

American government institutions and policies Handbook

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Understanding the structure and functioning of American government institutions and policies is essential for comprehending how the United States operates. The U.S. political system is characterized by its federal structure, separation of powers, and a complex web of institutions that work together to govern the nation. This article provides a comprehensive overview of these institutions, their roles, and the key policies that shape American society.

Overview of American Government Institutions

The United States government is divided into three primary branches: the Legislative, the Executive, and the Judicial. Each branch has distinct powers and responsibilities designed to provide a system of checks and balances.

Legislative Branch

The legislative branch, known as Congress, is responsible for making laws.

- **Congress:** Bicameral body consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- **Senate:** Comprises 100 senators, two from each state, serving six-year terms.
- **House of Representatives:** Contains 435 members, apportioned by population, serving two-year terms.
- **Primary Functions:** Drafting, debating, and passing legislation; approving budgets; ratifying treaties; confirming appointments.

Executive Branch

The executive branch enforces laws and is headed by the President of the United States.

- **President:** Serves as the head of state and government, with a four-year term, elected via electoral college.
- **Vice President:** Supports the President and presides over the Senate.
- **Cabinet:** Composed of heads of federal departments and agencies responsible for

implementing government policies.

- **Key Agencies:** Department of Defense, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, among others.

Judicial Branch

The judicial branch interprets laws and ensures they conform to the Constitution.

- **Supreme Court:** The highest court in the land, composed of nine justices, with life tenure.
- **Lower Courts:** Includes appellate courts and district courts.
- **Functions:** Reviewing laws for constitutionality, resolving disputes, and protecting individual rights.

Key Policies in the United States

American policies span a broad spectrum, covering domestic issues, foreign relations, economic strategies, and social programs. These policies are shaped by legislative actions, executive orders, judicial rulings, and administrative regulations.

Domestic Policy

Domestic policies focus on issues within the country, such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and social welfare.

- **Healthcare:** The Affordable Care Act (ACA) expanded access to health insurance and aimed to reduce healthcare costs.
- **Education:** Policies include federal funding for schools, student loan programs, and initiatives to improve educational standards.
- **Infrastructure:** Investments in transportation, utilities, and digital infrastructure to promote economic growth and safety.
- **Social Welfare:** Programs like Social Security, Medicaid, and unemployment benefits support vulnerable populations.

Foreign Policy

U.S. foreign policy reflects its role as a global leader.

- **Military Alliances:** NATO, bilateral treaties, and peacekeeping missions.

- **Trade Policies:** Negotiations of trade agreements like USMCA, tariffs, and sanctions.
- **Diplomacy:** Engagements with international organizations such as the United Nations and World Trade Organization.
- **Global Security:** Combating terrorism, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and humanitarian aid.

Economic Policies

Economic strategies aim to promote growth, stability, and fairness.

- **Fiscal Policy:** Managed through federal budgets, taxation, and government spending.
- **Monetary Policy:** Conducted by the Federal Reserve to control inflation and stabilize the currency.
- **Tax Policy:** Ranges from progressive income taxes to corporate taxes and tariffs.
- **Regulatory Policies:** Oversight of industries such as banking, environment, and labor markets.

Social Policy

Social policies address issues related to equality, civil rights, and societal well-being.

- **Civil Rights:** Laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, gender, religion, and other factors.
- **Immigration:** Policies governing visa issuance, refugee admissions, and border security.
- **Environmental Policies:** Regulations on pollution, conservation efforts, and climate change initiatives.
- **Criminal Justice:** Policies on law enforcement, sentencing, and prison reform.

Key Institutions Supporting Policy Implementation

Effective governance relies on various institutions that support policy development and execution.

Congressional Committees

Specialized panels that oversee specific policy areas, such as finance, defense, and health.

Federal Agencies and Departments

Implement policy decisions through programs and regulations.

Independent Commissions and Regulatory Bodies

Ensure fair practices and oversight, including the Federal Election Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

State and Local Governments

Implement policies tailored to regional needs, including education, transportation, and public safety.

Challenges and Reforms in American Governance

Despite its strengths, the U.S. government faces ongoing challenges that necessitate reform and adaptation.

