

# Rethinking the federal role in education

*Should Washington do whatever it takes?*

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# What should we want of the federal role?

- **Coherence**

The degree to which a related series of transactions leads logically to a desired outcome

- **Effectiveness**

The degree to which objectives are achieved as a result of a course of action

- **Complementarity**

The degree to which a course of action provides what is lacking and needed to support other actions and actors

# The Obama administration's K-12 program priorities (as identified by Whitehurst)

- Common standards
  - 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills
  - College and Career Readiness
- Consequential accountability (but only at the extremes)
- Turning around lowest performing schools
- Charter schools (but not vouchers or transfer or supp. services)
- Teacher and principal effectiveness
- Longitudinal data systems
- Extended learning time
- Community centered reform
- STEM interest and performance
- Innovation
- Resource equalization

*Competitive  
rather than  
formula*

# The Obama administration's K-12 priorities (in their words)

A Blueprint for Reform

*The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* \*

- college- and career-ready students
- raise the bar and reward excellence
- great teachers and leaders
- equity and opportunity
- promote innovation

\* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, *ESEA Blueprint for Reform*, Washington, D.C., 2010



# Coherence is lacking

- Any number of additional variables could be added, e.g., small schools, great curriculum, accountability for students, great superintendents, mayoral control
- There is no connection or flow between the existing variables, e.g., how do equitable resources or innovation lead to great teachers?
- Some of the variables conflict, e.g., rewarding excellence sends more resources to winners and thus reduces resource equity
- Goals, processes, actions, and resources are not differentiated, e.g., is “great teachers” equivalent to “college ready students”?

# Effectiveness

- Common Standards

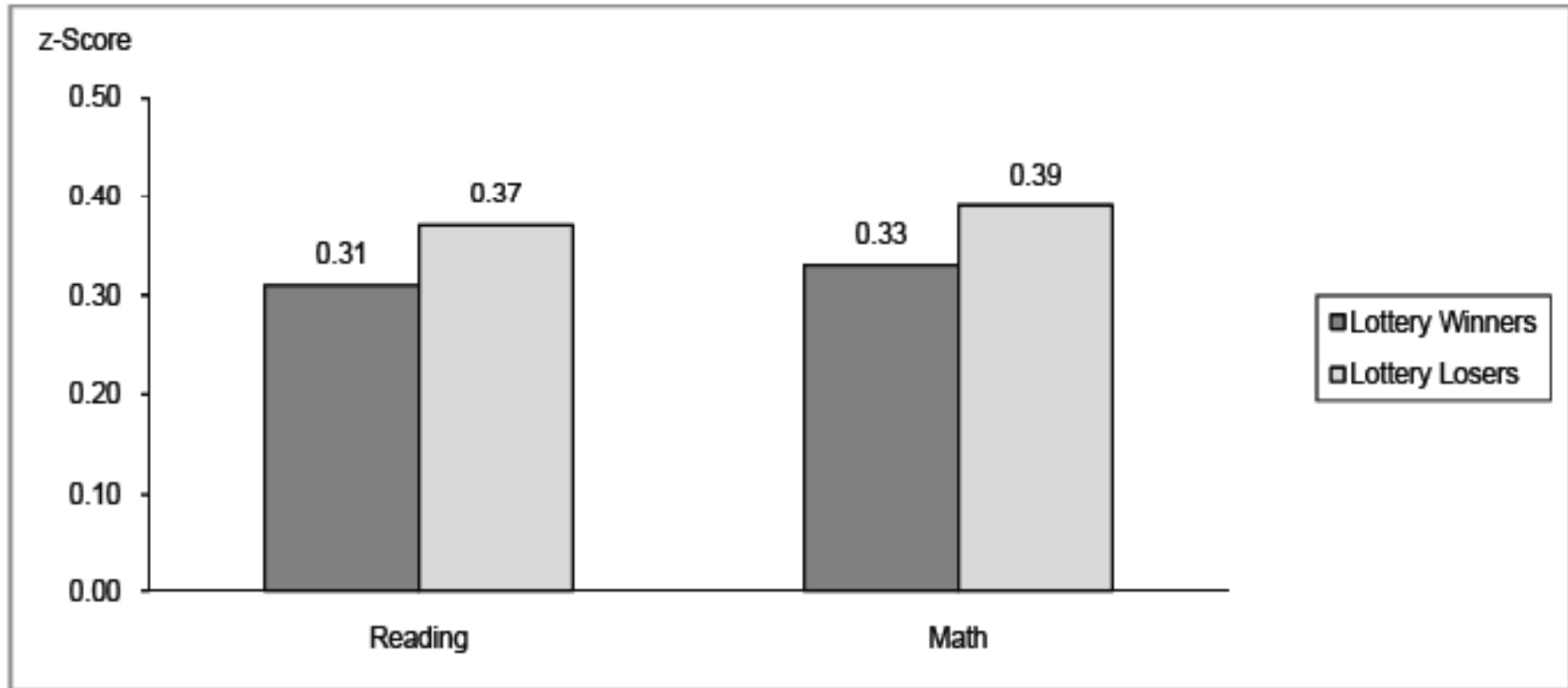
No statistical relationship between student achievement and

