting school accountability, and overhauling teacher tenure rules. These priorities often pit them squarely against entities that benefit from the status quo, such as teacher unions.

A critical issue for funders, members of the policy community, advocacy groups, and the general public is the effect of these organizations on public policy. From the funders' perspective it is important to know which investments are producing their intended outcomes. The advocacy organizations need to manage and improve their activities, which is difficult to do without having valid, measurable outcomes. The policy community needs to understand how the effects of more traditional forms of influence play out in the context of the emerging role of advocacy organizations. And the general public and body politic have to understand how public policy is formed and who influences it in order to inform the democratic process.

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Despite the importance of advocacy in education and other fields, tools for measuring influence are weak. For example, a typical reputational survey asks respondents to rank order or otherwise score a list of entities for influence. This is a beauty contest that gives us winners and runners-up. But we can't use the results to quantify the amount of influence that was exercised by any entity, what outcomes they influenced, or the mechanisms of advocacy that were employed.

In this report, we introduce a new method to study influence that addresses the deficiencies of typical reputational surveys. It involves a survey instrument, the Survey with Placebo (SwP), which asks respondents to rate the influence of a non-existent advocacy group (the placebo), along with actual entities engaged in advocacy. By comparing the scores of real organizations with those of the placebo group, we generate a scale of influence with a known zero point. This allows us to quantify the amount of influence any organization exercises and to test for the statistical significance of differences between influence scores. The SwP also asks about specific channels of influence, thereby providing information about the mechanisms by which influence is exercised by particular advocacy groups. Finally, the SwP is built around the study of particular outcomes, such as the passage of a piece of legislation. Thus the question of what is influenced is explicit rather than being ambiguous as in reputational surveys.

In order to validate the SwP, we have collected intensive qualitative data based on interviews of the leaders of advocacy organizations, their targets of influence, and other political insiders along with extensive documentary evidence. The question is whether the SwP, which can be quickly and inexpensively administered through a web tool, yields findings that are in line with those obtained from a time-consuming on-the-ground forensic analysis of the tactics deployed by individual advocacy organizations.

Our case study applies the SwP method to examine the activity of advocacy groups in Louisiana leading up to the passage in 2012 of the state's omnibus school choice legislation, House Bill 976. HB 976 led to the statewide expansion of the New Orleans voucher program as well as expansion of other aspects of educational choice. The legislation is viewed as very important by school choice advocates and has attracted considerable attention in light of the U.S. Justice Department's lawsuit claiming the program interferes with desegregation efforts. Three advocacy groups of interest received considerable financial support from foundations interested in the expansion of school choice, whereas other included advocacy groups, e.g., the Louisiana

Federation of Teachers and the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, are existing membership organizations whose advocacy efforts are funded largely through dues. Understanding the influence of the foundation-funded advocacy groups in the high-profile Louisiana case will be important in the context of future efforts to fund advocacy and evaluate its effects.

Findings on the SwP survey method

- Respondents to the SwP (including both legislators and political insiders) gave the placebo advocacy organization an average influence rating well above the lowest possible rating. This suggests that there is a respondent bias towards a moderate rating of any entity being scored, even a nonexistent one. A traditional survey approach would not reveal this bias and could result in attributions of moderate influence to organizations that have very little if any influence on their intended audience.
- Statistically significant differences were detected among the influence groups and between the actual influence groups and the placebo organization. Some groups were clearly identified as more influential than others. These findings indicate that the SwP is capable of picking up meaningful differences in the perceived influence of advocacy organizations.
- Respondents to the SwP were not able to detect significant differences among advocacy organizations based on channels of influence even though some of the groups differed quite a bit in their tactics, e.g., one organization focusing on the election of legislators favorable to the organization's policy preferences vs. another organization focusing on a media campaign. While respondents clearly thought some advocacy groups were more influential than others, they perceived all groups as adopting similar tactics and strategies. These findings suggest that the SwP is not a useful tool in investigating the mechanisms by which advocacy organizations try to influence decision making.
- Interviews with the leaders of advocacy groups and with those within the supposed paths of influence of those advocacy groups produce information that is not available through the SwP, particularly around specific paths of influence. However, the collection of interview data is expensive and labor-intensive, and for those reasons not practical as an approach to examining the influence of advocacy organizations that could be routinely deployed by funders.
- The long form of the SwP, which includes 42 response items and takes about 20 minutes to administer, is burdensome for many respondents. This reduces response rates. The length of the full version of the SwP is largely due to the design decision

to create an instrument that could detect differences among organizations in channels of influence. However, the results from administering the SwP indicate that respondents are unable to differentiate advocacy organizations based on tactics. Thus the burden of the long form is not justifiable.

- A short form SwP, which asks respondents simply to rank order each advocacy organization, including the placebo, on overall influence on the legislation in question produces results which correlate almost perfectly with the averaged results from the long form SwP. Response rates to the short form SwP are significantly higher than to the long form. Thus the short form SwP is an efficient, low-cost, and practical way for interested parties to determine whether some advocacy groups are more effective than others in influencing a particular outcome, and whether any particular advocacy group is perceived as having influence, i.e., scoring better than a placebo.

Findings with respect to the influence process

- Advocacy groups garner significantly higher ratings from respondents with similar positions. Thus respondents who opposed the school choice legislation rated anti-choice groups higher than pro-choice groups, and vice-versa.
- Respondents found tactics in the personal channel (political support and personal communication) more influential than tactics that addressed legislators indirectly, such as grassroots campaigns, media outreach, and informational seminars.
- Political insiders produce somewhat different ratings of advocacy organizations than legislators and their staff, perhaps because of greater familiarity with the tactics being used by various groups. For example, political insiders may be familiar with an advocacy campaign that targets just a few key legislators, whereas most of the members of the broader pool of legislators may have no contact with that advocacy effort.

Findings on the impact of advocacy in the Louisiana school choice legislation

- Governor Jindal is a dominant force in the politics of the state of Louisiana as well as in the school choice legislation that is the subject of our case study. The organizations that advocated for or against the school choice bill almost surely influenced votes in the legislature, but their efforts may not have been decisive.
- The Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) was perceived as the most influential advocacy organization in the passage of HB 976. The three foundation-funded pro-choice advocacy groups of interest in the study [the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), the Louisiana Federation for Children

(LFC), and the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS)] trailed the business association in influence, but each scored better than the placebo.

- The two anti-school choice groups included in the SwP, the Louisiana Federation of Teachers (LFT) and the Louisiana School Boards Association (LSBA), had the lowest influence scores among the field, although still slightly higher than that of the placebo group. These groups represent the “losing” side of the policy debate. If the organizations had been highly influential, the logic follows, one would expect the legislation to have failed.

Introduction

A New Breed of Education Advocacy

Education in the U.S. is in the middle of a transformation from the sleepy policy backwater of the last century to a period of intense public focus and policy change. A Rip Van Winkle who fell asleep in 1965 and awoke yesterday would not know about charter schools, distance learning, value-added measures, standards and accountability, the Common Core, tax-credit scholarships, voucher programs, blended learning, and on and on. Each of these topics is characterized by controversies and the potential for policy decisions to generate winners and losers among adults who are part of the industry of education. For example, employees of the traditional education system are the losers when the growth of charter schools disrupts staffing and funding for the traditional school districts with which the charters compete for students. Similarly, value-added measures put the salaries and employment of teachers at risk; standards and accountability generate consequences for school personnel and students; and so on. Losers on one side of the equation typically are matched by winners on the other side. For example, the loss of student enrollment by traditional public schools as students enroll in charter schools creates employment opportunities within the charter sector as well as resources for charter school operators.

Government officials are at the nexus of these competing policy preferences because education is a highly regulated industry and, in K-12, largely a public monopoly. Thus the path to changing the status quo (or protecting it) is through elected officials and bureaucrats.

Consistent with the principle that the prospect of change generates advocacy, a new generation of education advocacy groups has emerged with the aim of influencing policy at the local, state, and federal levels. These new groups are reshaping the dynamics of education politics. Their agendas push for reform on multiple fronts, including expanding parental choice, promoting school accountability, and overhauling teacher tenure rules. These priorities often pit them squarely against entities that benefit from the status quo, such as teacher unions.¹

These new groups typically fall under Section 501(c)3 of the federal tax code, which restricts their spending on lobbying and prohibits political activity. However, many are affiliated with 501(c)4 organizations, which are free to make campaign contributions and engage in unlimited lobbying. This organizational structure allows them to utilize a

broader set of tactics and attempt to influence policy through multiple channels. Many of these groups rely on foundations to support their multi-faceted advocacy campaigns. For example, the Walton Family Foundation commits about 40 percent of its education spending to groups for the purposes of influencing public policy. StudentsFirst, the national advocacy group founded by former DC Public School chancellor Michelle Rhee in 2010, raised close to \$30 million in just its second year of operation.² Stand for Children, another high-powered DC-based advocacy group, raised and spent over \$22 million in 2012.³ Both groups receive substantial foundation funding.

A critical issue for funders, members of the policy community, advocacy groups, and the general public is the effect of these organizations on public policy. From the funders' perspective it is important to know which investments are producing their intended outcomes. The advocacy organizations need to manage and improve their activities, which is difficult to do without having valid, measurable outcomes. The policy community needs to understand how the effects of more traditional forms of influence play out in the context of the emerging role of advocacy organizations. And the general public and body politic have to understand how public policy is formed and who influences it in order to inform the democratic process.