- **Partisan Polarization:** Deep political divides hinder effective policymaking.
- **Voter Engagement:** Ensuring high voter turnout and trust in electoral processes.
- **Institutional Efficiency:** Modernizing outdated systems for better service delivery.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Managing deficits and national debt.
- **Addressing Inequality:** Promoting equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Conclusion

The American government's institutions and policies form a complex but well-structured system designed to serve the nation's diverse interests. From the separation of powers to the myriad policies addressing domestic and international issues, the U.S. continues to evolve its governance to meet contemporary challenges. Understanding these components is vital for informed civic participation and for fostering an engaged, knowledgeable citizenry committed to the principles of democracy and effective governance.

American Government Institutions and Policies: An In-Depth Exploration

Introduction

American government institutions and policies form the backbone of the United States' political system, shaping everything from daily governance to long-term national strategies. These institutions are designed to ensure a balance of power, uphold democratic principles, and address the diverse needs of a sprawling nation. Understanding how these entities function, their roles, and the policies they implement is essential for grasping the complexities of American democracy. This article delves into the core institutions of the U.S. government—examining their structures, functions, and influence—while also exploring key policies that define the nation's political landscape.

The Structure of American Government: An Overview

The United States operates under a federal system characterized by a separation of powers among three primary branches: the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial. This division aims to prevent the concentration of power and promote effective governance through checks and balances.

The Executive Branch

The Presidency

At the apex of the executive branch stands the President of the United States, elected every four years through an Electoral College system. The President serves as the head of state and government, overseeing federal agencies, implementing policies, and conducting foreign relations.

Key responsibilities include:

- Enforcing federal laws
- Acting as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces
- Appointing federal officials and judges (with Senate approval)
- Vetoing or signing legislation into law
- Issuing executive orders to direct government operations

Federal Agencies and Departments

Beneath the President are numerous agencies and departments, such as the Department of Defense, Department of Education, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These entities carry out the day-to-day administration of policies and programs, often with specialized focus areas.

The Legislative Branch

The U.S. Congress

Congress is a bicameral legislature composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives. It holds the power to make laws, allocate funding, and oversee the executive branch.

Senate:

- Consists of 100 Senators (two per state)
- Serves six-year terms
- Confirms presidential appointments and ratifies treaties

House of Representatives:

- Comprises 435 members proportionally representing the population of each state
- Serves two-year terms
- Initiates revenue-related legislation

Legislative Process:

Bills are proposed, debated, and must pass both chambers before reaching the President for approval. Congress also has oversight functions, investigating executive actions and ensuring accountability.

The Judicial Branch

The Federal Courts

Led by the Supreme Court, the judiciary interprets laws, reviews constitutional issues, and resolves disputes. Federal judges are appointed for life, emphasizing independence.

Key functions include:

- Judicial review: determining the constitutionality of laws
- Settling legal disputes between states and individuals
- Clarifying the meaning and application of laws

The Supreme Court's decisions have profound impacts on American law, often setting legal precedents that shape future policies.

Key Policy Areas in American Governance

The policies enacted by American institutions span a broad spectrum, reflecting the nation's economic, social, and security priorities. Here are some of the most significant policy domains:

Domestic Policy

Economic Policy

Economic stability and growth are central to U.S. governance. Policies involve:

- Fiscal policy: government spending and taxation decisions
- Monetary policy: managed primarily by the Federal Reserve to influence interest rates and inflation
- Trade policy: tariffs, trade agreements, and international economic relations

Recent debates have centered around stimulus packages, minimum wage laws, and efforts to address income inequality.

Healthcare Policy

Healthcare remains a contentious issue, with policies focused on expanding coverage, controlling costs, and improving quality. Key initiatives include:

- The Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)
- Medicaid and Medicare programs
- Discussions on public options and drug pricing reforms

Education Policy

The federal government influences education through funding, standards, and student aid programs such as:

- Federal grants for K-12 and higher education
- Student loan programs
- Initiatives aimed at closing achievement gaps

Social Policy

Addressing societal issues like civil rights, immigration, and criminal justice has been pivotal.