- 1) respected ratings of the quality of state standards
- 2) rigor of state criterion for “proficiency”
- 3) presence of national standards and performance on international tests
- 4) alignment of national content standards with international tests

- Charter Schools

Three large multi-state or national correlational descriptive studies and one multi-state randomized trial find little or no difference between charter and regular public schools on student achievement (but subgroup effects)

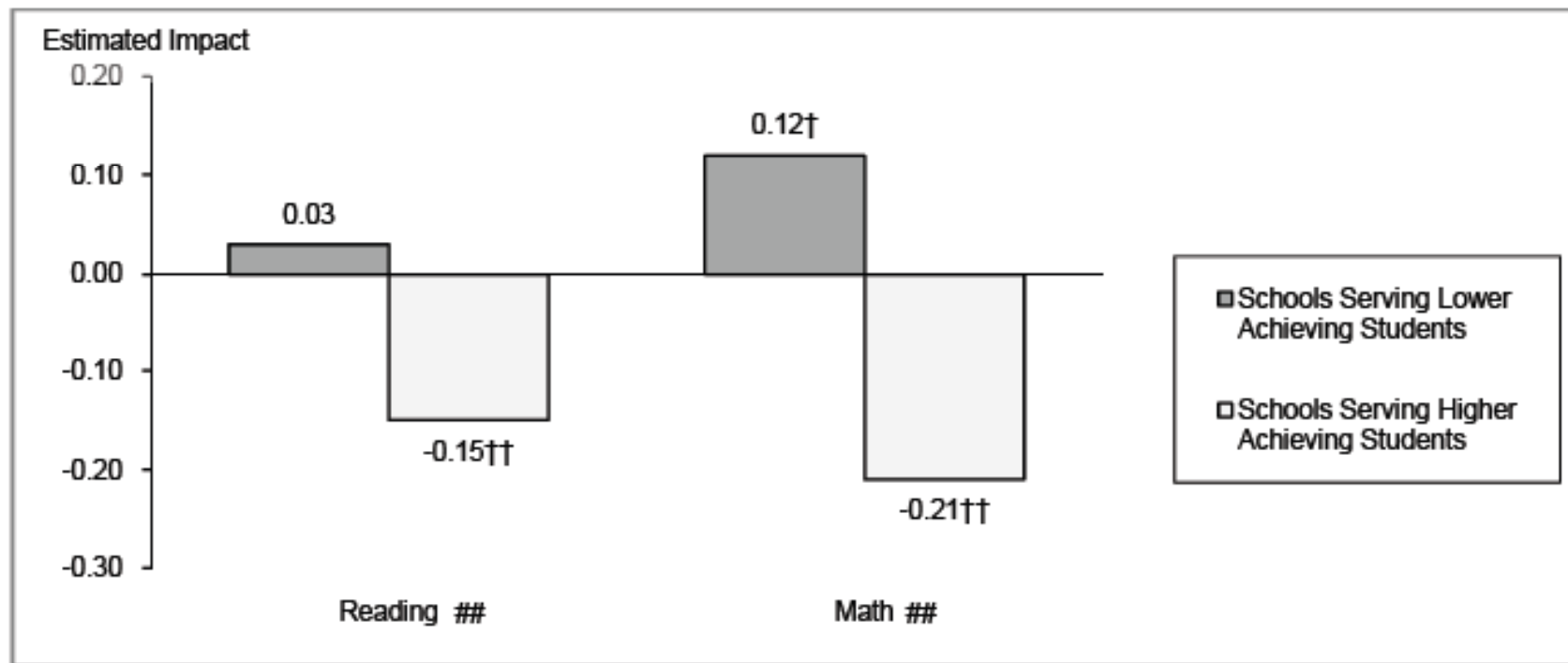
### Average Year 2 Test Scores of Lottery Winners and Losers



