

# Connecting research and policy may improve educational equity

October 26 2016

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Better communication about how educational research can impact public policy may improve educational equity, according to a new paper from Rice University.

The paper, which examined the significant disconnect between education researchers and [policymakers](#), appeared in the latest edition of the *Russell Sage Foundation's Journal of the Social Sciences*.

The paper's author, Rice Sociology Professor Ruth Lopez Turley, said the disconnect between [educational research](#) and [public policy](#) is characterized by three problems. First, researchers do not do a good job of informing policymakers about the results of their research and working with them before and throughout a study.

"Academic researchers generally focus on informing other researchers of their results rather than decision-makers," Turley said. "They have few or no incentives to take measures to ensure that policymakers use their work. Instead, they are largely rewarded for publishing their work with the most prestigious academic publishers or in the most-cited [academic journals](#), which are read primarily by other academics, not by decision-makers. Many institutions even frown upon applied work, deeming it not as worthy as the intellectual pursuit of interesting questions without regard for what is popular at the moment."

Turley said that while basic research and its review and publishing are important and should continue, research universities should recognize

and reward efforts to apply research in settings that could really benefit from it, such as state and local education agencies. She said academics should not make publishing in academic journals their end goal but instead take additional steps to ensure that their research actually informs decision-makers.

A second problem is that policymakers generally do not inform researchers about their policy goals, Turley said.

"Decision-makers in state and local education agencies often do not have access to academic research publications, as access can be very expensive," she said. "And if they do, they do not have time to read lengthy articles and stay current on the literature. Also, they often do not have adequate staff and resources to conduct their own research." She said policymakers need access to independent research because in-house research is sometimes viewed "with skepticism or dismissed altogether."

The third problem Turley cited is that when policymakers and researchers do exchange information, they often do so in a highly political context in which many interests supersede the interests of students.

"State and local policymakers generally do not inform researchers of their research needs and sometimes even make data access difficult for researchers interested in providing analysis," she said. "And while the sensitive nature of student and teacher data certainly requires that the data access be restricted for confidentiality reasons, the dangers associated with not sharing data are much greater than the dangers associated with doing so."

Under the right conditions, research can be an extremely informative tool for policymaking, Turley said.

"All parties—including researchers and policymakers—must implement changes in order to improve the connection between research and policy," Turley said.

Ultimately, Turley hopes that this model will encourage the creation of more partnerships among [education researchers](#), practitioners and policymakers.

**More information:** The paper, "Connecting Research and Policy To Reduce Inequality," is available online at [www.rsfsjournal.org/doi/full/10.1186/s13616-016-0113-1](http://www.rsfsjournal.org/doi/full/10.1186/s13616-016-0113-1)

Provided by Rice University

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