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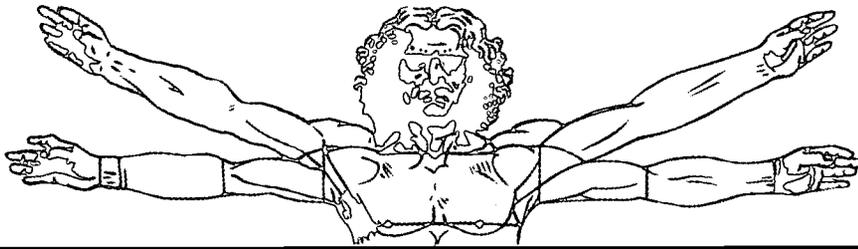
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ABSTRACT

This collection of essays addresses major issues that relate to the role of the federal government in American elementary and secondary education. After "Introduction: The National Interest in a Quality Education for All Children" (Donald M. Stewart), Part 1, "The National Interest in Elementary and Secondary Education," includes "Education and the Economy: The Nation Remains at Risk" (Milton Goldberg); "The Civic Ends and Means of Education" (Amy Gutmann); and "Promoting Social Cohesion Amid Diversity" (Richard D. Kahlenberg). Part 2, "Public Views about the Nation's Schools," includes "Report on Findings from Seven Focus Groups" (Lake Snell Perry with John Deardourff) and "Data from a National Poll" (American Association of School Administrators). Part 3, "The Federal Role in Achieving Good Schools for All," includes "The Time Has Come: A Federal Guarantee of Adequate Education Opportunity" (Kalman R. Hettleman); "The Case for Serious Federal Financing of America's Public Schools" (John D. Donahue); and "Reducing Inequality through Education: Millennial Resolutions" (W. Norton Grubb). (SM)



PASSING THE TEST

THE NATIONAL INTEREST IN
GOOD SCHOOLS FOR ALL

Foreward

Edward M. Kennedy

Introduction

Donald M. Stewart

Editor

Michael A. Calabrese

Contributors

Milton Goldberg

Amy Gutmann

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This publication would not have been possible without the generous support of the College Board. Donald M. Stewart, who also contributed the Introduction, suggested the collaboration that led to this project during the final year of his tenure as president and CEO of the College Board. Don, in addition to being one of the nation's most experienced and knowledgeable educators, is a pleasure to work with; his support and advice during this entire project was invaluable. We would also like to thank Larry Gladieux, executive director of policy analysis at the College Board, for his early input into the content of this effort. The Center also would like to thank U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy for his inspiring Foreword, as well as for his nearly three decades of leadership on education issues in the U.S. Senate.

We owe our greatest debt to our six authors, who somehow managed to squeeze a summary of their considerable expertise on these topics into the parsimonious page limits we allocated to each. We hope our readers will accept these essays as an invitation to read the various books and articles that undergird the views presented here. In shaping this volume we also relied heavily on our team of public opinion experts, Celinda Lake and John Deardourff, who along with Alysia Snell and the other professionals at Lake Snell Perry & Associates helped us to tease out realities about the public perception of American schools that only now, many months later, are becoming evident to opinion leaders. Thanks also to Bruce Hunter at the American Association of School Administrators for sharing AASA's polling data that appears in Part Two of this

volume. And finally, thanks to Emily Cooney, Justin Leach, Andy Sousa and the rest of the staff at CNP who labored long and hard to bring this to fruition.

Leon E. Panetta , Chairman
Maureen S. Steinbruner, President

* * *

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Michael Calabrese, who edited this volume, is CNP's director of domestic policy programs.

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Center for National Policy
Washington, D.C.
March 2000

FOREWORD

As this impressive volume demonstrates, the obligation of ensuring that all children receive a good education is one of the foremost challenges we face together, as a nation. Despite the progress that individual states and districts have made, a substantial achievement gap still remains between students in high-poverty schools and those in other schools. Clearly, we can do more at every level, federal, state, and local, to help more children in the neediest schools. Those who say education is only a local responsibility are wrong. It is only through a strong and cooperative commitment at every level that we can adequately address this basic challenge.

Every child in every community in America should be safe and feel safe in school. Every child, regardless of economic status, disability, or ethnic background deserves the opportunity to have a good education in a good public school. Public schools are one of the great achievements of American democracy. I commend the Center for National Policy and the College Board for compiling these perspectives on the national interest in excellence in elementary and secondary education.