**Note:** Test scores shown here are based on students' performance on state assessments across multiple states. To make scores comparable across states, they were standardized into *effect size* or *z-score* units, in which a one unit change represents one standard deviation among all of the students in a state

Gleason, P., Clark, M., Tuttle, C. C., and Dwoyer, E. (2010). *The Evaluation of Charter School Impacts: Final Report* (NCEE 2010-4029). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

### Impacts on Year 2 Test Scores, by Characteristics of Charter Schools' Student Populations: Mean Baseline Test Scores



† Impact estimate is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

†† Impact estimate is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

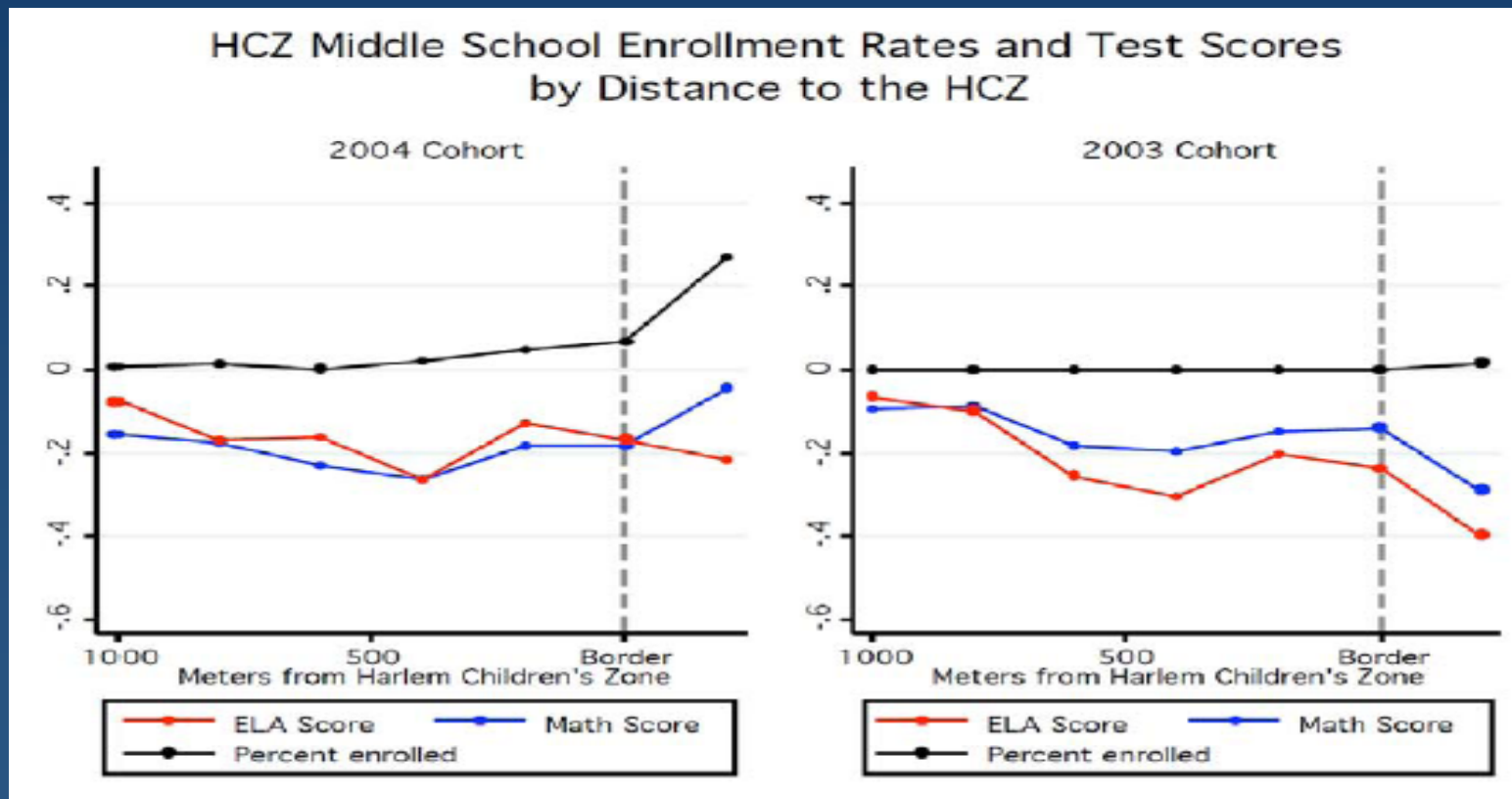
# Difference between estimates in two sets of sites is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

