This is an advanced readings course, covering representative readings about problems related to the study of schools and their improvement. We will spend most of our time reading & discussing books and articles concerned with these issues, with writing assignments to give you an opportunity to probe a bit deeper into various topics. This course of study is supposed to represent a broad introduction to some of the very best research in the social sciences related to (and shedding light on) educational problems related to improving schools. It will establish a strong foundation for your doctoral studies in these areas, and for your teaching and research regarding these issues in the years ahead.

The following books are required reading (all available at the KU Bookstore):

Tyack & Cuban, Tinkering Toward Utopia

Rothstein, Grading Education

Elmore, School Reform from the Inside Out

Bryk, et al, Organizing Schools for Improvement

Additional readings are available on the course Blackboard (Bb) site and the full schedule of expected readings is outlined in the syllabus below. Readings may be added in the course of the semester as new research becomes available. These will be announced in class or via email, but please consult the syllabus published on Blackboard for updates.

We will decide when assignments are due during the semester, but I would like you to write reaction papers each week, focusing on parts of the books that you find especially interesting, which should come after we have finished discussing them in groups. Guidelines for this assignment will be posted on the Blackboard site.

Additionally, I will post discussion questions twice each week, so that you can post reaction statements (150-300 words) on the "Discussion Board." Please try to get your reactions posted by the day before class, so that everyone has a chance to read them and respond if they would like. This will add considerably to the quality of our discussions, and to the learning process for the entire class.

Final grades for the semester will be determined on the following basis: Class discussion and participation in Blackboard discussion, 45%; book related essays, 55%. 
General Schedule (topics subject to change as the course proceeds)

First meeting: Introduction & Orientation

Discussion: What is the meaning of reform in education?

Second meeting: Historical & Conceptual Background

Read: Tyack & Cuban: Prologue & Chs. 1 & 2.

Supplemental: Rury & Mirel, “Political Economy of Urban Education” (Bb)

Discussion: How do we think about school reform?

Third Meeting: Inherent Limits of Reform?

Read: Tyack & Cuban, Chs. 3-5.

Supplemental: Rury, “Democracy's High School? Social Change and American Secondary Education in the Post-Conant Era” (Bb)

Discussion: Accountability as a reform framework.

Fourth Meeting: The Logic of Accountability

Read: Rothstein Chs. 1-3.

Supplemental: Stringfield, et al, “Promise, Progress, Problems, and Paradoxes of Three Phases of Accountability” (Bb)

Discussion: A brief history of accountability.

Fifth Meeting: Problems in Accountability Land

Read: Rothstein, Chs. 4 & 5

Supplemental: Morris, “Can Anything Good Come from Nazareth?” (Bb)
Lankford, et al, “Teacher Sorting and the Plight of Urban Schools” (Bb)

Discussion: What’s the upside of accountability?

Sixth Meeting: Can accountability be ‘done right?’

Read: Rothstein, Chs. 6-8.

Hess, “Understanding Achievement” (Bb)

Discussion: Can failing schools be saved?

Seventh Meeting: In What makes a good school?

Read: Elmore, Chs. 1, 2 & 3

Supplemental: Darling-Hammond, et al, “Reinventing High School” (Bb)

Kahne, et al, “Small High Schools on a Larger Scale” (Bb)

Discussion: Can schools be changed in a “comprehensive” fashion?

Eighth Meeting: Accountability at the School Level

Read: Elmore, Ch. 4

Supplemental: Borman, et al, “Comprehensive School Reform and Achievement” (Bb)

Dantow, et al, “Comprehensive School Reform in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Contexts” (Bb)

Camburn, et al, “Distributed Leadership in Schools” (Bb)

Discussion: Can reform occur at the district level?

Ninth Meeting: Going to Scale
Read: Elmore, Chs. 5-7.

Supplementary: Copland, “Leadership of Inquiry” (Bb)

Discussion: What are the roles of big city leaders in educational reform?

Tenth Meeting: The Politics of Urban Institutional Change

Read: Bryk, et al, Prologue, Into, Chs. 1 & 2

Supplementary: Shipps, “Pulling Together” (Bb)


Roderick, et al, “Impact of High Stakes Testing in Chicago” (Bb)

Discussion: What can we learn from case studies?

Eleventh Meeting: Chicago as a Reform Model

Read: Bryk et al, Chs. 3 & 4

Land, “Local School Boards under Review” (Bb)

Lacireno-Paquet, et al, “Creaming vs Cropping” (Bb)

Discussion: What were the building blocks of change?

Twelfth Meeting: The Promise & Limits of Reform

Read: Bryk, et al, Chs. 5, 6 & Conclusion

Discussion: What are the persistent barriers to systemic change?