The federal government's role is indispensable. Uncle Sam is in the unique position to make sure that in every state, the neediest communities get extra help. The federal government can hold states accountable for results, and it can provide substantial resources to meet national priorities. In 1965, the federal government took its first major step towards helping the nation meet these goals by approving the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As President Johnson said at the time, Congress has taken the most significant step of this century to provide widespread help to all of America's schoolchildren. I predict that this is just the beginning, the first giant stride toward full educational opportunity for all of our schoolchildren.

We've made extraordinary progress since then, especially in recent years. Student achievement is up. Teachers are improving. Schools are safer. Dropout rates are lower. More high school graduates are going on to college. But we still have much more to do — particularly for the neediest students in the poorest communities. One of the clear lessons of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is that the federal government does a better job than anyone else of getting funds to the neediest communities. As several authors in this volume point out, education is primarily funded by local property taxes, which results in limited resources for communities with low property tax bases. Federal funds help to address this inequity.

As Congress addresses these concerns, a key issue that deserves higher priority is early childhood education. We must treat education as a process that begins at birth and lasts a lifetime. Improvements in early childhood education will have beneficial effects on elementary and secondary schools, as well. We must also provide special assistance for troubled and failing schools. It is not enough to set high standards and, then, by fiat, order schools to meet them. It is unacceptable to abandon schools most in need of assistance. We don't have to undermine our public schools in order to save them.

As we see from the research reported here, there is deep and solid support for public schools, and a broad public willingness to commit greater federal resources to achieve the goal of good schools for all. Working together, every community, every state, and the federal government can do more to create conditions for improvement and reform — not in a few schools, but in all schools; not for a few students, but for all students. We have an obligation to give all children, through education, a future of fulfilled dreams and realized hopes.

Edward M. Kennedy
Washington, D.C.

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INTRODUCTION

DONALD M. STEWART

THE NATIONAL INTEREST IN A QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN

This important volume of essays addresses major issues that relate to the role of the federal government in American elementary and secondary education. Inspired by the leadership of Maureen S. Steinbruner, president of the Center for National Policy, and edited by her colleague Michael Calabrese, this collaborative effort with the College Board was launched at the end of my presidency there. It was born of our shared concern for the well-being of young people and of our nation. While recognizing the constitutionally based traditions of local control within the almost 17,000 school districts in America, our collective focus and that of our authors is on the national interest in elementary and secondary education.

The increasing priority given to education by voters and candidates in this year's national election campaign is evidence that the issue of education has been nationalized; the American public now expects candidates for federal office to grapple with school issues – issues that in the past were assumed to be of strictly state and local concern. Today human capital formation, competitiveness and the preservation of democratic as well as capitalistic values are all rolled into an on-going national

political discussion about vouchers, charters, class size, standards, teacher quality and upgrading facilities in inner city schools.

This publication is divided into three parts. The first features three essays that each articulate a distinctive national interest in quality public education. These are economic competitiveness, maintaining an effective democracy, and social cohesion amid diversity. A second set of three essays focuses on a fourth national interest, reducing inequality of opportunity. These final three essays recommend specific proposals for significant increases in federal spending targeted to ensure adequate instructional resources for all students, regardless of family income or jurisdiction. The central policy goal these authors have in common is a desire to remedy disparities between high- and low-income states and school districts with respect to the resources it takes to ensure equal educational opportunities for all public school students, while simultaneously preserving the tradition of local control.

On the pages between these two sets of essays is a summary of recent public opinion research that informed the content and organization of this report. Findings are presented from a set of seven

focus group sessions with groups of middle-income and politically independent (or weakly partisan) voters in Richmond, Virginia, and in Oak Park, Illinois, a close-in suburb of Chicago. The focus groups—small group discussions of two or more hours in length—were conducted by a bipartisan team led by pollsters Celinda Lake and John Deardourff. Presented with this excerpt of their full report are a number of charts that summarize similar findings from a poll of 750 public school parents conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

Some very interesting and useful conclusions about trends in public opinion can be derived from these analyses. What came through most clearly from the focus groups was a strong sense that public education is a “national value.” Both CNP’s focus groups and the AASA survey revealed remarkably strong support for the institution of public education in America. Voters clearly believe it is important to have good quality schools that are free and accessible to all children regardless of income or background. In the focus groups, many voters volunteered diversity and exposure to children of different backgrounds as a major benefit of public education. A clear majority also agreed that the quality of public education affects the well-being of all Americans and not just of families with children in school.

