

The Policy Attributes Theory

The **policy attributes theory**, developed by C-SAIL director Dr. Andy Porter, posits that there are five components to successful policy implementation: **specificity**, **consistency**, **authority**, **power**, and **stability**. We apply this theoretical framework to our Center's work to guide our Implementation, Longitudinal, Measurement, and FAST Program studies.

SPECIFICITY

Specificity refers to how extensive and detailed a policy is. A highly specific policy will take the guesswork out of implementation by explicitly setting goals and providing guidelines, curriculum frameworks, instructional materials, or professional development to help principals and teachers implement prescribed practices with fidelity. Examples:

Low Specificity

Teachers are allowed to develop their own curriculum with little oversight by the school/district/state.

High Specificity

Every teacher is required to follow the curriculum prescribed by the school/district/state.

CONSISTENCY

Consistency reflects the degree to which different education policies all call for the same education practice. The better aligned a reform is with current school, district, state, or federal policies or goals, the more seamless its implementation will be (that is, educators will not have to choose between competing or conflicting demands). Examples:

Low Consistency

The courses that high school students are required to take are not aligned to the state's college- and career-readiness goals and expectations.

High Consistency

The courses that high school students are required to take are aligned to the state's college- and career-readiness goals and expectations.

AUTHORITY

Policies gain *authority* through becoming law; their consistency with social norms, resources, or support from experts; or promotion by charismatic leaders. This attribute also emphasizes the importance of stakeholder buy-in and the need to acquire their investment as a critical aspect of effective reform. Authority is established through persuasion. Examples:

Low Authority

State officials impose a new assessment system without a period of stakeholder input, feedback, and resources or professional development to prepare schools for the new test.

High Authority

Principals, teachers, community partners, and students share in the state decision-making process for determining their assessment system.

POWER

A policy gains *power* through rewards and sanctions. Power is established through force. Examples:

Low Power

Teachers do not receive or lose anything based on their compliance with policies.

High Power

Teachers receive pay raises, promotions, or other such rewards for excellent compliance or face dismissal for poor compliance.

STABILITY

Stability represents the extent to which policies remain constant over time. Examples:

Low Stability

From 2010 to 2016, the state has replaced newly adopted standards with yet another set of standards and another aligned assessment.

High Stability

From 2010 to 2016, the state has implemented the same set of standards and assessments.

For more information on the policy attributes theory and C-SAIL's research, visit c-sail.org.