## Difference between estimates in two sets of sites is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

# Effectiveness

- HCZ and Promise Neighborhoods

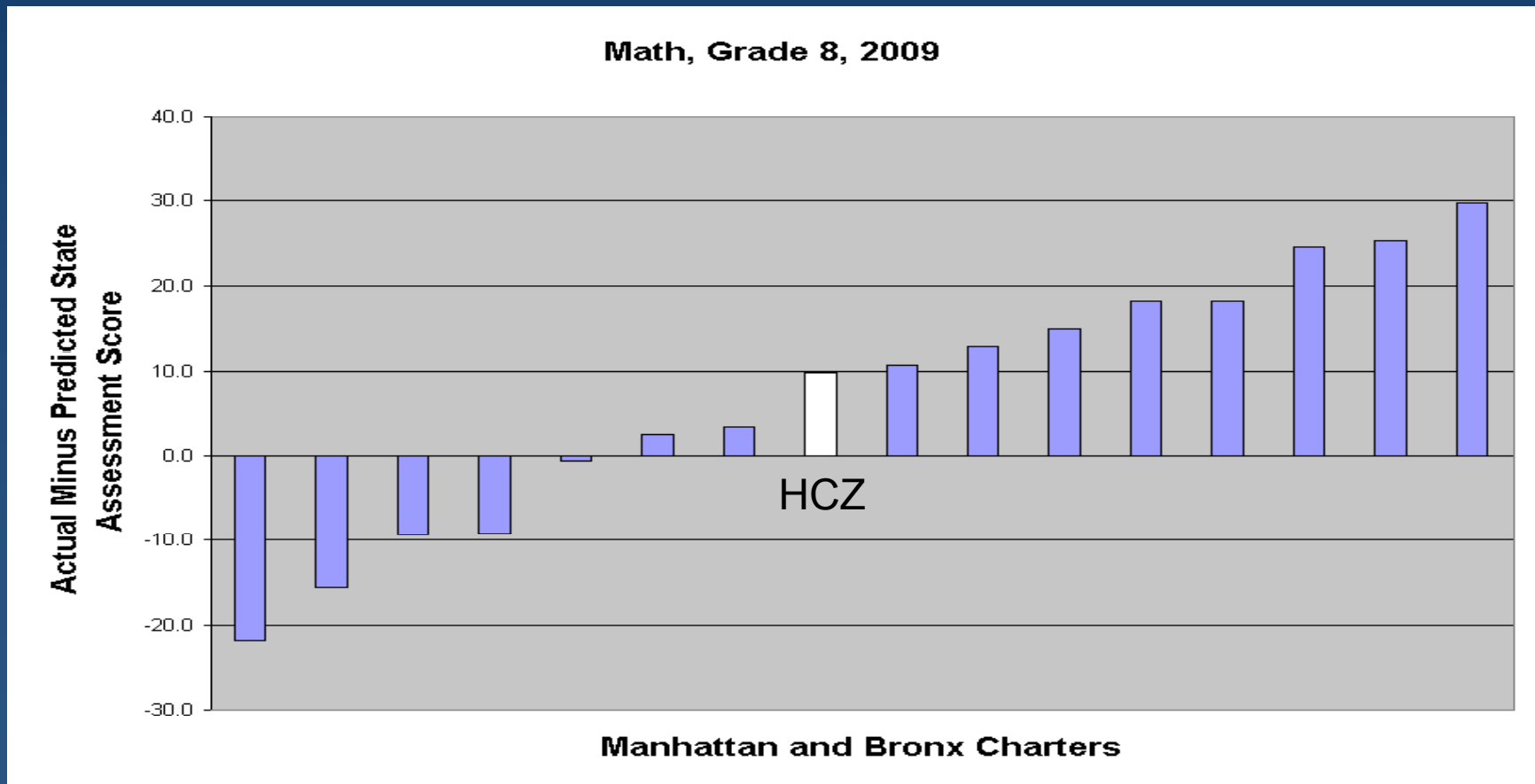
Dobbie & Fryer (2009)