How can we measure influence?

Nearly 60 years ago James March, the Stanford University political scientist and business management guru, aptly described both the importance of interest group influence and the difficulty in measuring it: "Influence is to the study of decision-making what force is to the study of motion ... [but] there is lacking not only an immediately obvious unit of measurement, but even a generally feasible means of providing simple rankings" (1955: 434).⁴ These methodological difficulties persist to this day. As a result, we have an extensive literature on principles of interest group influence but almost no empirical examinations of the influence of particular interest groups. As an example of the former, we know that interest groups are more likely to be formed and to act in circumstances in which government officials are considering policy decisions than when government is quiescent -- in other words, impending government action leads to advocacy more frequently than advocacy leads to government action. Thus we can expect to find more interest group advocacy around K-12 education laws and regulations in states in which those rules are in flux than in states in which the rules seem stable. And there is no dearth of principles and advice

about how an interest group can maximize its influence on decision-makers. But the study of interest group influence is crippled by the lack of an empirical link between actual attempts to influence and outcomes.

There are two reasons little has changed in the 60 years since March decried the lack of a unit of measurement of influence. First, influence has many channels. Advocacy organizations can directly communicate with policymakers, but they can also engage in indirect influence by waging campaigns to influence public opinion. Alternatively, they can influence the selection of policymakers through direct involvement in elections or through efforts to affect the appointment of people to decision-making positions. There are many mechanisms to go along with many channels of influence. Lobbying, for example, can take several forms including personal persuasion, technical assistance, and information provision. Any attempt to measure influence must come to grips with the multiple ways it can be exercised.

The second challenge to measuring influence is to construct a plausible counterfactual. A claim of influence is an assertion of causality: There is an outcome in the form of a policy preference being obtained and there is an action or set of actions that are engaged in by the advocacy group prior to the outcome that were intended to influence the outcome. The advocacy group or others wish to attribute the outcome to the actions of the advocacy group. Perhaps legislation was changed in a direction fitting the policy preference of the advocacy group and the organization had taken actions favoring that legislative change. But correlation is not causation - the legislative victory may have had nothing to do with the efforts of the advocacy group.

This problem is acute when victories can be declared after the fact rather than having to be predicted, and when there are many channels of influence that are likely to have been involved. For example, an advocacy group intends to achieve outcomes that favor the interests of charter schools in a particular state. Policy moves in a direction that favors charter schools. The advocacy group claims victory for any positive movement, ignores areas in which there has been no progress, and does not document either the specific actions by which it influenced the outcome or consider the possibility that other forces were at play. This is standard operating practice in self-evaluations of the effectiveness of advocacy groups.

The causal claim of influence through advocacy has to be supported by an answer to the question: compared to what? That comparison is the counterfactual. Its quality

determines the confidence with which the causal claim of influence can be supported and provides the opportunity to create the missing unit of measurement noted by March.

A classic and typically unsatisfying solution to identifying the counterfactual and creating a unit of measurement in studies of influence is to rely on a reputational survey in which respondents are asked to provide a rating of the influence of various organizations. For example, Education Week carried out a study intended to identify the most influential actors in U.S. education in four categories: people, organizations, information sources, and research studies.⁵ The methodology involved identifying influential people in education and inviting them individually, first, to nominate entities in each of the four categories of influence, and second, to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 each of the entries compiled from nominations. These scale scores were then averaged across all respondents and transformed into a rank order of entities within categories. Thus the reader of the Education Week report learned, for example, that Bill Gates was the most influential person in U.S. education in 2006, whereas George W. Bush was ranked second and Kati Haycock third. And the most influential organization was the U.S. Congress, followed by the U.S. Department of Education and the Gates Foundation.

Consider questions that such a reputational survey cannot answer:

- How much influence was exercised? This goes to the challenge of identifying a unit of measurement. Was Bill Gates a hare of influence or simply the winner of a race among tortoises? There is no way to know from the survey itself.
- What was influenced? Was it legislation or public opinion or education practice or administrative rules or funding or what? Learning that those polled think that Kati Haycock was the 3rd most influential person in education without learning a thing about what Kati influenced is like reading that Mercedes-Benz makes the world's best sedan without being told why it excels.
- How was influence exercised? Did Bill Gates influence education through the funding decisions of his foundation, public messaging, behind the scenes persuasion, or what? Note that this question can't be answered independent of knowing what was influenced.

A New Approach

It is against this backdrop that we present a new methodological framework for measuring the influence of advocacy groups on education policy. Our approach starts by identifying a particular outcome of interest, i.e., what was influenced. This approach of starting with the outcome is very different from the approach used in the Education Week study and many others of identifying influence from reputation alone with no connection to particular actions or outcomes. In the case study in this report, the outcome of interest will be a particular piece of state legislation on school choice in Louisiana: House Bill 976.

With the outcome identified, we use media reports and consultations with knowledgeable informants to identify entities that are in a position to influence the outcome of interest. In our case study it will be organizations advocating for and against passage of the school choice legislation in Louisiana.

We then collect data using two converging methods. One method consists of interviews and an extensive document review. We start with responsible parties in the advocacy entities we wish to study to determine their theory of action for exercising influence, including the channels they employ. We then interview individuals that are within the critical paths of influence that the advocacy organizations say they are using to determine whether the path described by the advocacy organizations can be verified. For example, if a particular advocacy organization indicates that their strategy is to directly lobby legislators and their staff, we interview legislators and staff to determine the impact of this lobbying.

Our second method is a formal survey instrument, the Survey with Placebo (SWP). It has three properties that distinguish it from the typical 1 to 5 or 1 to 7 rating scale used in reputational surveys. First, respondents are required to distribute their ratings across the entities being rated such that the scores of the entities are distributed as in a normal curve. For example, were 10 entities being rated, our instrument requires the respondent to put a couple toward the high end of the scale, and couple towards the bottom end, and most in the middle. Our approach avoids the Lake Woebegone fallacy in which everyone is above average (as is both possible and frequently the case with a typical survey rating scale). Second, the entities receive ratings on distinct channels of influence. Thus, for example, an organization can receive a high score on personal influence, e.g., meeting with legislators, contributing to their campaigns, but a low

score on indirect influence, e.g., advertising. The design of the survey instrument to disaggregate channels of influence dovetails with our interview process, which elicits from advocacy organizations their intended influence channels. The third unique property of our survey instrument is that it includes a placebo entity that is not involved whatsoever in the outcome or influence process of interest. The ratings of the placebo entity provide a zero point on the scale of influence against which all the actual advocacy organizations can be compared. For example, if the placebo group scores at the middle of the scale of influence then any actual entity being rated has to score significantly above the middle of the scale to be judged to have had influence. This is the missing link for constructing the unit of measurement that James March recognized as critical to studying the influence process. Details on the survey instrument and other aspects of the methodology are in a technical appendix.⁶

A Case Study of Louisiana School Choice Legislation

To demonstrate the application of this framework, this study presents findings from a case study in Louisiana. This study uses our new approach to measure the influence of advocacy groups on the 2012 passage of Louisiana’s omnibus school choice legislation, House Bill 976. HB 976 led to the statewide expansion of the New Orleans voucher program as well as expansions to other aspects of educational choice. The legislation is viewed as very important by school choice advocates and has attracted considerable attention in light of the U.S. Justice Department’s lawsuit claiming the program interferes with desegregation efforts. Three advocacy groups of interest received substantial financial support from foundations interested in the expansion of school choice, whereas other examined advocacy groups, e.g., the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, represent existing interests within the state that favor the traditional public school system. Understanding the influence of the foundation-funded advocacy groups in the high-profile Louisiana case will be important in the context of future efforts to fund advocacy and evaluate its effects.

Background on House Bill 976 (Act 2)

Louisiana’s 2012 HB 976, which became Act 2 upon being signed into law in April of that year, creates or alters four different programs and processes. Most notably, it expands eligibility for Louisiana’s existing voucher program, Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence (SSEE), from only students in New Orleans to all students statewide in families with a total income not exceeding 250 percent of the federal poverty guidelines and who are entering kindergarten, were enrolled in a Louisiana

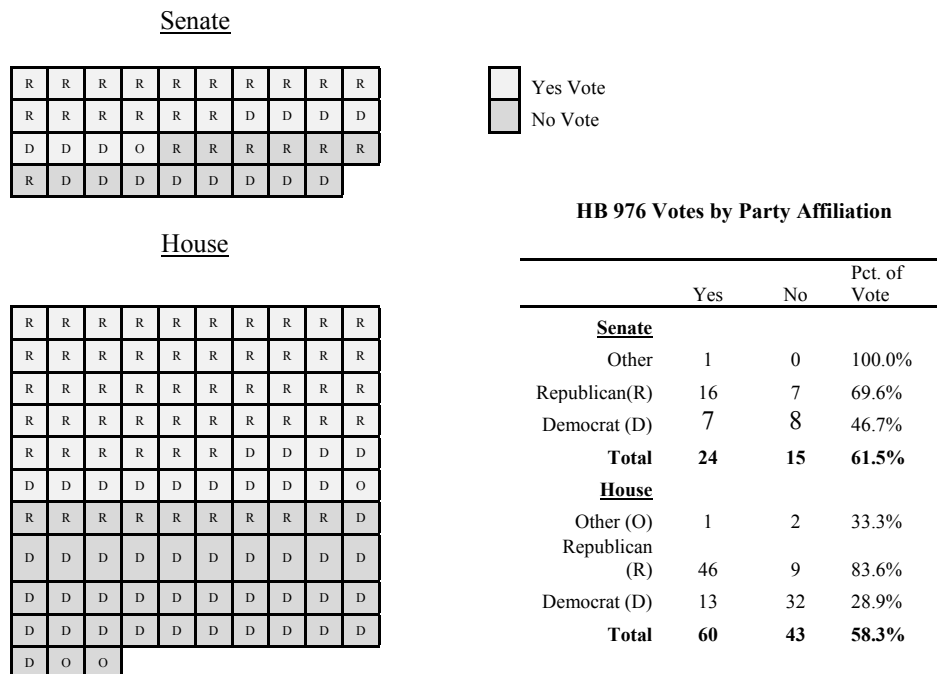
public school that had an accountability grade of C, D, or F, or received a scholarship the previous school year. Students are eligible to transfer to participating private schools or to public schools with an A or B grade. This is sometimes referred to as the "voucher portion" of the bill, and was considered the heart of the legislation.