- Civil Rights Legislation: protecting against discrimination based on race, gender, or religion
- Immigration Policies: including border security, visa regulations, and pathways to citizenship
- Criminal Justice Reform: efforts to address mass incarceration, sentencing laws, and policing practices

Foreign Policy

The U.S. exerts global influence through diplomacy, military engagement, and economic strategies.

Main aspects include:

- Alliances such as NATO
- Trade agreements like USMCA
- Counterterrorism efforts
- Humanitarian aid and development programs

Foreign policy decisions are shaped by the President, Congress, and diplomatic institutions like the State Department.

Institutional Checks and Balances

The U.S. political system emphasizes a series of checks and balances to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful.

Congressional Oversight

Congress monitors and influences executive actions through hearings, investigations, and the power of the purse?controlling funding.

Presidential Veto and Judicial Review

The President can veto legislation, which Congress can override with a two-thirds majority. Meanwhile, courts can strike down laws that violate constitutional principles.

Appointment and Confirmation Process

The President appoints judges and officials, but these appointments require Senate approval, ensuring a bipartisan review.

Recent Developments and Challenges

In recent years, American government institutions have faced numerous challenges, including political polarization, issues of voter access, and debates over the scope of federal authority.

- Partisan Divides: Increasing polarization affects legislative productivity and judicial appointments.
- Electoral Integrity: Disputes over voting rights, gerrymandering, and election security have become focal points.

- Policy Gridlock: Divergent priorities between Congress and the Presidency often hamper swift policy implementation.
- Emerging Issues: Climate change, cybersecurity, and pandemics like COVID-19 have tested institutional resilience and policy responsiveness.

Conclusion

American government institutions and policies form a complex, dynamic framework designed to uphold democracy, promote stability, and respond to societal needs. From the constitutional design of the three branches to the myriad policies shaping economic, social, and foreign affairs, these institutions continually evolve amid political, social, and technological changes. While challenges persist—such as partisan conflicts and institutional reforms—the strength of the U.S. system lies in its foundational principles of checks and balances, representation, and adaptability. Understanding these core structures and policies offers valuable insight into how the United States navigates its role both domestically and on the global stage, ensuring that governance remains aligned with the evolving aspirations of its people.

Question What is the primary function of the United States Congress? The primary function of the U.S. Congress is to create, amend, and pass federal legislation, oversee the executive branch, and represent the interests of the American people through its two chambers: the House of Representatives and the Senate. How does the system of checks and balances work among the three branches of government? Checks and balances ensure that no single branch—executive, legislative, or judicial—becomes too powerful. Each branch can limit or review the actions of the others, such as the President vetoing legislation, Congress confirming appointments, and the Supreme Court declaring laws unconstitutional. What are the key policies addressed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services? The Department of Health and Human Services focuses on improving healthcare quality, preventing disease, supporting health and social services, and protecting the health of Americans through programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and public health initiatives. How does the federal budget process work in the United States? The federal budget process involves the President submitting a budget proposal to Congress, which reviews, modifies, and approves appropriations bills. These bills allocate funding to various government agencies and programs, ultimately determining federal spending for the upcoming fiscal year. What role does the Supreme Court play in shaping American policies? The Supreme Court interprets the Constitution and reviews laws and executive actions to ensure they are constitutional. Its decisions can influence policies on civil rights, healthcare, immigration, and other key issues, shaping the legal landscape of the nation. What are the recent trends in voting rights and electoral policies in the U.S.? Recent trends include debates over voter ID laws, mail-in voting, and efforts to expand or restrict access to the ballot, with states implementing various reforms aimed at increasing voter participation or addressing concerns about election security. How do U.S. immigration policies impact government institutions? U.S. immigration policies influence government institutions by shaping border security efforts, visa regulations, and refugee programs, impacting agencies like Customs and Border

Protection and the Department of Homeland Security while also affecting economic and social services. What initiatives are currently prioritized in American environmental policies? Current environmental policies focus on combating climate change through renewable energy investments, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting natural resources, and enforcing regulations on pollution, with agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency leading efforts.