# Effectiveness

- HCZ and Promise Neighborhoods

Whitehurst and Croft (2010)



# Effectiveness

- Turning around lowest performing schools

**Turnaround model:** Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50% of the staff

**Restart model:** Convert a school or close and reopen it as a charter school

**School closure:** Close a school and enroll the students elsewhere

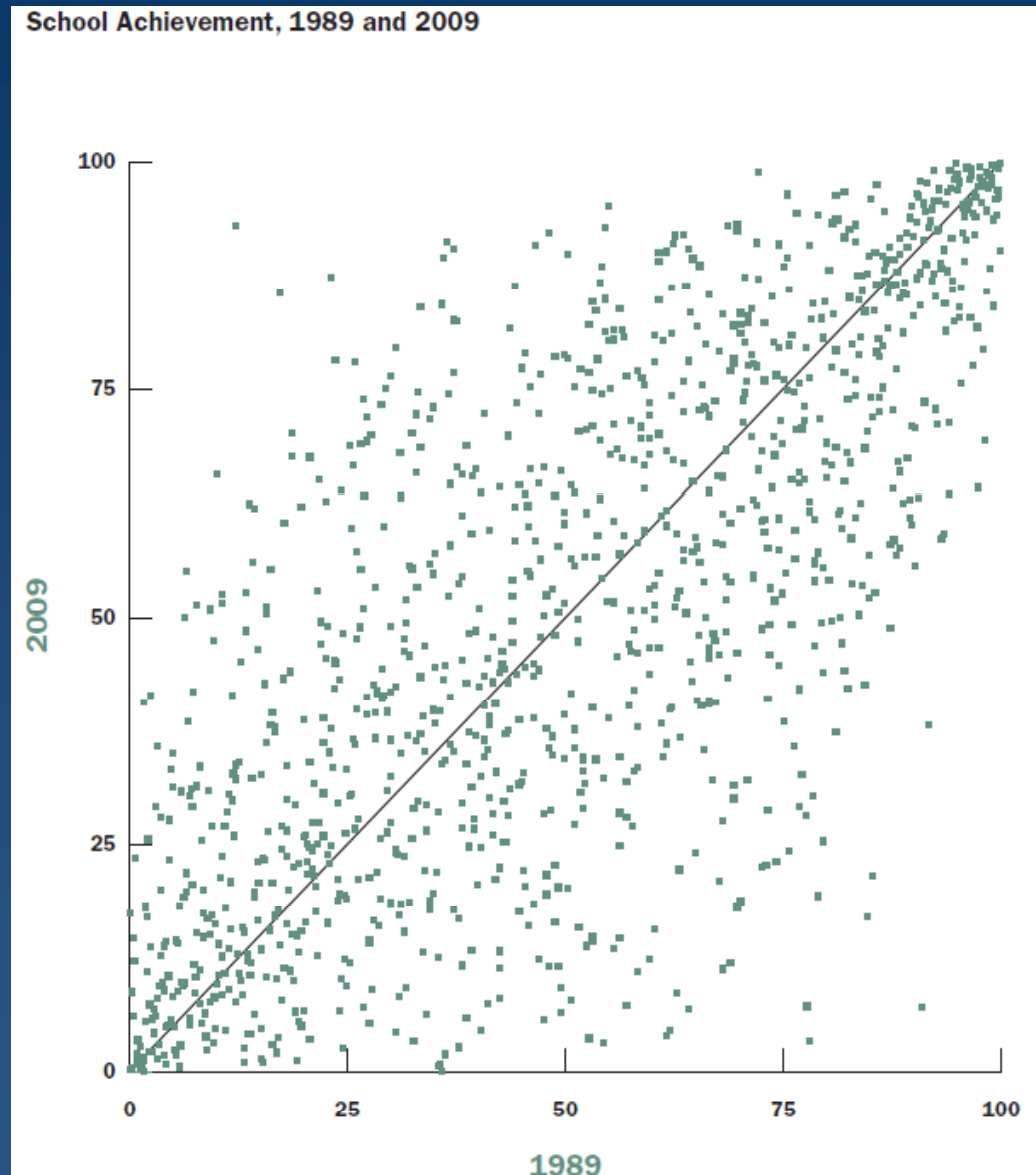
**Transformation model:** Replace the principal and institute comprehensive reforms

- IES Practice Guide on Turning Around Persistently Low Performing Schools: “The panel feels compelled to emphasize that the level of evidence [for the recommendations in this Guide] is *low* because none of the studies examined for this practice guide is based on a research methodology that yields valid causal inference.”
- CCSR report on Chicago’s policy, *When Schools Close*: “Once students left schools slated for closing, on average the additional effects on their learning were neither negative nor positive.”