The law also makes a number of changes to charter school statutes. It requires the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to approve a common charter application, recruit chartering groups, and create a process for authorizing multiple charter schools. BESE is also given the ability to approve charter proposals if a local school board fails to comply with the charter application requirements. Related to authorizers, HB 976 requires BESE to establish procedures for certifying local charter authorizers, including nonprofit organizations and universities, for the purpose of accepting, evaluating, and approving applications for charter schools from chartering groups.

In addition, the legislation permits parents of students attending a public school with a letter grade of D or F for three consecutive years to petition BESE to transfer the school to the Recovery School District, a state-run district tasked with turning around chronically low-performing schools. Finally, the bill requires BESE to create a process through which virtual course providers, postsecondary institutions, or corporations can be authorized to provide courses to Louisiana students.

Figure 1 reports the voting results on HB 976 in the Louisiana House and Senate. The bill passed with a comfortable margin in both houses, gaining 58 percent in the House and 62 percent of the vote in the Senate. The bill garnered some bi-partisan support with 29 percent of House Democrats and 47 percent of Senate Democrats voting in favor of the bill.

Figure 1. Vote breakdown for HB 976



Governor Bobby Jindal, first elected in 2008 and convincingly re-elected in 2012, is widely credited as the driving force behind the passage of HB 976. Prior to the 2012 legislative session, Jindal’s team successfully worked to develop a political environment conducive to his education reform goals by endorsing the election of reform-oriented legislators and state school board members, 87.3 percent of whom were elected.⁷ Jindal made education reform the central focus of the first year of his second term, having three key pieces of legislation filed on his behalf which primarily targeted education: teacher tenure/compensation (HB 974); educational choice (HB 976); and early childhood education (SB 581). Describing the process around the passage of HB 976, one political insider stated that the governor’s office was “courageous but not collaborative” when it came to pursuing its agenda, largely controlling both the content of the bill and the legislative strategy for securing its passage. Another organization leader commented that the legislation passed because the governor wanted it to pass. These observations are backed by a variety of comments in the media, including this from the head of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s political science department: “There’s really just one political actor in Louisiana—the governor.”⁸

A range of pro-reform advocacy organizations, including each of the three foundation-funded organizations we study here, worked collaboratively in support of the three pieces of legislation that composed the Governor’s education reform package, one

of which was HB 976. In addition to convening privately, advocacy groups partnered publically, sponsoring a large-scale reform-themed education summit and touring the state together to speak with legislators in their home districts prior to session.

Foundation-Funded Advocacy Groups

Our primary interest is in the influence of three advocacy groups that collectively received millions of dollars annually in foundation funding at either the national or state level and were actively involved in advocacy surrounding the passage of HB 976: Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS), and Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC). Two of these organizations, LFC and BAEO, focused their advocacy efforts on securing the statewide expansion of the SSEE voucher program which was already operating in New Orleans, while the third, LAPCS, primarily directed its attention toward the provisions of the bill related to charter schools.

LFC is a project of the American Federation for Children (AFC) and the National Alliance for School Choice. As the only advocacy group among the three able to expend 501(c)4 funds, LFC was uniquely positioned to conduct advocacy tactics which required sizeable amounts of capital, such as making campaign contributions and executing large-scale mailings. BAEO is a national organization focused on expanding educational options for poor and working-class black children. Operating a statewide chapter in Louisiana, the advocacy group particularly targeted black legislators with many of its efforts. LAPCS is a membership-based organization which works to promote student access to high-quality charter schools throughout the state of Louisiana. During the 2012 legislative session, the advocacy group centered its work on providing information regarding charter schools and choice.

Methods

This section describes the two methods used to measure the influence of advocacy groups on the passage of Louisiana's 2012 school choice bill.

Survey with Placebo (SwP)

The first method, the SwP, is a variant of the "attributed influence" surveys used by political scientists to study influence of interest groups.⁹ In short, this technique involves a survey of legislators and political insiders with first-hand knowledge of the factors that influenced the policy outcome. It differs from the typical attributed influence survey in the inclusion of a placebo organization known to have had zero

influence. Respondents were asked to rate the influence of a set of advocacy groups and one placebo organization on the legislation's outcome on a 7-point scale ranging from least influential to most influential.¹⁰ These responses were then analyzed to determine the degree to which each advocacy group's average influence ratings were significantly different from those of the placebo.

A total of seven organizations were represented in the survey.¹¹ In addition to the three foundation-funded advocacy groups described earlier, one other supporter of HB 976 was included: the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI). LABI functions as Louisiana's state chamber of commerce and uses its staff of full-time lobbyists to promote the interests of business. LABI was identified as a key advocate for the passage of HB 976 by each of the foundation-funded advocacy groups.

Two opponents of HB 976 were also represented in the survey: the Louisiana Federation of Teachers (LFT) and the Louisiana School Boards Association (LSBA). Both of these groups opposed the redirection of education dollars from the traditional public school system to private schools via the expansion of the SSEE voucher program. They also expressed concerns about the proposal to grant third-party organizations the authority to authorize charter schools.

The final organization included in the survey was a placebo organization which was given a plausible organizational name, but which does not exist. It therefore serves as a valid reference point for "zero influence". The inclusion of a placebo group allows us to test whether an advocacy organization had a significant influence on the policy outcome by comparing respondents' ratings of the influence of the advocacy group to the ratings of a placebo advocacy group that was known to have had zero influence on the legislation.¹²

Table 1. Advocacy groups represented in survey

Organization
<u>Proponents</u>
Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) *
Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS)*
Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC)*
Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI)
<u>Opponents</u>
Louisiana Federation of Teachers (LFT)
Louisiana School Boards Association (LSBA)
<u>Placebo</u>
Fictional organization given plausible name

*Foundation-Funded

Long and short form versions of the survey were used in the Louisiana pilot. The long form was our preferred data collection instrument. It was administered at the beginning of the survey window to all respondents. The long form paired each advocacy group with each of the six advocacy tactics shown in Table 2. These six tactics were designed to measure the influence of the advocacy groups within three channels: personal (personal communication, political support), informational (research material, seminars and events) and indirect (grassroots campaigns, media outreach). Including multiple tactics drawn from each channel increases the reliability of individual respondents' ratings and allows us to examine differences in attributed influence across the three channels. The same six tactics were referenced for each advocacy group.

Respondents to the long form were asked to sort the statements into the seven categories of the influence scale, with the lowest category corresponding to "least influential" and the highest corresponding to "most influential".¹³ The number of cards that could be placed in each of the seven categories was restricted so that after all the cards were sorted, their distribution was approximately normal.¹⁴ The cards were randomly ordered for each respondent to mitigate any bias resulting from the location of a particular organization or tactic within the card stack. Additional details on the instrument and survey administration are available in the technical appendix.¹⁵

Table 2. Statements on the cards for each advocacy group in the SwP

Influence Channel	Statement
Personal	Personal communication with representatives from [Advocacy Group Name]
	Political support from [Advocacy Group Name]
Indirect	Grassroots campaign organized by [Advocacy Group Name]
	Media outreach by [Advocacy Group Name]
Informational	Research material provided by [Advocacy Group Name]
	Seminars and events organized by [Advocacy Name]

The short form of the survey was designed to take less than five minutes to complete to encourage responses from individuals who may have been deterred by the length of the long form. It was administered three weeks prior to the end of the survey window to those who did not respond to multiple requests via letter, e-mail, and phone to complete the long form. The short form included the same set of advocacy groups, the same placebo, and the same 7-point scale as the long form. However, it included just one statement per advocacy group and did not pair the advocacy groups with particular tactics.¹⁶ Both versions were administered in hard-copy and electronic form.

