

Becoming a more  
***Sophisticated Consumer***  
of (Education) Policies

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# Overview

- ***A Caveat***: Please be clear... there's a HUGE difference between a policy *analyst*, and a policy *maker*!
- A 10,000 foot view, with a “consumer” (*rather than an academic*) focus

## Three Central Themes

- 1.) Investing in *Problem* Identification and Articulation: *What's the Problem, Where's the Problem, Who is the Problem?*
- 2.) Identifying *Policy Constraints*: Visible and Invisible
- 3.) Establishing Useful (and *Realistic*) *Policy Goals*: *Beware of the 100% solution!*



# BIG difference between... a crisis, and a problem

- Rarely, if ever, do policymakers have enough of these three things: **time**, **information** (*data*) and/or **resources** (*people, space, \$\$\$, etc.*).
- However, much of what I'm going to talk about tonight pertains to making policy decisions in a **non-crisis** environment.
- Natural disasters, public safety challenges often require immediate action (leadership!)
- **Consumer Alert:** *Who says it's a "crisis"?*

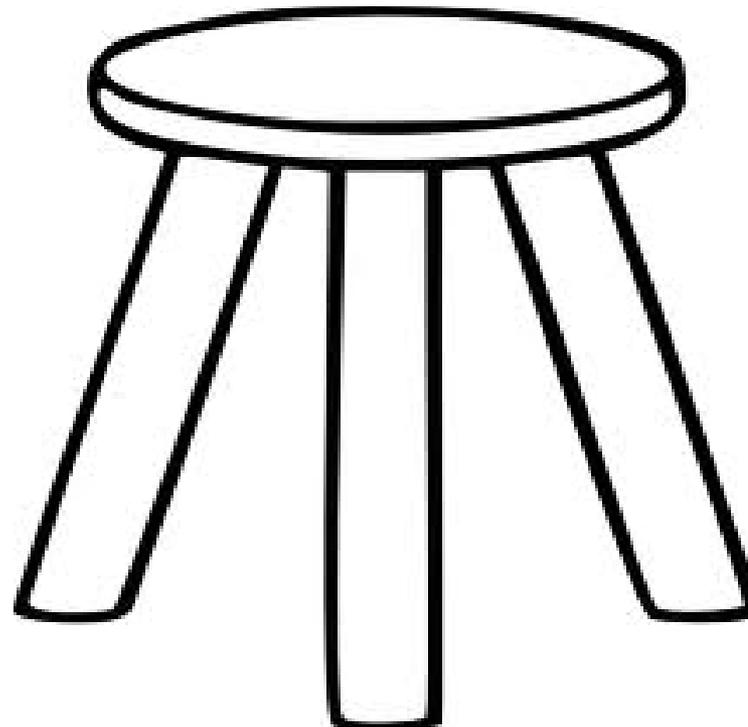




# *The 3 Legged Stool of Successful Policymaking*

**Problem**

**Policy Action**

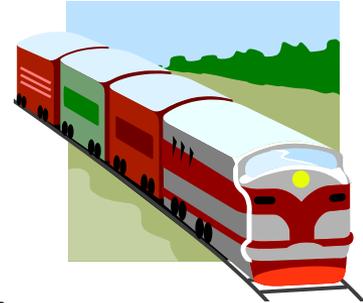


**Policy Goal**

# Policy Problem

## *Identification and Articulation*

- The **PROBLEM** is the engine that drives the policy design train.
- If you get the problem wrong (*if it's misidentified, if it's description is inaccurate or incomplete*), the rest of the process has a **VERY DIFFICULT** time being successful
- Is there one "**TRUTH**" when it comes to problems? (*No, but it requires a commitment*)



# Investing in Problem Identification and Articulation

- *Ready, Shoot, Aim!*
- *Consumer Questions:*

1.) *Who is identifying and articulating the **problem** to be addressed via policy? Could they have an interest in the other legs of the stool?*

2.) *Do you feel confident that (in this case) policy actors have sufficiently/successfully differentiated between what are **symptoms**, and what are the **core/central problems** that need to be addressed?*