Related keywords: federal government, constitution, legislative branch, executive branch, judiciary, public policy, government agencies, elections, policy making, political system

BETTER POLICIES BETTER SCHOOLS THEORIES AND APPLIC

Better policies better schools theories and applic

In the quest to enhance educational outcomes, the relationship between policy decisions and school effectiveness has garnered significant attention from educators, policymakers, and researchers alike. The phrase "better policies better schools" encapsulates the idea that well-designed policies can lead to improved teaching environments, student achievement, and overall school performance. This article explores the core theories underpinning this concept, examines practical applications, and discusses how evidence-based policies can transform educational landscapes.

Understanding the Foundations of Better Policies and Better Schools

Theoretical Frameworks Behind Educational Policies

Effective educational policies are rooted in various theoretical perspectives that explain how policies influence school outcomes. Some of the most influential theories include:

- **Systems Theory:** Views education as a complex system where various components?students, teachers, administrators, resources?interact dynamically. Policies should therefore consider the interconnectedness of these elements to produce positive change.

- **Principal-Agent Theory:** Focuses on the relationships between policymakers (principals) and school actors (agents). Effective policies align incentives, clarify responsibilities, and establish accountability to ensure goals are met.

- **Diffusion of Innovation Theory:** Explains how new ideas and practices spread within educational systems. Policies that facilitate innovation adoption can accelerate improvements in schools.

- **Equity and Justice Theories:** Emphasize that policies should promote fairness, reduce

disparities, and ensure equitable access to quality education for all students.

The Role of Policy in Shaping School Environments

Policies influence various aspects of school life, including curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, funding allocations, student assessments, and disciplinary procedures. When thoughtfully crafted, they can:

- Establish clear expectations and goals.
- Allocate resources efficiently.
- Promote best practices and continuous improvement.
- Foster inclusive and safe learning environments.
- Encourage community and parental involvement.

Key Theories and Models for Improving Schools through Policy

Accountability and Performance-Based Policies

Performance-based policies emphasize accountability mechanisms such as standardized testing, teacher evaluations, and school rankings. The underlying theory suggests that:

- Clear metrics motivate schools and teachers to improve.
- Data-driven decision-making leads to targeted interventions.
- Transparency fosters trust among stakeholders.

However, critics argue that overemphasis on testing may narrow curricula and increase stress, highlighting the importance of balanced policies.

Decentralization and Local Autonomy

Decentralization involves shifting decision-making authority from central authorities to local schools or districts. The theory posits that:

- Local stakeholders better understand community needs.
- Flexibility enables tailored solutions.
- Empowered schools are more innovative and motivated.

Successful decentralization requires capacity-building and effective oversight to prevent disparities.

Resource Allocation and Equity Policies

Policies aimed at equitable funding and resource distribution seek to close achievement gaps. Theories supporting these policies include:

- **Funding Equity Theory:** Resources should be allocated based on student needs to promote fairness.
- **Human Capital Theory:** Investing in qualified teachers and facilities yields better educational outcomes.
- **Social Justice Framework:** Ensures marginalized groups have access to quality education.

Practical Applications of Better Policies in Schools

Implementing Evidence-Based Policies

Applying research findings to policy design can significantly improve school outcomes. Examples include:

- Adopting effective teaching methods validated by research, such as formative assessment or differentiated instruction.
- Designing early childhood education policies that promote readiness and reduce later disparities.
- Implementing teacher professional development programs aligned with best practices.

Policy Interventions for Equity and Inclusion

Strategies to foster inclusive environments include:

- Providing targeted support and resources for marginalized groups.
- Developing language and cultural competence policies.
- Creating anti-discrimination and anti-bullying initiatives.

Leveraging Technology and Innovation

Policies that promote technological integration can enhance learning by:

- Supporting digital literacy initiatives.

- Providing access to online resources and virtual classrooms.
- Encouraging innovative pedagogies like blended learning.

Challenges and Considerations in Policy Development

Balancing Standardization and Flexibility

While standards ensure consistency, excessive rigidity can stifle innovation. Effective policies strike a balance, allowing schools to adapt while maintaining core quality benchmarks.

Ensuring Policy Sustainability

Policies should be designed with long-term perspectives, considering funding stability, political support, and community engagement to ensure enduring impact.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Continuous assessment of policy effectiveness through data collection and analysis helps in refining strategies and ensuring accountability.