The survey was sent to 194 individuals with first-hand knowledge of how the final policy outcome came to be. The target sample was stratified into three groups. The first group consisted of 35 Key Legislative Agents who were policymakers identified as major influencers in the outcome of the legislation, including the sponsors of the legislation and education committee members. The second group was composed of 107 General Legislative Agents, who were legislators in the 2012 Louisiana legislature, but were not identified as major influencers. The third group included 52 Political Insiders. This group consisted of knowledgeable informants who are not policymakers, including lobbyists, leaders of trade associations and advocacy groups, and policy analysts.

The survey results were used to calculate a measure of attributed influence for each advocacy group in the survey. The influence ratings capture how strongly the respondents endorsed the influence of the advocacy group over the placebo. Comparing the influence rating of each advocacy group to the inactive placebo group allows us to evaluate whether the influence attributed to each advocacy group is significant.¹⁷

Critical Path Interview Analysis

The interview analysis complements the survey by looking inside the black box of advocacy group activity. This method involves gathering qualitative data to verify the relationship between an advocacy tactic and the policy outcome.¹⁸ It provides a descriptive look at an organization's influence that can capture many of the nuances that the survey may not be well-suited to detect. Imagine, for example, that an advocacy organization puts all its chips on the re-election of one individual to the state senate based on its belief in that individual's ability to shape legislation favorable to the advocacy organization's preferred policy positions. The advocacy organization might appear impotent based on the survey, but still have accomplished exactly what it intended.

The first step in the interview analysis was to conduct interviews with the three externally-sponsored advocacy groups. The purpose of these interviews was to document the specific tactics employed by the organizations and, for each tactic, the sequence of events ("intermediate outcomes") that link the tactic to the passage of HB 976. Interviewees were asked to gather any supporting materials that might help them recall the details of the tactics they pursued while advocating for the passage of the bill in advance of the meeting.¹⁹

After documenting all of the tactics used by each advocacy group, the research team selected a small number of tactics that highlighted the unique roles and major strategies adopted by each advocacy group to explore through the critical path analysis.

A critical path was diagramed for each tactic to summarize the advocacy group's conjecture on how the tactic was connected to the passage of HB 976. Each path diagram begins with an advocacy tactic and ends with the policy outcome (passage of HB 976). If the path involves a personal or informational channel of influence, the tactic is linked directly to a policymaker outcome, as they were the immediate audience of the tactic. If the channel of influence is indirect, the path is mediated by the response of the third party that was the immediate audience of the tactic. For example, the influence of a grassroots campaign on policymakers' support for HB 976 will depend on the response of members of the public exposed to the grassroots campaign.

Initial sketches of the diagrams were sent to the advocacy groups in order to confirm that they accurately reflected their hypotheses on the chain of events linking the tactic to the policy outcome. Upon confirmation, the research team proceeded to gather evidence to verify the chains of events shown in each diagram, beginning with the implementation of the tactic and working forward in the path toward the policy outcome. Evidence was gathered from official state records, media reports, and interviews with legislators and political insiders. We sought both evidence that particular tactics and intermediate outcomes occurred, as well as evidence that particular steps in the path influenced subsequent steps.

After completing the collection of evidence, the findings were summarized in narrative form. For each advocacy group, we constructed a profile that includes an overview of the organization and a qualitative account of our findings on their critical paths of influence.

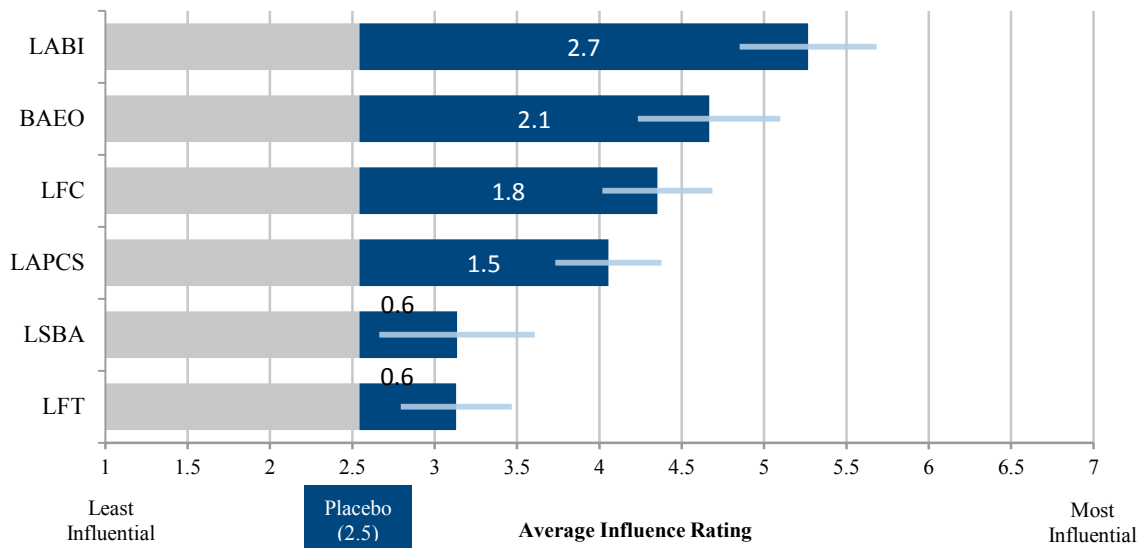
Survey Results

Overall, 72 of the 194 individuals targeted for the survey responded in some form, a response rate of 37 percent. Among subgroups, 83 percent of Political Insiders (n=52), 37 percent of Key Legislative Agents (n=35), and 15 percent of General Legislative Agents (n=107) responded to the survey. Forty-seven percent of respondents completed the long form and 53 percent completed the short form. Thirty-five percent of respondents chose to complete the survey online while 65 percent responded using the hard copy option.

Overall Influence Ratings

Figure 2 shows the mean influence ratings of the advocacy groups, highlighting the difference between the group and placebo rating. The mean influence ratings of all advocacy groups were significantly higher than the placebo rating of 2.5, indicating that respondents, on average, were correctly able to identify the placebo as the least influential of the seven groups. While the survey results indicate that respondents did not consider any groups non-influential, as the mean ratings of all groups were significantly higher than the placebo's, certain advocacy groups were clearly identified as more influential than others.

Figure 2. Advocacy group influence ratings relative to placebo



Note: Figure 2 shows the mean influence ratings for each advocacy group, highlighting the difference between the group’s mean rating and the placebo mean rating. Thin light blue bars show the 95% confidence interval around each mean. The gray bars indicate the placebo mean rating. Means presented are means used in paired t-tests, thus observations without ratings for all groups, including the placebo, are excluded. Colored segments (and corresponding label) highlight the difference between group mean and placebo mean. (n=61)

Source: Survey results. Author’s calculations.

Respondents rated all four pro-school choice advocacy groups above the two anti-school choice groups. LABI, the state’s chamber of commerce, led all advocacy groups with a mean influence rating that was 2.7 points higher than the placebo. The organization’s rating is significantly higher than the rating of all other advocacy groups, including the other pro-school choice organizations. This finding is perhaps unsurprising to political insiders in Louisiana; some commentators even claim that the group’s influence rivals that of the governor’s office.^{20,21} In interviews, political insiders consistently identified the organization as a major player among advocacy groups in the effort to pass HB 976.

LABI’s history of political largesse is a key factor in its high levels of influence. During the 2011-12 electoral cycle, LABI’s total political contributions were in excess of \$780,000, with the top five recipients of the group’s donations all being BESE candidates.²² In addition to helping elect policymakers, LABI also monitors their legislative activity, regularly publishing “legislator scores” that publicly announce

how closely Louisiana state legislators align with the mission and goals of the group.²³ One advocacy group representative suggested that bills such as HB 976, which LABI indicated would be included in the development of this ranking, often receive special attention from lawmakers. The magnitude of LABI's presence across multiple policy areas in Louisiana politics contributes to its high influence rating in the SwP.

The three foundation-funded advocacy groups, BAEO, LFC, and LAPCS, follow LABI, with mean ratings that differed from the placebo by 2.1, 1.8, and 1.5 points, respectively. Consistent with their ranking, BAEO and LFC executed tactics that focused on what many consider to have been the heart of the legislation—the school voucher provisions—while LAPCS's activities were more focused on the charter school aspects of the legislation. BAEO's influence rating was significantly higher than LAPCS's rating, while all other differences within the foundation-funded groups were statistically comparable.

