

How to reform public education?

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Although his research helps inform national debate over public education policy, Douglas Harris gets a familiar reaction when he tells people he is an education economist. “They sort of look at you funny,” says [Harris](#), an associate professor of economics at Tulane University.



Douglas Harris, who holds the first endowed chair in public education at Tulane, is leading a discussion of hot topics in public education reform. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

It may not be intuitive, but economics in education is of growing importance because of market-based reforms taking place across the country in urban public school systems such as those in New Orleans. Harris, who holds the inaugural Tulane University Endowed Chair in Public Education, has the job of launching a new research consortium that will contribute to growing debates over school choice, teacher evaluation standards and other hot-button topics in public education reform.

He is recruiting Tulane faculty and non-academic researchers from local organizations to collaborate on the consortium, which has not yet been named. He plans to convene a working group this spring.

“The whole idea is to engage scholars from Tulane and other local universities in important new research and to work with local educators to make it relevant □ to improve schools,” he says.

Before coming to Tulane, Harris was an associate professor of educational policy studies at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. He won acclaim for his 2011 book, *Value-added Measures in Education: What Every Educator Needs to Know*. Nominated for a national Grawemeyer Award, the book has been lauded for its clarity in how to design educational accountability systems that improve teaching and learning.

John Ayers, executive director of the [Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives](#), says Harris is a major force in education research.

“He's known for meticulous and careful research, and his research is understandable and readable. He can communicate complicated things in interesting ways,” Ayers says. “It's a coup that Tulane got him.”

Michael Joe is a writer in the Office of Development.