# Examples

## Question #1:

- If those identifying and articulating the problem have a pre-existing (*ready-made*) solution that they would like used (*purchased*), that tends to influence (*direct*) how the problem is defined.
- If the experts used to help make sense of a situation have a particular way of seeing/describing the world, chances are they will want to keep that perspective consistent.
- **Policy Borrowing:** *If it works in Kansas City, then...*

# Examples

## Question #2:

- Homelessness is certainly a problem in our community, but if we want to think about “fixing” (*ending*) the problem of people being without homes in our community, being without a permanent shelter *is a symptom* of a larger (*core*) problem in our society (*poverty*).
- Symptoms need to be addressed as well, but.. we need to be clear as to what we’re trying to “fix” (lack of shelter, or homelessness?)

## *In this context...*

- If ***the problem*** identified is ***a lack of kindergarten readiness*** for some of the most “at-risk” kids in our community, then the data suggests Universal Pre-K is a successful policy action
- ***However...***
- If ***the problem*** identified is ***closing the achievement gap*** in our public schools, then...
- Ask yourself; ***Does the Problem match the Policy Goals and Policy Actions?***



## *Two last thoughts about problems...*

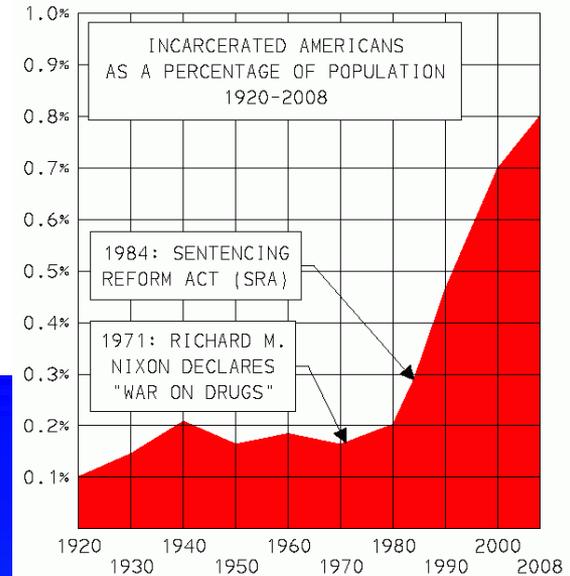
- Policy problems are rarely if ever static or fixed, they are **DYNAMIC**: As a result, policy solutions need to have mechanisms that allow for **monitoring, feedback, and manipulation**. In other words, you rarely “**fix**” things as a policy maker, you manage and do your best to continually mitigate the challenges.
- **Beware of unintended consequences!** By changing one variable, you may create a new set of challenges.

# Identifying Policy Constraints, or...

*what's keeping you from doing what you'd really like to do?*

- Can take the usual forms: *lack of time, space, people...*
- Can also be influenced by political or economic climate, perceived political capital of policy makers, a lack of communication or coordination of needed constituencies, etc.
- Sustainability of a policy often has more to do with its ***perceived legitimacy***, than it's actual measured effectiveness.

# Classic example...



## Cost-Effectiveness of Drug Treatment

- Treatment is less expensive than not treating or incarceration (1 yr methadone maintenance = \$4,700 vs. \$18,400 for imprisonment)
- Every \$1 invested in treatment yields up to \$7 in reduced crime-related costs
- Savings can exceed costs by 12:1 when health care costs are included
- Reduced interpersonal conflicts
- Improved workplace productivity
- Fewer drug-related accidents

## ***Constraint to Sustainability: Perceived Legitimacy of Policy Action***

- Public support for policy action can be a fickle thing, especially when the policy has a likelihood of being interpreted as benefiting one segment of the public over another.
- Depending on how the targets of the policy are socially constructed (positively, or negatively) , the publics' interpretation of a policy solution's legitimacy can shift quickly and dramatically.