Case Studies: Successful Policy Applications

Finnish Education System

Finland's education policies emphasize equity, teacher professionalism, and trust in schools. The result is a highly performing system characterized by:

- Minimal standardized testing.
- High-quality teacher training.
- Equal resource distribution.

Charter Schools in the United States

Charter schools exemplify decentralization and innovation, with policies supporting autonomy and accountability leading to diverse school models that serve different student populations effectively.

Conclusion: Moving Towards Better Policies for Better Schools

The linkage between policies and school quality is well-established, grounded in various theories that emphasize accountability, equity, innovation, and community involvement. To realize the vision

of better schools, policymakers must craft strategies that are evidence-based, adaptable, equitable, and sustainable. Continuous evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to equity are essential components of successful policy implementation. Ultimately, when policies are thoughtfully designed and effectively applied, they can catalyze profound improvements in educational outcomes, ensuring that all students have access to high-quality learning environments.

Key Takeaways:

- Effective policies are grounded in robust theoretical frameworks.
- Balancing standardization with local autonomy fosters innovation.
- Equity-focused policies help reduce disparities.
- Evidence-based decision-making enhances policy impact.
- Ongoing monitoring and stakeholder involvement are critical for sustained success.

By embracing these principles, educational systems can move closer to the goal of delivering high-quality, equitable education for every learner.

Better policies better schools theories and application is a critical theme in the ongoing quest to enhance educational outcomes worldwide. As educational landscapes evolve amidst technological advancements, societal shifts, and economic challenges, the importance of crafting effective policies becomes ever more apparent. Better policies can serve as the foundation for equitable, innovative, and high-quality education systems, but understanding the underlying theories and their practical application remains essential for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders alike.

Understanding the Core Concept: Why Better Policies Lead to Better Schools

At its essence, the phrase better policies better schools theories and application underscores the belief that sound policy frameworks directly influence the quality, accessibility, and relevance of education. Good policies set the tone for curriculum standards, teacher training, resource allocation, assessment methods, and school management. When these policies are rooted in robust theories and are effectively implemented, they can unlock the potential of schools and improve student outcomes.

Theoretical Foundations Behind Education Policy

To develop effective policies, it's crucial to understand the theories that inform them. These frameworks help clarify what strategies are most likely to succeed and why.

- Systems Theory

- Overview: Education systems are complex, interconnected entities. Systems theory emphasizes understanding how different components?students, teachers, administrators, policies, communities?interact.

- Application: Policies should consider the entire ecosystem, ensuring that changes in one area (e.g., teacher training) positively impact other areas (e.g., student achievement).

- Diffusion of Innovations Theory

- Overview: Introduced by Everett Rogers, this theory explains how new ideas and practices spread within a community or organization.

- Application: Policymakers aiming to implement innovative teaching methods must consider how to facilitate adoption, including communication channels, leadership, and addressing resistance.

- Equity and Justice Theories

- Overview: These theories focus on reducing disparities and ensuring fair access to quality education for all students.

- Application: Policies rooted in equity prioritize resource redistribution, inclusive curricula, and support systems for marginalized groups.

- Behavioral and Motivation Theories

- Overview: These explore what motivates teachers and students, influencing policy approaches to engagement, discipline, and incentives.

- Application: Designing policies that motivate positive behaviors can lead to more effective teaching and learning environments.

Practical Application: From Theory to Policy Implementation

Having a solid theoretical foundation is just the beginning. The real challenge lies in translating these theories into actionable policies that improve educational outcomes.

- Policy Development Process

- Identify Needs and Goals: Use data and research to understand current gaps.
- Engage Stakeholders: Collaborate with teachers, students, parents, and community members.
- Design Evidence-Based Policies: Incorporate best practices and theoretical insights.
- Pilot and Refine: Test policies on a small scale, gather feedback, and make adjustments.
- Scale and Sustain: Implement at broader levels with mechanisms for ongoing evaluation.

- Key Strategies for Effective Policy Application

- Data-Driven Decision Making: Use quantitative and qualitative data to inform policies.
- Capacity Building: Invest in training and resources so schools can effectively carry out policies.
- Flexibility and Local Adaptation: Allow schools to adapt policies to local contexts while maintaining core objectives.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish metrics to assess policy impact and facilitate continuous improvement.