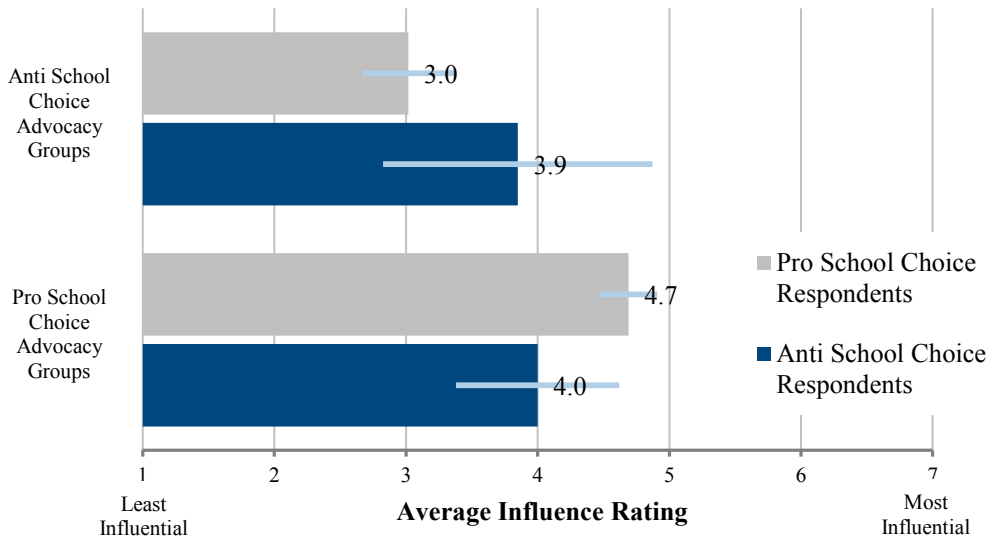
The two anti-school choice groups included in the sort, LFT and LSBA, had the lowest ratings among the field of actual organizations, both scoring only 0.6 points higher than the placebo. This is perhaps an unsurprising result since these groups represent the “losing” side of the policy debate. If the organizations had been highly influential, the logic follows, one would expect the legislation to have failed. Both anti-school choice groups had significantly lower influence ratings than the pro-school choice groups but were still rated significantly higher than the placebo group.

[Influence Ratings by Respondent and Advocacy Group Position on HB 976](#)

Similar to the advocacy groups, we can classify most respondents as either school choice supporters or opponents depending on how they voted on the bill or their affiliation with an organization that advocated for or against the legislation. Figure 3 compares how pro- and anti-HB 976 respondents rated the advocacy groups on either side of the legislation. The results show that advocacy groups garner significantly higher ratings from respondents with similar positions on the legislation. “Anti” respondents rated “anti” groups 0.9 points higher than “pro” respondents, and “pro” respondents rated “pro” groups 0.7 points higher than “anti” respondents, both statistically significant margins. “Pro” respondents' fervor for “pro” groups should not hide the fact that “anti” respondents rated groups from both sides very similarly. “Anti” respondents actually rated “pro” groups slightly higher than “anti” groups by a

margin of 4.0 to 3.9, something that could be attributed the widespread perception of LABI’s influence throughout the entire respondent sample.

Figure 3. Influence ratings by respondent and advocacy group position on school choice



Note: Figure 3 shows pooled means for all pro-HB 976 advocacy groups (LABI, BAEO, LFC, LAPCS) and anti-HB 976 advocacy groups (LFT, LSBA), according to respondent position, “Pro” or “Anti”, on HB 976. Mean ratings are indicated in label outside bar. Thin light blue bars show 95% confidence intervals around each mean. Nine respondents did not have readily identifiable positions on HB 976 and are excluded from the calculation shown in Figure 3. (“Pro” n = 45, “Anti” n = 10).

Source: Survey results. Author’s calculations.

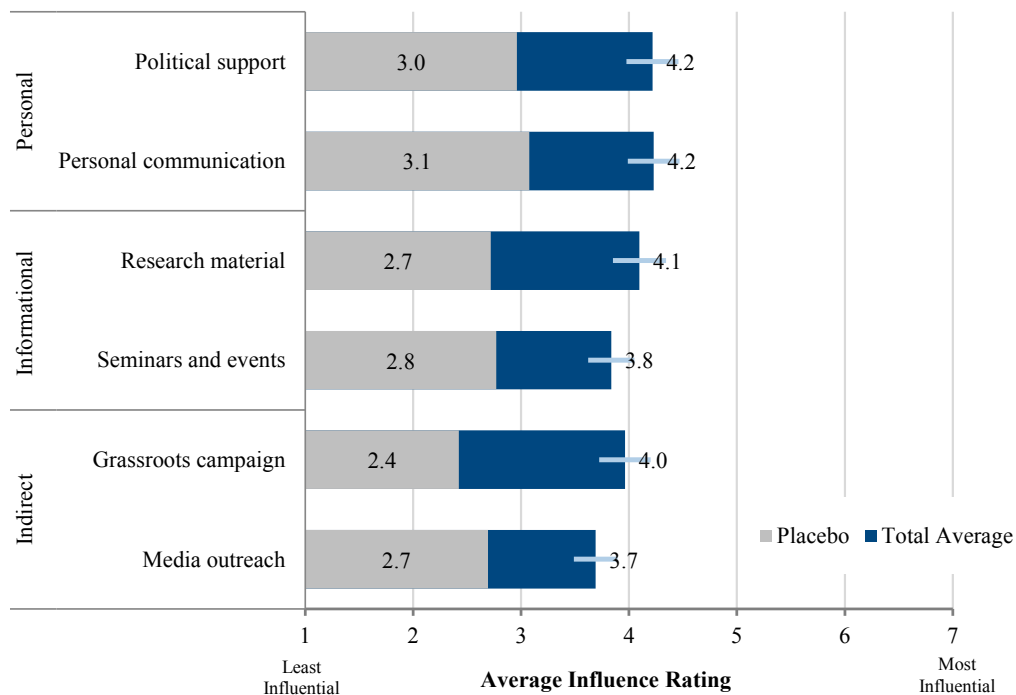
Influence Ratings by Tactic and Channel

The responses to the long form survey can be used to identify whether respondents felt particular advocacy tactics were more influential than others (see Figure 4).²⁴ Overall, average tactic ratings showed less variation than average organization ratings. The range in organization ratings was 2.7, whereas the difference between the highest and lowest rated tactic was only 0.5. However, even within a limited range, differences in tactic ratings lend themselves to substantive interpretation. Respondents found tactics in the personal channel (political support and personal communication) to be most influential, rating both tactics at 4.2. Because tactics in the personal channel aim directly at legislators, they offer the most leverage to advocacy groups that successfully implement them. Direct access to legislators is

the best way for advocacy groups to deliver either advice or pressure. Meanwhile, by donating to a campaign or sending out mailers on a candidate’s behalf, two types of political support, advocacy groups help legislators reach one of their primary goals: re-election.²⁵

Less influential were tactics that addressed legislators indirectly. Tactics such as grassroots campaigns and media outreach target a broad audience with hopes of swaying public opinion and getting members of the public to apply pressure on legislators. For advocacy groups using these tactics, the pathway to a legislator is mediated, usually through the public or the media. As a result, respondents may fail to attribute the influence back to its original source, the advocacy group. Both tactics in the indirect channel, as well as seminars and events, an informational tactic, had significantly lower ratings than the tactics in the personal channel.

Figure 4. Average influence rating by advocacy tactic



Note: Figure 4 shows mean influence rating by advocacy tactic. Results calculated from long form survey responses. Total bar indicates mean tactic rating for all organizations. Gray segment of bar indicates mean tactic rating for placebo organization. Navy blue segment highlights difference between placebo mean and total mean. Thin light blue bars show 95% confidence intervals around each mean. Tactics are grouped by their influence channel, identified in the rotated, group label. (n=27)

Source: Survey results. Author's calculations.

Figure 4 also shows how the placebo group was rated according to each tactic. Having respondents rate the influence of non-existent tactics reveals base feelings about the various methods of advocacy. Interestingly, ratings for the placebo group mirrored ratings for the advocacy groups. Despite having no evidence of an organization using that tactic or even the existence of the organization, respondents still rated personal tactics higher than indirect tactics. Evidence of the rigidity of respondent opinion is further found when looking at intra-influence channel rankings. Each tactic included in the SwP can be grouped into one of three influence channels (shown in Figure 4). When we look at how advocacy groups rank against each other in certain channels, as shown in Table 3, we find that the rankings are largely similar to those from the overall results. LABI and BAEO are the top two advocacy groups in all three advocacy channels, as well as the overall sample. LFC and LAPCS alternate between third and fourth, with the two anti-school choice groups, LFT and LSBA, ranking at either fifth or sixth.

The survey results show that the interaction of particular advocacy groups and tactics yield no notable variation from the aggregate results. Pro-school choice groups, led by LABI and BAEO, are uniformly perceived as more influential than anti-school choice groups, regardless of advocacy channel. Also in line with aggregate results, the tactics in the personal channel are consistently the highest rated for all advocacy groups. This lack of variation suggests that while respondents clearly thought some advocacy groups were more influential than others, they perceived all groups as adopting similar behaviors and strategies, something which runs counter to the claims made by pro-school choice advocacy groups that the organizations took specialized roles to maximize their impact. It may be the case that the survey tool is too blunt to measure the type of specialization used by the pro-school choice advocacy groups. Groups may be using a full array of tactics, and in equal proportion, but specializing based on their target audience or content area of the legislation. Furthermore, respondents may have had trouble remembering the impact of specific tactics and may have instead simply assigned ratings based on their opinions of the groups and advocacy tactics in aggregate. These complex interactions of organization and tactic are best explored in the critical paths, which allow for rich, qualitative descriptions of the advocacy pathways.