# Effectiveness

- School turnarounds

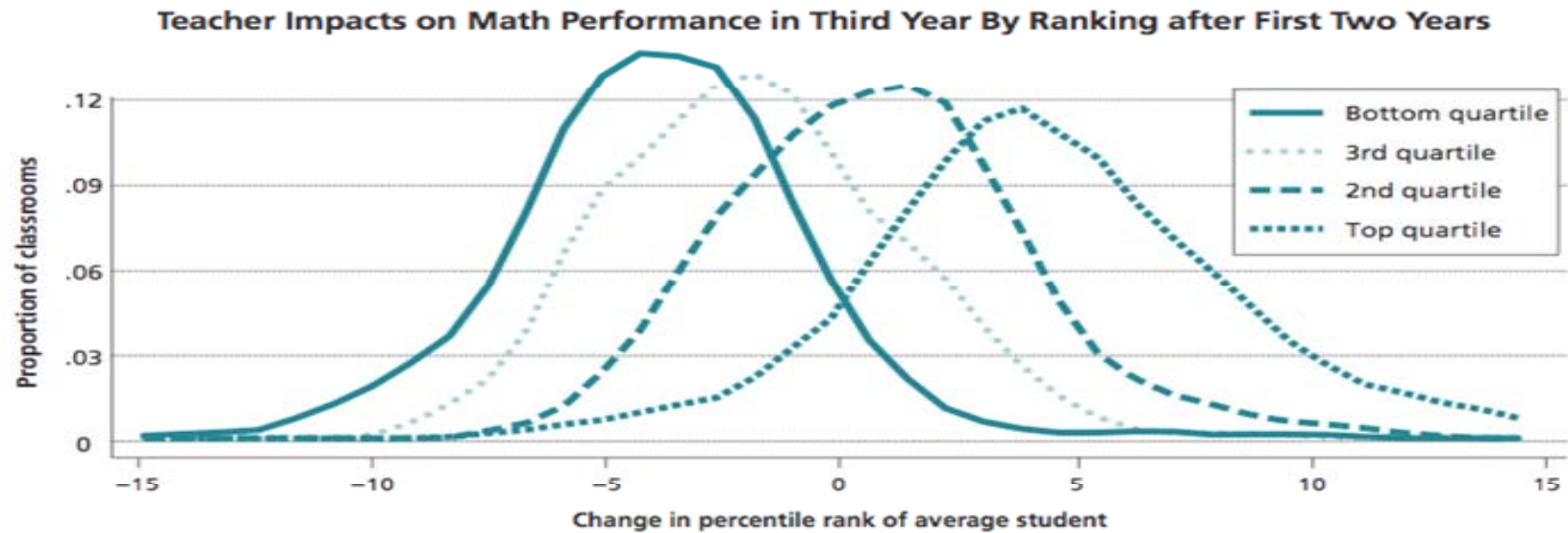
2009 Brown Center Report on American Education: “Of the 115 schools scoring at the 10th percentile or below in 1989, only four of them (or 3.5 percent) scored at the state average or above in 2009.”



# Effectiveness

- Great teachers and principals

## Past Performance Predicts Future Performance



Note: Classroom-level impacts on average student performance, controlling for baseline scores, student demographics, and program participation. LAUSD elementary teachers, < 4 years' experience.

Gordon, Kane, Staiger (2006)

- BUT

# Effectiveness (teachers)

- Demonstrations of natural variability in the effectiveness of teachers do not demonstrate the effect of any identified intervention or policy to improve teacher effectiveness
- Teach for America (MPR study): 0.15 effect size for math achievement and no effect on reading achievement
- Merit pay (Vanderbilt study): "simply did not do much of anything"
- DC teacher evaluations and dismissals: new mayor

# Effectiveness: Things left out

## Curriculum vs. Other Policy Levers

### Summary of Effect Sizes

<i>Charters</i>	
Charter schools in general	0.00 mathematics
Oversubscribed NYC charter schools	0.09 mathematics
<i>Reconstituting the teacher workforce</i>	
Merit pay for teachers in India	0.15 reading and mathematics
Teach for America	0.15 mathematics
<i>Preschool programs</i>	
Abecedarian Preschool	0.45 reading
Head Start	0.24 letter naming
Head Start	0.00 vocabulary
Even Start	0.00 vocabulary
Nurse Practitioner Partnership	0.09 reading & math test scores
<i>State standards</i>	0.00 mathematics
<i>Curriculum comparisons</i>	
More effective math curricula	0.30 mathematics
Most effective preschool curricula	0.48 vocabulary
Most effective dropout preventions	1.00 progressing in school
Most effective early reading programs	0.80 alphabetics

Whitehurst & Croft (2009) Don't forget curriculum. Brookings.