Case Studies: Successful Examples of Better Policies in Action

- Finland's Education System

- Policy Approach: Emphasizes equity, teacher professionalism, and student well-being.
- Theoretical Underpinning: Based on systems theory and equity principles.
- Outcome: Finland consistently ranks high in global education assessments, demonstrating how cohesive, research-informed policies can produce excellent results.

- KIPP Schools in the United States

- Policy Approach: Implements extended school days, rigorous teacher training, and a focus on college readiness.
- Theoretical Underpinning: Diffusion of innovations and behavioral motivation.
- Outcome: Improved student achievement, especially in underserved communities.

- Singapore's SkillsFuture Initiative

- Policy Approach: Focuses on lifelong learning and skills development aligned with economic needs.
- Theoretical Underpinning: Systems theory and motivation theories.
- Outcome: A resilient workforce equipped for future challenges.

Challenges and Considerations in Policy Implementation

While good policies can make a significant difference, there are hurdles that need careful management:

- Political and Bureaucratic Resistance
 - Resistance from stakeholders can impede policy rollout.
 - Solution: Engage stakeholders early and foster transparency.
- Resource Limitations
 - Limited funding and infrastructure can restrict policy effectiveness.
 - Solution: Prioritize policies and seek innovative funding solutions.
- Cultural and Contextual Differences
 - Policies must be adaptable to local cultural contexts.
 - Solution: Incorporate local insights during policy design.
- Evaluation and Accountability
 - Without proper monitoring, policies may not achieve desired goals.
 - Solution: Establish clear metrics, regular reporting, and feedback loops.

Future Directions: Evolving Policies for Dynamic Schools

The landscape of education is continuously changing, demanding policies that are adaptable and

forward-looking.

- Embracing Technology: Policies supporting digital literacy and remote learning.
- Promoting Inclusion: Policies that ensure access for students with disabilities and from marginalized backgrounds.
- Fostering Innovation: Creating environments where experimentation and creative teaching methods are encouraged.
- Building Resilience: Preparing schools to respond to crises like pandemics or economic downturns.

Conclusion: Bridging Theory and Practice for Better Schools

Better policies better schools theories and application encapsulates the idea that effective educational reform hinges on a deep understanding of underlying principles and thoughtful, strategic implementation. By grounding policies in proven theories?such as systems thinking, diffusion of innovation, and equity?and translating these into practical steps, education systems can become more equitable, effective, and responsive to the needs of students and communities. The journey from theory to practice is complex, but with deliberate planning, stakeholder engagement, and ongoing evaluation, policymakers can craft strategies that truly transform schools and, ultimately, improve the lives of learners.

Final thought: Continual learning and adaptation are essential. As educational challenges evolve, so too must policies?always guided by solid theory and committed to the principle that better policies lead to better schools and brighter futures.

Question What are the core principles behind 'Better Policies, Better Schools' theories? These theories emphasize that effective educational policies should be evidence-based, equitable, and focused on improving student outcomes through accountability, resource allocation, and innovative practices. How can policymakers implement 'Better Policies, Better Schools' strategies effectively? Policymakers can implement these strategies by engaging stakeholders, utilizing data-driven decision-making, promoting teacher training, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within schools. What role does data play in applying 'Better Policies, Better Schools' theories? Data is crucial for identifying gaps, measuring progress, and tailoring interventions; it enables schools and policymakers to make informed decisions that enhance educational quality and equity. Can 'Better Policies, Better Schools' theories address disparities in education? Yes, these theories advocate for policies that target underserved communities, ensure equitable resource distribution, and promote inclusive practices to reduce achievement gaps. What are some successful examples of applying 'Better Policies, Better Schools' theories in practice? Examples include comprehensive school reform initiatives, data-informed teaching practices, and policy reforms that prioritize teacher quality and student well-being, leading to improved academic

performance and school climate.

Related keywords: education reform, school improvement, policy development, instructional strategies, educational leadership, curriculum design, student achievement, evidence-based practices, school management, educational policies

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