RAND EDUCATION

Making an Impact with Policymakers: Lessons from the Field

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Making Your Findings Policy-Relevant

1. Craft your policy story
2. Determine your audience(s)
3. Match story and audience to outlet

- Case Study 1: Engineers of the Future
- Case Study 2: Personalized Learning in the Classroom

Craft Your Policy Story

- Define the problem
- Identify the findings that will solve the problem/ explain the research questions
- Pinpoint the main messages and sub-points

Case Study 1: Engineers of the Future Policy Story

- **Problem:**
  - **There is a clear need in the U.S. to improve the representation of African-American and Latino talent pursuing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers.**
  - **Baltimore City Public Schools and the RAND Corporation partnered to implement *Engineers of the Future*, a summer learning and school- year program that includes mathematics instruction, hands- on project- based work, virtual learning, and exposure to STEM careers**

- **Hoped for findings or research questions**
  - **Will providing high achieving minority students from under-resourced urban schools the opportunity to take Algebra I in middle schools put them on a trajectory to enter STEM fields in college?**

Case Study 1: Engineers of the Future Policy Story

- **Main messages (scenario 1: IT WORKED!)**
  - **RAND found that the program helped high achieving disadvantaged middle school students receive the necessary preparation and coursework to pursue advanced math and science classes in high school and be prepared for STEM careers.**
  - **Thus, summer learning in tandem with virtual learning are educational strategies that can enable students in urban school districts to take appropriate higher- level mathematics courses and improve their mathematics achievement, which will enable them to pursue a STEM career.**

Case Study 1: Engineers of the Future Policy Story

- **Main messages (scenario 2: IT SORT OF WORKED!)**
  - **RAND found that summer learning made a greater impact on students' wanting to pursue a career in a STEM field than taking Algebra I in middle school alone.**
  - **RAND found that taking Algebra I in middle school enabled students in the program to stay on track to taker higher level mathematics in high school than comparable students who did not.**

Exercise #1

Pick a project and craft its policy story

This could be a new research idea, an ongoing project, or a completed project.

Determine Your Audience(s)

- **Who are you talking to and why?**

Exercise #2

List the various audiences who would find your findings valuable, and why

Audiences can be practitioners, fellow academics, policymakers…think of some more!

Select Your Outlet

- Op-Ed?
- Social media?
- Conference presentation?
- Meeting with a key decisionmaker?
- Any others?

Case Study 2. Personalized Learning

- **Policy story**
  - **Problem: Personalized learning is an approach to education that seeks to allow what and how a student learns on a daily basis to be less constrained by the needs of other students or by external grade-level requirements. Instruction is driven largely by the individual student's needs, interests, and context, and is informed by ongoing conversations with the student and the adults in his or her life. Technological advances have expanded how and where student learning can be personalized.**
  - **Findings/ research questions: The adoption of personalized learning approaches has increased significantly in recent years, but does it work?**
  - **Main message: Personalized learning can produce modest achievement gains, but implementation challenges remain**

Case Study 2. Personalized Learning

- Audiences
  - Teachers/school leaders
  - Parents
  - State and local education agencies
  - Federal government/Department of Education
  - Congress
  - Foundations looking to fund personalized learning in classrooms

Case Study 2. Personalized Learning

- **Outlets**
  - **RAND reports**
    - **Full report and Research Brief (see handout)**
    - **Survey results addendum**
    - **Executive Summary (see handout)**
  - **Journal articles**
  - **Op-Eds (see hand out)**
    - **https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/08/15/what-emerging-research-says-about-the-promise-of-personalized-learning/**

Exercise #3

Link your policy story and the audiences with possible outlets

Construct a table or figure if you need to!

Parting Tips

- **Map your plan at the start of project (even before funding!)**
  - What is the problem?
  - Who are the audiences?
  - How will I disseminate the findings? And in which outlets?
- **Stay current with recent news to write Op-Eds**
  - Use plain language
  - Nail the lede/hook
  - Focus on one creative idea/ interesting finding
- **Follow legislative sessions and new Bills underway**
  - Make appointments to talk with Congressional staffers (over the phone or in person)
  - Practice your ‘elevator pitch’


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