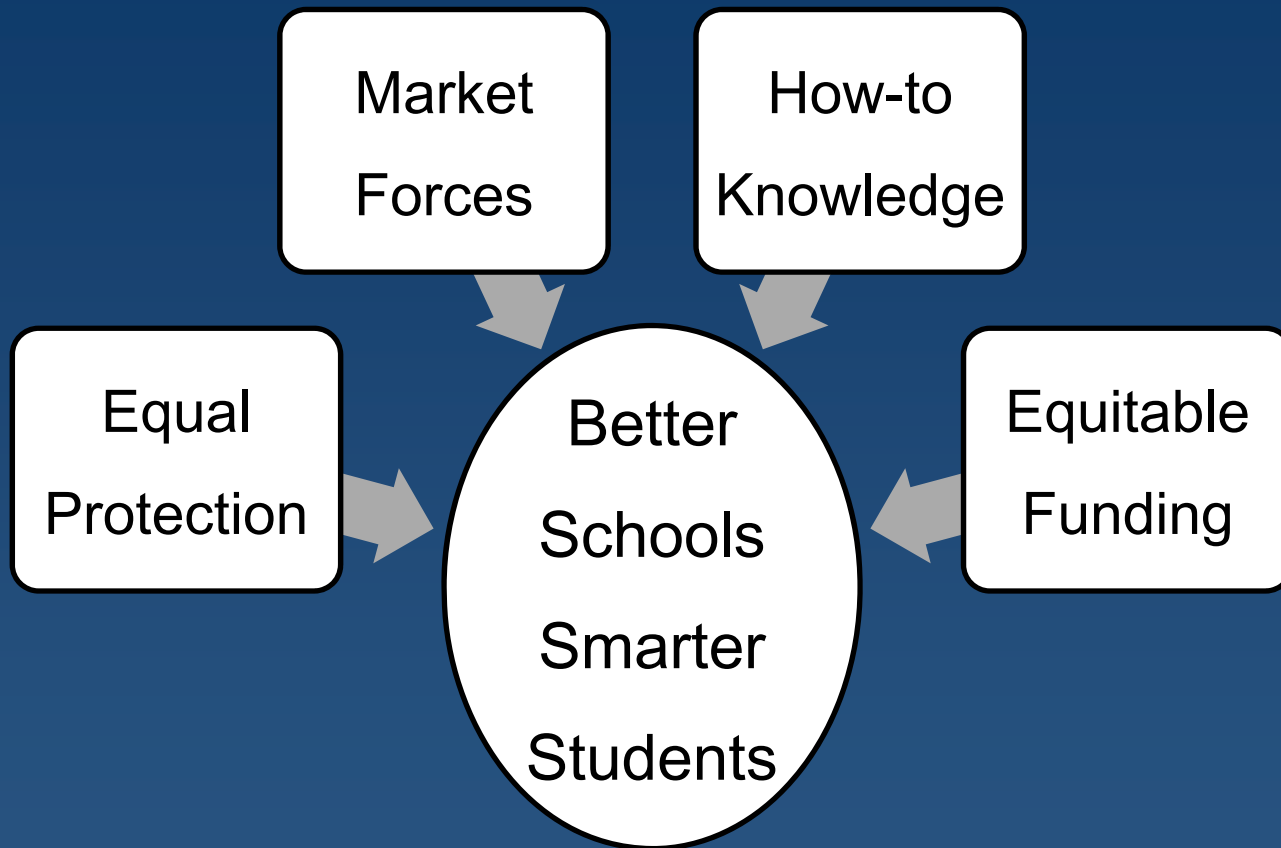
# Complementarity

- State and local share of educational costs ~ 90%
- Public education is enshrined in state constitutions and absent in the federal constitution
- School boards and mayors operate schools through 14,000 quasi-independent school districts
- Parents increasingly insist on choice

What is the appropriate federal role vis-a-vis other parties?

# A coherent and complementary federal role

- Knowledge
  - Research
  - Technical assistance
- Civil Rights
  - Non-discrimination based on race, sex, national origin ...
- Funding
  - Subsidization of extra costs of educating students with disabilities and disadvantages
- Market forces
  - Enhancing quality and usability of information on performance of education providers
  - Promoting opportunities for choice
  - Funding follows child



The Federal Role