## *Example...*

- In public education, the Federal Government is the one who provides districts Title One resources to help support the most “at risk” students within a district- because efforts to do this on a “local” level (*a redistribution of local resources*) are often very difficult to sustain.
- Is it more “fair” to give all students the same (equal) resources, or is it more fair to identify those most in need and give them more (*and therefore, others less*)?



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January 6, 1993

## THE NEW PRESIDENCY: The President-Elect; Clintons Pick Private School In Capital for Their Daughter

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN,

Correction Appended

**LITTLE ROCK, Ark., Jan. 5**— President-elect Bill Clinton, who has made improving public education a priority throughout his political career, announced today that he was sending his daughter, Chelsea, to an expensive private school attended by many children of Washington's power elite.

In explaining the Clintons' decision to send 12-year-old Chelsea to the Quaker-run Sidwell Friends school, where annual tuition is \$10,700, Mr. Clinton's spokesman, George Stephanopoulos, said the family believed it had to do what was best for her education. She is currently in the eighth grade at a public junior high in Little Rock, and will begin classes at Sidwell in Northwest Washington later this month.

Mr. Stephanopoulos said that the decision should not be interpreted as a snub of the public schools in Washington and that there was no contradiction between it and Mr. Clinton's commitment to public education. Forgoing Symbolism

In effect, Mr. Stephanopoulos said the Clintons had made a parental decision, not a Presidential one. They chose a school purely on the basis of what they as parents thought best for their daughter, setting aside whatever symbolic effect the decision would have. The last recent President with a school-age child, Jimmy Carter, sent his daughter, Amy, to Washington public schools.



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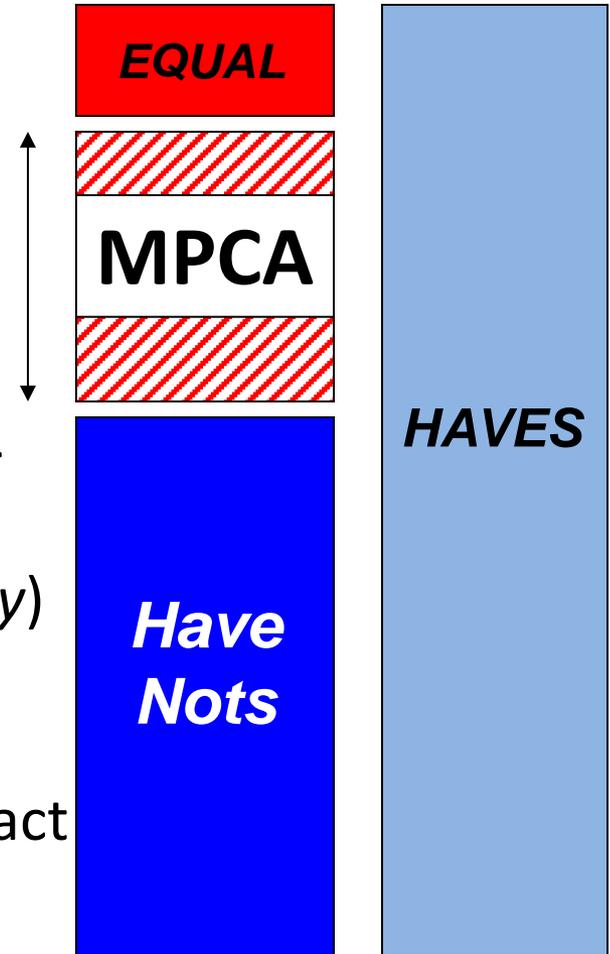
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# The *Margin of Perceived Competitive Advantage*

- To better support the historically disadvantaged students within a school district (*The “Have Nots”*), differentiated funding strategies are adopted for select (targeted) schools.
- Parents of the “*Haves*” tend to reach a threshold of political support for this strategy-- a point at which they believe their students are losing their (*perceived*) competitive advantage (*access & opportunity*) over other (“*Have Not*”) students.
- It is within this “Margin” that a tipping point can occur for parents, and this shift can impact the public support, and decision-making of educational leaders.



