Preschool Policymaking by Stealth
An Alternate Framework for the Policy Process

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The Politics of Preschool

Historically, publicly funded, universal preschool has lacked political support in the United States, both on the national and state levels.

- Synonymous with communism and “nanny state.”
- Parents, not government, should be primary caretakers of young children.
- Public preschool has been figuratively and literally connected to public health services programs, aka “welfare.”
- Divergent views, even among early childhood advocates, on what type of early education programming is most appropriate and effective (e.g. universal, targeted, public, private, etc.)

States Providing Universal Pre-K: 2013-2014 School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>% of 4 Year-Olds Specified</th>
<th>Political Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>No Data Available</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Policymaking by Stealth

Stealth Actor

Policy Passage

Stealth Design

A policy proposal that avoids identification with politically unpopular issues even if their goals are consistent with those issues, is aligned with established, supported institutions, and includes a funding structure that both avoids attention to the long-term costs of the program, avoids the need for frequent reappropriation, and facilitates future expansion (Newman, 2003).

Stealth Strategy

- No involvement of advocacy groups.
- No media coverage.
- Pre-K proposal included in bill with other education funding cuts, veiling the full cost of the program.

Stealth Actor

- State Representative Jo Eddins (D)
- Eddins’ high “social acuity” (Mintrom & Norman, 2009) meant he was well aware of the concerns and motives of his fellow legislators.
- Eddins gave a “highly selective presentation of statistics” (Gray, 1990, 22) to his colleagues by only discussing the funding cuts in the education bill and neglecting to mention the part of the bill in which the state would be responsible for funding an entirely new grade.
- Eddins correctly counted on his colleagues not understanding the state education funding.

Stealth Design

- Included in omnibus K-12 education funding bill; avoids stigma of “welfare” & aligns preschool with one of the most robust public institutions, the public education system.
- Funded via state aid formula for school districts; “entitlement funding.”
- Jackson, personal communication, 1/17/15, that did not require a separate appropriation and was thus easier to pass.
- Called for 10-year delay in full implementation, meant no additional funding needed at time of passage.
- Pre-K replaced existing state-funded early childhood programming, resulting in a decrease in early childhood spending in the short term.

Stealth Strategy

- No involvement of advocacy groups.
- No media coverage.
- Included in bill with other important education issues, which masked the significance of the proposal.

The Case of Oklahoma

Stealth Design

- Included in K-12 education reform bill; avoids stigma of “welfare” & aligns preschool with one of the most robust public institutions, the public education system.
- Funded via K-12 education budget, not health and human services budget; less stigma and less vulnerable to future funding cuts.
- Program is voluntary: limited initial fiscal impact, increases likelihood of passage but also facilitates future program expansion.

Stealth Actor

- State Senator Lloyd Jackson (D)
- Jackson’s high “social acuity” (Mintrom & Norman, 2009) meant he was well aware of the concerns and motives of his fellow legislators.
- Jackson kept his intentions quiet, drafting the legislation solely with the input of key members of his staff and relying on his skills at political maneuvering for policy passage, rather than the mobilizing of traditional support networks.

The Case of West Virginia

Stealth Design

- Included in omnibus K-12 education funding bill; avoids stigma of “welfare” & aligns preschool with one of the most robust public institutions, the public education system.
- Funded via state aid formula for school districts; “entitlement funding.”
- Pre-K replaced existing state-funded early childhood programming, resulting in a decrease in early childhood spending in the short term.

Stealth Strategy

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- No media coverage.
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Policymaking by Stealth – Beyond Preschool

- Key contribution of Policymaking by Stealth is a reframing of the role of policy advocates.
- Contradicts assertions of Multiple Streams (Kingdon, 1995) and Advocacy and Coalition Framework (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014), that a coordinated advocacy movement is critical for substantial policy change.
- Policymaking by Stealth suggests that in attempts to pass more sweeping policy changes in complex political contexts, the role of advocates is more subtle and peripheral than traditionally conceptualized.

- To further the understanding of the policy process, Policymaking by Stealth could be applied by analysts to other instances of unexpected passage of policies related to politically challenging issues.

References


Preschool Policymaking – Beyond Preschool

- Policy entrepreneurs and advocates should consider using the design and strategy elements outlined in the Policymaking by Stealth framework when working for policy change, particularly if they are operating in a political context that is either unfavorable to their position or holds too many diverse and complex interests, such that policy passage using traditional advocacy tools seems unlikely.