Table 3. Advocacy group influence rankings

Influence Rank	Indirect Channel	Informational Channel	Personal Channel	Overall
1st (Most Influential)	LABI	LABI	LABI	LABI
2nd	BAEO	BAEO	BAEO	BAEO
3rd	LFC	LAPCS	LFC	LFC
4th	LAPCS	LFC	LAPCS	LAPCS
5th	LFT	LSBA	LFT	LSBA
6th	LSBA	LFT	LSBA	LFT
7th (Least Influential)	Placebo	Placebo	Placebo	Placebo

Influence Ratings of Legislative Agents and Political Insiders

Figure 5 compares the influence ratings of three types of respondents: legislative agents, political insiders, and representatives of the organizations themselves.²⁶ Next, we compare the influence ratings of two types of respondents: legislative agents and political insiders. Two advocacy groups had significant differences between the ratings of legislative agents and political insiders: BAEO and LFC.²⁷ Legislative agents found LABI to be the most influential group, followed more distantly by BAEO and LAPCS. Notably, the distance between the ratings of LABI and BAEO, the second-highest-rated organization by legislative agents, is greater than that between BAEO and the placebo, the lowest-rated organization. By comparison, political insiders rated LABI and BAEO as their most influential groups, with LFC closely following.

Issues with name recognition may account for LFC’s low rating among legislators. A representative from LFC mentioned that the name of the organization had changed from years past and suggested that legislators were likely more familiar with his/her name than the name of the organization. For BAEO, the targeted audience of its advocacy may be the cause for its lower influence rating among legislators. BAEO representatives note that several of their tactics focused primarily on black legislators. As a result, non-black legislators who were not targeted by the full array of BAEO tactics may perceive the organization as being less influential. One of the flaws of the survey is its inability to capture advocacy efforts targeted at specific, limited audiences, particularly when groups work in concert with each other. The critical path analysis, another technique used in this study, elucidates more nuanced efforts that may go undetected by the SWP.

Interview Narratives

Selected examples of results of the Critical Path Interview Analysis are presented below. Due to their different missions, strengths, and constraints, the three foundation-funded organizations took different approaches to influencing the passage of House Bill 976. The critical paths illuminate these differences and provide insight into how their collective advocacy efforts may have contributed to the policy outcome.

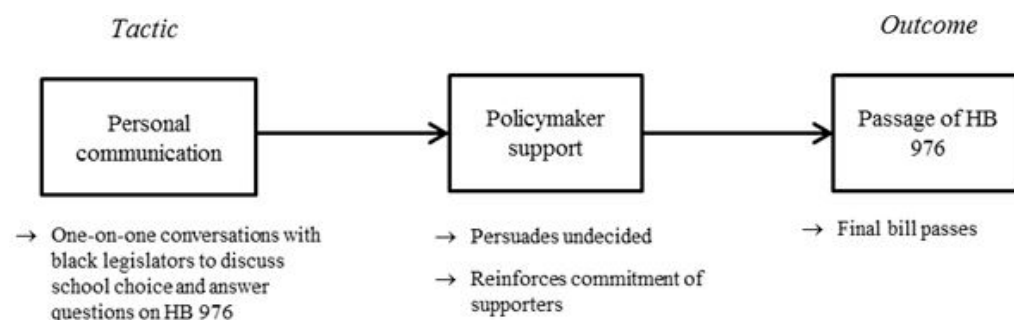
Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO)

The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) is a national organization active in nine states, including Louisiana. As stated on its national website, the organization's mission is to "increase access to high-quality education options for Black children by actively supporting transformational education reform initiatives and parental choice policies that empower low-income and working-class Black families."²⁸

Though the organization is supportive of educational options generally, including the growth of charter schools, their primary focus in Louisiana during the 2012 legislative session was securing statewide expansion of the voucher program.²⁹ To accomplish its policy objectives, BAEO drew from tactics in the personal, indirect, and informational channels to carry out multiple broad advocacy strategies.

Here we present interview results from one of those strategies: personal communication with black legislators. As shown in Figure 5 below, BAEO engaged in personal conversations with black legislators in an attempt to gain the support of undecided voters and maintain the commitment of school choice supporters. The organization believed that engendering support among these legislators would promote the passage of HB 976.

Figure 5. Influence path of BAEO personal communication



In personal communication with black legislators, BAEO answered questions regarding school choice and HB 976, providing policymakers with support and information while building strong relationships. Through ongoing communications, BAEO worked to reinforce the support of school choice proponents, move swing vote legislators toward supporting the bill, and flip the position of some school choice opponents.

In addition to regular meetings with legislators, the organization had specific strategic conversations. For example, as the House vote neared, BAEO met with legislators who were worried about how they should vote on the legislation. The organization had been in communication with each of these legislators and they were all likely supporters of the bill, but had some lingering concerns. Members of BAEO's staff listened to their concerns and encouraged them that no matter how they voted, BAEO would not abandon them. Through these conversations, the legislators had their support for the bill reinforced.

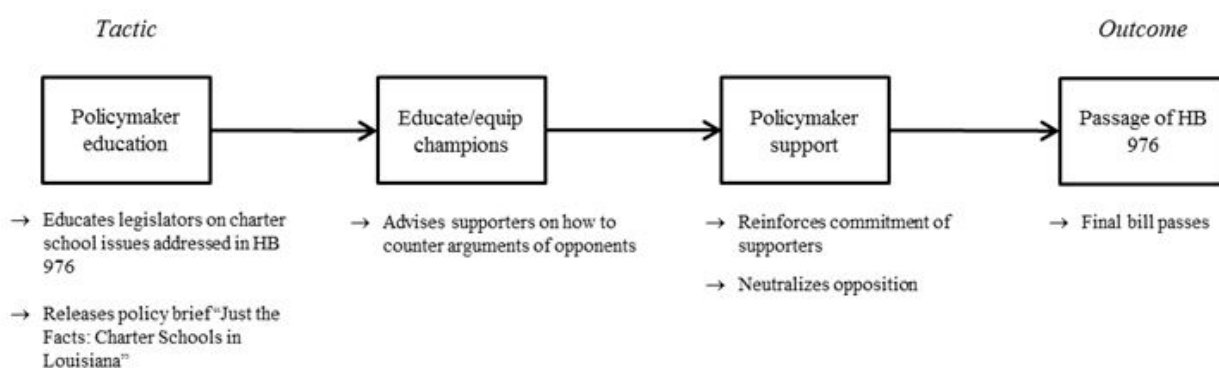
To verify this critical path, the research team collected evidence from interviews with legislative agents and political insiders as well as from media reports. Although the final vote count illustrates that the organization was not successful in moving every black legislator to support the legislation (10 of the 31 Black Caucus members voted for the bill), there is evidence to support the notion that BAEO's tactics were influential. One political insider pointed out that there had been a major shift in black legislator support from 2008 to 2012, and in a separate conversation, indicated that their organization let BAEO take the lead in communicating with black legislators, stating that working through that organization was the best way to get an audience with those lawmakers.³⁰

Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS)

The Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS) serves Louisiana charter schools through advocacy, outreach, and member services. As stated on the organization's website, LAPCS's mission is to "support, promote, and advocate for the Louisiana charter school movement, increasing student access to high quality public schools statewide."³¹ Of the three foundation-funded organizations included in our study, LAPCS was the only membership-based organization, and thus faced a different internal dynamic than other groups involved in the effort surrounding HB 976. LAPCS sought legislation that would ensure the authorization of high-quality charter schools and protect schools' autonomy and ability to innovate. The organization pursued multiple advocacy strategies as it advocated for HB 976; here, we focus on the organization's strategy of providing legislators with accurate information regarding Louisiana charter schools and school choice.

LAPCS's critical path links its efforts in educating policymakers on the key policy issues addressed by HB 976 to the final policy outcome. During the 2012 legislative session, LAPCS staff met regularly with legislators to clarify misconceptions regarding charter schools and to educate them on the specific issues addressed by the legislation. LAPCS hypothesizes that these informational tactics equipped champions with information to persuade their colleagues and to counter the arguments of opponents, and that this additional information built political support for the bill. A diagram of this critical path is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Influence path of LAPCS policymaker education



This strategy of informing legislators was executed in multiple ways. For example, LAPCS released a policy brief entitled, "Just the Facts: Charter Schools in Louisiana," to counter common misconceptions about charter schools and provide accurate

information on issues like accountability, funding, and selectivity within the charter sector.³² The organization also conducted targeted meetings with legislators to discuss school choice, sharpen legislators' knowledge of HB 976's impact, and enable legislators to counter misinformation. LAPCS postulates that the information they provided helped to reinforce the support of legislators and to neutralize erroneous claims made by opponents.