A second major finding from this public opinion research is that while voters are very concerned about schools and children as a priority for public policy, they are not particularly enamored with either of the core reform agendas currently associated with liberals and conservatives. Neither the standards, testing and accountability movement associated with the political left, nor the voucher, choice and privatization movement of the political right, evidenced much volunteered support. In CNP’s groups there was no volunteered support for vouchers or privatization (although there was vol-

unteered support, primarily in Richmond, for home schooling as a legitimate option). In the AASA poll, fully three-quarters of public school parents said they had never considered moving their children from public to private school. A plurality (42%) considered public schools to be at least equal in quality to private schools – and among the 29% who said private schools are at least “somewhat better,” most cited “more discipline” as the reason. The premium placed on the ability of private schools to enforce discipline, remove disruptive students, and even to compel parental involvement reflected the clear message that discipline, values, drugs and school violence are a big worry both to voters in general and to public school parents in particular.

Although the public is very supportive of boosting the quality of public education, our focus groups indicated clear signs of a “backlash” against increased pressure on children, particularly with respect to the growing emphasis on high-stakes testing. Parents indicated a concern that schools are “teaching to the test” in a manner that may be neglecting other important aspects of a quality education. In the AASA poll, parents ranked test scores near the bottom among a list of attributes they would use to gauge school quality. While rankings varied somewhat by region, across the nation parents ranked “happy children who enjoy school” highest, followed by high graduation and attendance rates, high parental involvement, small class sizes and availability of technology as the most important attributes of quality education.

With regard to the federal role in primary and secondary education, public opinion suggests a rough consensus along two dimensions: First, the federal government should do more to guarantee basic educational opportunity for all American children, particularly those who live in low-income districts. In the AASA poll, the public school parents who

were surveyed agreed overwhelmingly that access to a quality public education ought to be considered a basic right of citizenship. The consensus on this view spanned the political spectrum. Second, the focus groups revealed widespread awareness that a good education for all children contributes to U.S. economic prosperity, expressing the view that U.S. businesses need to rely on having access to workers with an adequate educational background everywhere in the nation and discussing how programs like Social Security and Medicare will depend on the productivity of the future workforce for funding. Participants in both cities suggested that while schools ought to be locally controlled, the national government can play a constructive role by promoting model curriculum standards.

THREE NATIONAL INTERESTS

Moving to the contributions of our six authors, we begin with three essays that each describe one of the distinctly national interests in the provision of a good basic education to all of America's children.

The first essay in Part One revisits an issue and a report that arguably began the process of making schools a legitimate issue for national action. In 1983, Milton Goldberg participated in drafting *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. That influential report linked the quality of American education to a compelling national interest in global economic competitiveness. "Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce," the commission of business and academic leaders warned.

Goldberg writes here that the vulnerability described in *A Nation At Risk* is as relevant now as it was 16 years ago. It's not just the increasing complexity of work due to technological change, but also the quickening speed of change that makes human capital our nation's most vital investment.

Goldberg reviews progress made, including the increased percentage of high school students taking math and science courses and going on to college. But he points to discouraging data as well: particularly the poor performance of high school seniors compared to their peers in Europe and Asia on the international mathematics and science assessments (TIMSS). Business leaders, he writes, applaud the progress but continue to complain about the employability of young people. He cites the importance of growing business participation in promoting high expectations and high achievement.

The second essay, by Amy Gutmann, addresses education's distinctive purpose in a constitutional democracy: to ensure that all children acquire both the skills and civic virtues to carry out their adult responsibilities as American citizens. She stresses that although education is primarily a matter of local and parental responsibility, ensuring that all children are educated for democratic citizenship is as importantly the concern of every American citizen. Because the most inclusive and meaningful level of citizenship is at the national level, it therefore falls upon the federal government to guarantee that all children — not only the most affluent or academically able — are adequately educated for citizenship. All children residing in this country, she concludes, are entitled to the sort of quality education prerequisite to free and equal citizenship. After defending the civic ends of education — which include teaching both basic skills and civic virtues — Gutmann concludes by describing the effective means of educating children for democratic citizenship in an increasingly global community.

