

**EPIC**

**Education Policy  
Innovation Collaborative**  
RESEARCH WITH CONSEQUENCE

# Education Policy Innovation Collaborative

## RESEARCH WITH CONSEQUENCE

States, school districts, and schools across the nation are instituting **large-scale changes** to improve the quality and equity of their public education systems. The public and private sectors have invested billions of dollars in pursuing a vision of education that serves all children. Some reforms will be more successful than others, and some strategies will succeed only for some children.

Understanding policy effectiveness requires **a targeted research agenda** that assesses not just whether reforms improve outcomes, but specifically **which strategies are most effective, where, when, and for whom.**

The **Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC)** helps our partners answer these important questions. And does so in a proving ground for education reform, the state of Michigan, where the school system's challenges and successes mirror many American communities.



# THE EPIC APPROACH

Our state and district-level partners drive what we research. In **close collaboration** with our partners, we establish a **comprehensive research agenda**. We then pursue a series of coordinated projects within the structure of a policy lab, not simply as a stand-alone research project. As a policy lab, we are able to examine a fuller array of interrelated questions and look at educational issues from multiple angles.

This approach requires a **team of experts** who can work carefully and precisely, integrating multiple methods. As a university-based center, we are also **training the next generation of talented researchers** to provide rigorous research that informs and strengthens evidence-based decision-making.



Together with our partners, we are ultimately working to **improve educational outcomes for all kids**, providing **objective and actionable research** to inform decisions that affect students, teachers, and school leaders in urban, rural, and historically disadvantaged communities.



# A FOCUS ON MICHIGAN, INFORMING THE NATION

EPIC is housed in Michigan State University's (MSU) College of Education and primarily partners with the Michigan Department of Education and local school districts.

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Michigan aims to become a **Top 10 education state within the next 10 years**. A key element of this plan is a turnaround strategy called the Partnership Model, aimed at improving educational outcomes in the state's lowest-performing schools and districts. Also central to this goal are efforts to enable innovative instruction, develop and support talented educators, and maintain high-quality educational options for all of Michigan's students.

EPIC is honored to work closely with Michigan's education leaders to answer the most pressing education policy questions the state faces.



# TAILORED RESEARCH AGENDA

Our tailored research agenda for Michigan focuses on issues that, while critical to our home state's school improvement efforts, will also **inform actions taken across the nation.**



## PARTNERSHIP DISTRICTS

The Partnership Model is Michigan's strategy to improve outcomes in its lowest performing schools, and a key component of the Top 10 in 10 strategy. The state has turned to EPIC to evaluate these efforts in real-time, providing actionable information to monitor how the policy is working for schools and districts.



## CHOICE AND MOBILITY

School choice seeks to provide children with quality public school options regardless of where they live. Effective policies include mechanisms for ensuring that parents know which schools best fit their children. EPIC is helping our partners improve school choice for all students.



## COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

Michigan school districts are making the shift toward a more individualized approach for students that emphasizes skill and subject mastery. EPIC is partnering with districts piloting these approaches to learn how this is working, where, and why.



## TEACHER QUALITY

Teachers are the most important school-based input into students' educational success. EPIC is partnering with state and local policymakers to ensure that all of Michigan's students have the opportunity to learn from high-quality educators.



# EPIC LEADERSHIP



## JOSHUA M. COWEN

Faculty Co-Director, EPIC

Associate Professor of Education Policy, MSU

Joshua M. Cowen, PhD, is the founder and faculty co-director of EPIC and is associate professor of education policy at the College of Education at Michigan State University. He is an expert on teacher quality, school choice, student and teacher mobility, and education policy more broadly. His work has been published in numerous highly regarded outlets, and supported through a diverse array of philanthropies, including Arnold Ventures, the Smith Richardson Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation, as well as through state and federal contracts and grants. He has led or participated in program evaluations in Florida, Louisiana, Kentucky, Michigan, and Wisconsin. He has also partnered directly with state and district policymakers in Kentucky, Michigan, and Wisconsin to inform policymaking. Dr. Cowen was co-editor of *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, the flagship peer-reviewed journal for education policy in the United States. Dr. Cowen is also a member of the Executive Leadership Board for the National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice (REACH). Dr. Cowen received his PhD in political science and education science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, his MPP from Georgetown University, and his BA in history from the University of Michigan.

[jcowen@msu.edu](mailto:jcowen@msu.edu)

[@JoshCowenMSU](https://twitter.com/JoshCowenMSU)



# EPIC LEADERSHIP



## KATHARINE O. STRUNK

Faculty Co-Director, EPIC

Clifford E. Erickson Distinguished Chair in Education, MSU  
Professor of Education Policy and by courtesy Economics, MSU

Katharine O. Strunk, PhD, is the faculty co-director of EPIC, and is the Clifford E. Erickson Distinguished Chair in Education and a professor of education policy and by courtesy economics at Michigan State University. She is an expert on K-12 education governance, including teachers' unions, collective bargaining agreements, and portfolio management models, as well as teacher labor markets, school turnaround, and accountability policies. Her work has been published in highly regarded peer-reviewed journals and as policy briefs to inform policymakers and practitioners. She has worked extensively with district and state policymakers, including working with the Los Angeles Unified School District and the California and Michigan Departments of Education to help decision makers formulate, design, and revise policy. Dr. Strunk's work has been supported by state and federal contracts and grants as well as by philanthropic organizations. Dr. Strunk is also an associate editor and the policy brief editor of the journal *Education Finance and Policy*, and a member of the Executive Leadership Board for the National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice (REACH). Dr. Strunk received her PhD in Educational Administration and Policy Analysis and her MA in Economics from Stanford University, and her BA in Public Policy from Princeton University.

[kstrunk@msu.edu](mailto:kstrunk@msu.edu)

[@KatharineStrunk](https://www.instagram.com/KatharineStrunk)



# EPIC LEADERSHIP



## EMILY MOHR

Managing Director, EPIC

Emily Mohr, MPP, is the managing director of EPIC. Emily has spent her entire career working in the education sector. Most recently, Emily served eight years at the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), working on strategic initiatives focused on human capital and district research partnerships. In her former role, Emily played a key part in the fundraising for and development and implementation of the district's new multi-measure teacher and school leader evaluation systems and school performance improvement systems. Emily also led a successful effort to create a human capital data warehouse and launch online reports for school and district leadership to better inform their decision making. She also managed the district's employee learning management system, which she scaled district-wide. In her role managing district research partnerships, Emily worked extensively to build external relationships that added research and analytic capacity to the district, and helped create systems aimed at using results to better inform policy and practice. Her appreciation for the importance of research to inform district and state policy and practice stems from her participation in the Harvard Strategic Data Project fellowship. Before her time in LAUSD, Emily worked in district strategy at Teach For America and served as a program assistant at the California Endowment. Emily received her MPP from the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy Studies and her BA in Public Policy Studies from Vanderbilt University. She is an Ohio native.

[emohr@msu.edu](mailto:emohr@msu.edu)



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201 Erickson Hall, 620 Farm Lane, East Lansing, MI 48824 | (517) 884-0377 | [EPICedpolicy@msu.edu](mailto:EPICedpolicy@msu.edu)