To verify this path of influence, the research team interviewed legislators who received information from LAPCS. One legislative agent with whom members of the research team spoke and who was provided with LAPCS's policy brief, emphasized the power of information in the advocacy process, though rating LAPCS's "research materials" tactic at the midpoint of the SwP.³³ Video footage of the House floor debate confirms that members to whom LAPCS provided information spoke about the charter components of the bill and were able to counter erroneous claims made by opponents.³⁴ For example, in one instance, a member of the legislature asked a question that illustrated that she was misinformed about the number of pathways through which a charter school could be authorized under the bill, and a LAPCS-informed legislator was able to provide her with correct information. Though not specifically citing the chamber's exchange on charter schools, one legislator publically stated on the House floor at the end of the day's discussion that listening to his colleagues' debate on HB 976 got him "to thinking about the children" and influenced his vote in favor of the legislation.³⁵

Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC)

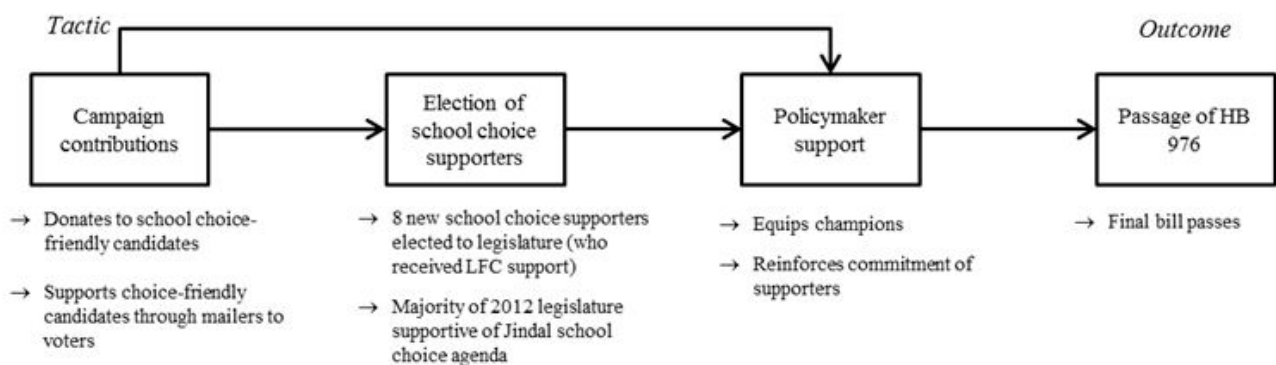
The Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC) is a project of two national organizations, the American Federation for Children (AFC) and the Alliance for School Choice. LFC is dedicated to "promoting, protecting, and expanding school voucher and opportunity scholarship programs for low- and middle-income children."³⁶ The organization is also associated with a political action committee (PAC), allowing it to expend funds in campaigns. This flexibility of operating as both a 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 was unique among the foundation-funded advocacy organizations of interest in our study.

LFC's primary policy objective was the statewide expansion of Louisiana's existing SSEE program. The organization used tactics from the personal, indirect, and informational channels within multiple broad advocacy strategies to pursue its policy goals. Here, we focus on the organization's effort to establish a legislative body

favorable to school choice bills by providing campaign support to pro-school choice candidates.

As shown in Figure 7 below, drawing on its ability to contribute to election campaigns, LFC attempted to build a legislative body that would support educational choice initiatives during the 2012 session and beyond. The organization hypothesizes that through its campaign support of candidates that were already friendly to their position, they “stacked the deck” in favor of reform before HB 976 was even filed.

Figure 7. Influence path of LFC campaign contributions



Specifically, LFC supported pro-school choice candidates in three ways: financially contributing to campaigns, endorsing school choice supporters, and sending mailers to voters. In total, the organization spent \$321,000 on state-level races (particularly legislative and BESE races) during the 2011 election cycle and 28 of the 38 candidates it supported (74 percent) were elected.³⁷

From October 3 to November 15, 2011, LFC provided campaign contributions of between \$500 and \$2,000 to the campaigns of candidates who supported educational choice. Candidates used these funds to increase the vigor of their campaign for office and touted the support of the organization to win voter support. In addition to financial contributions, LFC sent mailers to voters on behalf of legislative candidates who supported educational choice. Mailers encouraged voters to support these candidates and included messages about the positive impact that the candidate would have on education. For example, a mailer sent in support of Senate candidate Elbert Lee Guillory included statements such as “improve education by empowering parents” and “direct more money into the classroom.”³⁸ Voters responded to these efforts by favoring the candidates at the ballot box, resulting in a

portion of these candidates being elected. Across the state, the majority of legislators elected were supportive of school choice which created a friendly legislative body for the governor's forthcoming education reform agenda.

We gathered evidence through interviews, reviews of official campaign documents, and official election results to attempt to verify this path. One political insider indicated that legislators know LFC as a prominent financial contributor and identified the organization as one of the three most influential advocacy organizations that supported HB 976.³⁹ There is also evidence that candidates recognized LFC's endorsement as valuable to their campaign. For example, at least two candidates for the Louisiana Senate, Derek Babcock and Mack "Bodi" White, heralded the organization's support on their campaign websites.⁴⁰

There is evidence to suggest that campaign contributions were not a strong factor in securing the passage of HB 976. For instance, one legislative agent supported by LFC in the election indicated that campaign contributions are not as influential on legislators as direct communication from organizations well-informed on the legislation. This legislator rated the influence of LFC political support in the upper end of the SwP distribution, but not in either of the top two categories.⁴¹ Another legislative agent that LFC supported indicated that relationships are the driving factor behind which organization is most influential on any particular legislator. This interviewee rated personal communication with LFC over political support.⁴²

However, external sources, albeit ones that are generally seen as disfavoring the reform movement, suggest that campaign contributions made by LFC and other reform groups did in fact influence the legislation. For example, in a piece printed in *The Jena Times*, a Jena, Louisiana newspaper, one political commentator specifically identifies the American Federation for Children (LFC's parent organization) as having influenced the passage of HB 976 through campaign contributions.⁴³ A similar piece suggests that it was likely that campaign funds contributed by Governor Jindal made the difference.⁴⁴ While these claims are speculative, they do point to an on-the-ground assessment that dollars influenced the final policy outcome.

Discussion

Toward Advocacy Value-Added

The surge in education advocacy over the past decade raises the imperative for better methods to evaluate its influence on public policy. As this nascent industry grows, funders will have more choice over where they invest their advocacy dollars. To maximize the return on their investments, they will need sound information on the most effective organizations and the most effective channels for achieving their policy objectives. This study gives hope that such information can be produced.

Findings from the Louisiana case study indicate our survey tool can produce a valid and reliable measure of influence. Respondents consistently placed the placebo group at the low end of the influence scale and assigned higher ratings to the advocacy groups that were truly engaged in the Louisiana debate. This is evidence that respondents can reliably distinguish non-influential groups from influential groups and that the placebo serves as a reliable estimate of the point of zero influence on the survey scale. The benefit of the placebo cannot be underestimated. This feature allows us to move beyond relative comparisons and quantify influence in absolute terms. Moreover, the placebo makes it possible to generalize influence ratings beyond a particular policy context. The placebo ratings can be used as an “anchor item” to equate influence ratings from different versions of the survey, making it possible to compare the influence of advocacy groups that operate in different locales and focus on different policy issues.

The survey was precise enough to draw statistically meaningful distinctions between advocacy groups. The patterns that emerged in the data were generally consistent with the qualitative evidence on the major influencers in Louisiana. The four pro-reform advocacy groups that were on the winning side of the policy outcome each received significantly higher average influence ratings than the two groups on the losing side. The group with the highest overall influence rating - LABI - is a recognized powerhouse in Louisiana politics with reach that extends beyond public education issues.

The survey also sheds light on the channels through which influence occurred. Respondents attributed greater influence to the two personal channel tactics, i.e., personal communication and political support. This is consistent with the literature

showing that direct lobbying and campaign contributions are more influential than indirect tactics such as grassroots campaigns.⁴⁵ It also sheds light on why LABI, the aforementioned powerhouse that employs 10 full-time professional lobbyists, was the top rated influencer. Future administrations of the survey will allow us to confirm whether or not groups that have greater capacity to work through personal channels always have the advantage.

One of the key takeaways from the critical path analysis is that Governor Jindal's office wielded a tremendous amount of influence on the passage of HB 976. In fact, a plurality of the political insiders that we interviewed agreed that the governor's office was the central actor in the passage of HB 976. This is consistent with the theory that advocacy groups are opportunistic and mobilize their resources when the possibility of reform is imminent.

It may be, however, that the reason HB 976 was so predictable was in part due to the work of the advocacy groups at earlier stages in the policy process. Our survey inquired about the influence of advocacy groups on the legislature's passage of HB 976. However, our interviews with advocacy groups and political insiders suggest the major effects of advocacy may have occurred prior to the legislative session. This is consistent with research showing that the effects of lobbying are more readily observed in the agenda setting stage of policymaking than they are in roll calls.⁴⁶ For instance, LFC has been supporting the elections of school choice-friendly candidates in Louisiana since at least 2008, when it supported the election of Governor Jindal. The survey may not have picked up the effects of this work in selecting policymakers. Future work should consider how best to capture the effects of advocacy groups at earlier stages in the policymaking process.

The timing of the survey is another important issue to revisit. In the case of Louisiana, there was a 13-month gap between when HB 976 was passed and when the survey was administered. Legislators' interactions with advocacy groups during this interim period may have shaped their perceptions of the groups' influence on HB 976. Additionally, we have reason to believe the legal battle that followed the passage of HB 976 deterred legislators from participating in the survey and critical path interviews. Just prior to the launch of the survey window, the state's Supreme Court ruled the program's funding mechanism unconstitutional, requiring the legislature to rethink its funding of the voucher program.^{47,48} When members of our research team

approached one legislative agent at the state capitol regarding the survey, he was dismissive of the project, asking “you know this bill has been thrown out, right?”

Securing a high response rate from legislators is likely to be a challenge, even when the political conditions are mild. The influence of advocacy groups is a politically sensitive topic for politicians and many legislators were skeptical about the study and how the results would be used. Reasons offered by legislators for not participating included not recognizing the organizations fielding the survey and being concerned that results from the survey would provide political fodder for opponents. Making personal contact with legislators was a way to add legitimacy to the survey and ensure that legislators received the survey and understand how to complete it. This is a labor-intensive task, but one that will be integral to the success of future survey administrations.