## *How this plays itself out as a (possible) policy constraint...*

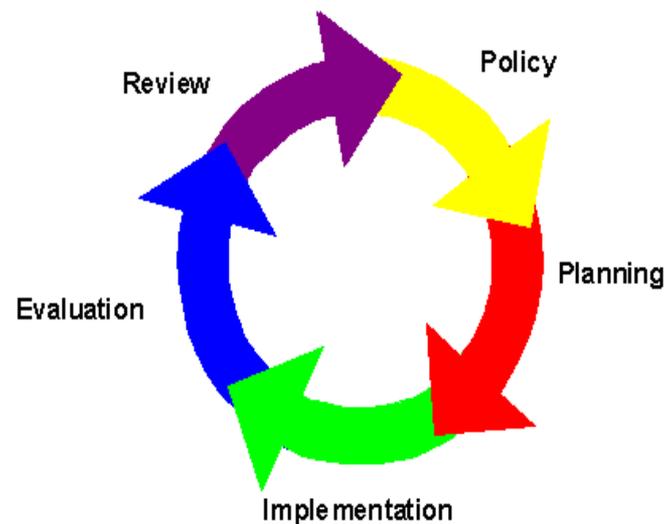
- If parents begin to see their investment in a program such as Universal Pre-K as benefiting one segment of the population, at the (*potential*) risk of diminishing their student's ability to be academically/socially "competitive" in school (*essentially subsidizing the competitiveness of other students*), it could threaten their long-term support for the policy initiative.

## *As a policy consumer...*

- ***Consumer Question***: Given people have a tendency toward self-interest when it comes to public policy, are there ways to both ***define the problem*** and ***characterize the solutions/outcomes*** in ways that illuminate potential short and long term benefits for a broad(er) cross-section of the public?
- ***“If I give this up now, how might my family and community benefit in the future?”***

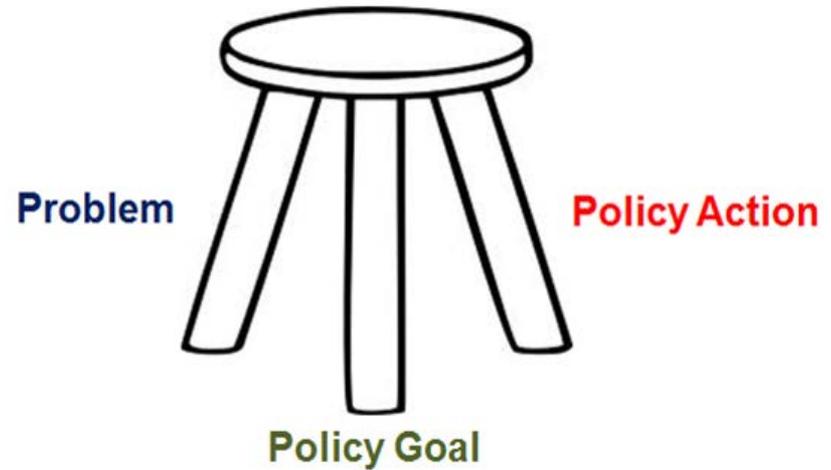
# Establishing Policy Goals

- **Consumer Alert:** *Beware of the 100% solution!*
- Encourage and support policy makers setting realistic policy goals: *When it comes to dealing with people, when was the last time we achieved 100% of anything?*
- *Think incremental, iterative growth building toward both short and long term policy goals*



## *In review...*

- What's the problem(s)?  
Is it a lack of parent engagement? Is it poor quality Pre-K options? Is it affordability? Is it “redshirting” kindergarten parents? All of the above?
- Given the constraints you've identified, how do you see (*evaluate*) the proposed policy action creating the change it has outlined?
- Is there a good “*match*” between, **1.)** What they say is wrong, **2.)** What they have to work with, and **3.)** What they say will happen as a result of this policy action?



# *Final thought...*

**START WHERE YOU ARE.**

**USE WHAT YOU HAVE.**

**DO WHAT YOU CAN.**

**- ARTHUR ASHE**

# Thank You

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