Some revisions to the survey may also help boost response rates. Respondents to the long form of the survey expressed frustration over the amount of time required to complete it. This may explain why only 18 percent of our target sample completed the long form, despite 10 weeks of phone calls, emails, and even some personal office visits. We were able to double the response rate in three weeks by administering the short form version, which simply asked respondents to rate the overall influence of advocacy groups. The overall ratings of advocacy groups were not statistically different between the two forms, but we did lose the ability to identify which channel of influence respondents found most influential. For future administrations we may consider finding a middle ground between the long and short form versions that allows us to reduce the survey length but still capture information on the channels of influence.

End Notes

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6. David Stuit, Claire Graves and Sy Doan, *Technical Appendix to Measuring the Influence of Education Advocacy: the Case of Louisiana's School Choice Legislation*, December 2013 (www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/12/10-education-advocacy-louisiana-school-choice-whitehurst).
7. Ken Rudin, "Jindal Wins Smashing Re-Election in Louisiana; Nevada Blinks on Caucus Date," *NPR's political junkie*, October 24th, 2011 (www.npr.org/blogs/politicaljunkie/2011/10/24/141606998/jindal-wins-smashing-re-election-in-louisiana-nevada-blinks-on-caucus-date).
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9. Andreas Dur, "How Much Influence do Interest Groups have in the EU? Some Methodological Consideration," in *Opening EU Governance to Civil Society: Gains and Challenges*, edited by Beate Kohler-Koch, Dirk De Bievre and William Maloney. (Mannheim, Germany:CONNEX, 2008).
10. Respondents are asked to: "Please sort the activities according to their influence on [Policy Outcome]". Studies have shown that 5 to 7 points maximizes the reliability of unipolar scales. See Stuart J. McKelvie, "Graphic Rating Scales - How many categories?" *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. 69 (1978), pp.185-202.
11. The number of advocacy organizations and the ratio of proposing and opposing organizations represented in the card stack may differ depending on the nature of the bill, the advocacy activity surrounding it, and the organizations that are of interest to the funder. By providing respondents with the opportunity to evaluate the influence of organizations on both sides of the legislation, we develop a more complete picture of the true influence of the pro-legislation foundation-funded organizations that are the primary focus of our study. The inclusion of opponents may also enhance the response rate among legislators who opposed the policy change under consideration. Finally, using a balanced field allows the tool to be used in areas where the legislation of interest failed, despite the work of the funded advocacy organizations.

12. The placebo organization is a fixed element in all versions of the SwP that are customized for each research site. It serves as an anchor item for equating the influence scores across different policy outcomes and different advocacy groups.
13. A unipolar scale fits with our conceptual definition of influence as an absolute one-dimensional quantity that reflects the degree to which an organization shifted the final policy outcome towards its position. This construction makes it possible for advocacy groups with opposite policy positions (“for” and “against”) to fall high on the influence scale. For example, if two groups effectively lobby on opposite sides of a policy the final outcome will represent a compromise. Both of these groups can be said to have high influence on the outcome if the compromised position is closer to each of their positions than what we would expect had they not engaged on the issue. A unipolar scale is also conceptually aligned to the normal distribution of card slots that respondents must adhere to in the activity. On a unipolar scale the midpoint of the scale is equivalent to “average”. Values on the left side of the scale are below average, values on the right are above average. This is also the case for a normal distribution.
14. This assumes that influence is a normally distributed dimension and therefore the intervals between the categories are equal. This forced distribution eliminates rating biases that inflict standard survey methods (e.g., rating everything the same or giving everyone high ratings).
15. David Stuit, Claire Graves, and Sy Doan, Technical Appendix to Measuring the Influence of Education Advocacy: the Case of Louisiana's School Choice Legislation, December 2013 (www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/12/10-education-advocacy-louisiana-school-choice-whitehurst).
16. Since the number of cards in the short form is less than or equal to the number of positions on the 7 point scale the scores do not take on a quasi-normal distribution and consequently we cannot infer they are on the same equal-interval scale as the long form. This has implications for how the short form and long form scores are combined.
17. We use a paired t-test to test the null hypothesis that the difference between the mean organization and placebo SwP scores is zero. A one-sided t-test evaluates the probability that the mean difference between the SwP scores of the organization and placebo are greater than 0.
18. Andrew Bennett. “Process Tracing and Causal Inference,” in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, 2nd ed., edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier, pp. 207-19. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).
19. Each interview lasted approximately 2.5 hours and followed a semi-structured, open-ended format. Two researchers from Basis Policy Research conducted each interview together. During the interview, one researcher explained the interview protocol, took primary responsibility for asking the questions, and also took notes. The second researcher coordinated the audio-recording of the interview, took notes on a laptop computer during the interview, and asked follow-up questions as necessary.
20. John Maginnis, “Maginnis: Business Lobby Captive of Success,” *Business Report*, Sept. 10, 2013, (<http://businessreport.com/article/20130910/BUSINESSREPORT0112/130919978>).
21. Jeremy Harper, “High Stakes: Upcoming Legislative Session will be the Most Important in Years,” Dig,

Apr. 3, 2013, (<http://digbatonrouge.com/article/high-stakes-6577/>).

22. "Louisiana Association of Business & Industry," Influence Explorer.
23. "LABI Releases Legislators' 2013 Business and Industry Score Cards," Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, accessed Sept. 27, 2013, (http://labi.org/labi/labi-news/2013_voting_record).
24. The short-form survey only asks respondents to score organizations and does not ask them to score tactics or organization-tactic pairings.
25. David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, (Yale University Press, 1974).; Richard Fenno Jr., *Home Style: House Members in their Districts*, (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education, 1978).
26. Response rates were too low to distinguish between key and general legislative agents. Full t-test comparison results are presented in the technical appendix of this report.
27. Because the "political insider" subsample includes responses from members of BAEO, LFC, and other members of the pro-HB 976 advocacy organization coalition, the mean BAEO and LFC scores may be inflated due to self-promoting one's own advocacy efforts and the efforts of colleagues. However, even when responses from members of this coalition were omitted, the difference between legislators and Political Insiders for both BAEO and LFC were still statistically significant.
28. "Our Mission and Core Values." Black Alliance for Educational Option, accessed July 1, 2013, (www.baeo.org/?ns_ref=14&id=5457).
29. The Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program was enacted in 2008 and initially open only to income-eligible students attending failing schools and living in Orleans Parish.
30. Political Insider A, interview by Claire Graves, March 14, 2013; Political Insider A, interview by Claire Graves, June 5, 2013.
31. "Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools" accessed July 1, 2013. (<http://lacharterschools.org/>)
32. Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, "Just the Facts: Charter Schools in Louisiana," February 2012.
33. Legislative Agent A, interview by Claire Graves, June 1, 2013.
34. "March 22, 2012 Day 8, House Floor, Part 1,"
35. "March 22, 2012 Day 8, House Floor, Part 2,"
36. "About Us," Louisiana Federation for Children, accessed July 1, 2013 (www.louisiana4children.org/about-us).
37. "Election Impact Report: Electing School Choice Champions," (Washington: American Federation for Children, 2012), (http://s3.amazonaws.com/assets.clients/Afc/legacy_assets/uploads/196/original/Election_Report_FINAL.pdf?1336570454).
38. *Ibid.*
39. Political Insider B, interview by Claire Graves, March 21, 2013.
40. "LA Federation PAC for Children Endorses Babcock!" Derek Babcock Senate, accessed Sept. 27, 2013, (<http://derekbabcock.com/2011/09/la-federation-for-children-endorses-babcock/>).; MackBodiWhite.com, accessed Sept. 27, 2013, (<http://mackbodiwhite.com/wp-content/uploads/lafcpAC.pdf>).
41. Legislative Agent A, interview by Claire Graves, June 1, 2013.

42. Legislative Agent B, interview by Claire Graves, June 6, 2013
43. Tom Aswell, "Did Campaign Contributions Play Role in Vote on Two Bills?" Jena Times (Jena, La.), Mar. 28, 2012, (<http://jen.stparchive.com/Archive/JEN/JEN03282012p04.php>).
44. Tom Aswell, "Following the Jindal, ALEC Money in Reforming Louisiana: Part I—Education," BayouBuzz.com, Mar. 19, 2012, (www.bayoubuzz.com/buzzitem/2816-following-the-jindal-alec-money-in-reforming-louisiana-part-i-education).
45. Lester Milbrath, *Washington Lobbyists* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1963), pp. 213 and 230-231.
46. Margaret M. Conway, "PACs in the Political Process," in *Interest Group Politics*, 3rd ed., edited by Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1991).
47. Just after the survey window closed, the U.S. Department of Justice filed suit seeking to prevent students who are attending school districts that are still under federal desegregation orders from participating in the voucher program, citing the program's potential to impede the process of desegregation. It seems likely that legislators may have heard rumors of this impending suit during the survey window.
48. Bill Barrow, "Teachers file state lawsuits challenging Gov. Jindal's Voucher, Tenure Laws," *Times-Picayune*, June 7, 2012, (www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/06/teachers_file_state_lawsuits_c.html).

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