The third and final essay in Part One addresses the distinctive national interest in promoting social cohesion and national unity in a country possessing an unusually rich diversity of people. Richard D. Kahlenberg reminds us that public schools are the nation's most inclusive social institution and

play an influential role in shaping our shared identity as Americans. He notes that U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter wrote in 1948 that public education is “at once the symbol of our democracy and the most pervasive means for promoting our common destiny.” Kahlenberg argues that schools are necessarily an assimilating force in society. He says it is important for schools to assimilate children politically (to believe in democratic values and civic responsibility), and economically (to acquire the skills and work ethic necessary to become productive adults), but also that it is inappropriate for public schools to promote cultural assimilation, if that entails elevating the beliefs or traits of the majority over the distinctiveness of minorities. Kahlenberg concludes by suggesting that national policy should actively promote the “common school” ideal fostered by 19th century educator Horace Mann, and strive for greater integration by socioeconomic status and race.

THREE PERSPECTIVES ON ADEQUATE EDUCATION FOR ALL

Part Three of this report includes three essays that each focus on the national interest in ensuring adequate educational resources for all students, regardless of the state or school district they happen to reside in.

The first of these essays, by Kalman R. Hettleman, suggests that the concept of “adequacy” has replaced “equality” as the defining standard of equal educational opportunity. In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that citizens could not rely on the equal protection clause of the federal constitution to force states to remedy spending disparities between wealthy and poor school districts. Legal and legislative battles over equalization shifted to state courts and legislatures, initially making little headway. Hettleman reports that during the past decade the tide has turned. School finance reformers have prevailed in a majority of challenges after shifting from

a focus on “equality” to an emphasis on “adequacy” under the right to education clauses found in most state constitutions. Since education is compulsory, the right to an adequate education has become compelling, Hettleman says, precisely because of the statewide standards and high-stakes performance tests that promise to impose harsh consequences, such as denial of a high school diploma, for children denied an adequate opportunity to learn. With the growing national movement for rigorous standards and accountability — and the resulting implication that sufficient instructional resources must be available to give all children a fair chance to pass the high-stakes performance tests — Hettleman says that the time has come for a federal guarantee of adequate educational opportunity. States are not up to this challenge, he argues, citing wide differences in wealth and political will. Control should remain local, Hettleman concludes, but the guarantee of adequacy and the additional resources necessary should increasingly become a federal responsibility.

In the fifth essay, John D. Donahue, a professor at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, makes a case for doubling the federal share of school spending. Donahue does not advocate any change in the tradition of local control. Rather, he argues, the national debate about education spending priorities should be premised on a bipartisan consensus to spend an additional \$35 to \$50 billion per year to help poor-performing schools and disadvantaged children. Donahue’s rationale focuses on the problem of widening economic inequality and the persistent disparities in state and local school spending that number among its causes. He argues that the radically decentralized character of American school financing is a historical accident; that if we were designing our system from scratch today, we would certainly better equalize funding between rich and poor states and districts. It’s hard to argue, he writes, that there is an important public interest in quality education that dissipates at

the city limits or state border. For Donahue, four reasons justify a progressive redistribution of additional education spending at the federal level. The first, as noted, is widespread disparities in school expenditures among the states, ranging from an average \$9,000 in New Jersey to less than \$4,000 in Mississippi. A second justification is demographics. Student headcounts are projected to rise steadily to a record 54.5 million in 2006, which will only aggravate a third problem. State budgets face a risk of fiscal distress, if today's economic prosperity is not permanent. Finally, Donahue identifies reasons why state and local lawmakers might invest less in public education than what would be optimal for the nation as a whole.

The final essay is by W. Norton Grubb. Grubb, too, concludes that rising inequality is a serious problem for American society that cannot be addressed adequately without a larger federal role in school spending. He points out that major programs to enhance equity, such as Social Security, historically have been federal rather than local initiatives, since large-scale efforts by individual states to correct inequities would be likely to cause in-migration of the poor and out-migration of the affluent. Moreover, much of the inequality in education concerns differences in resources among the states. Grubb argues that despite the apparent anti-egalitarian tenor of the times, the public may be increasingly receptive to a vision that supports equity through education. He outlines several specific priority areas for national policy initiatives, including the development of a new urban education policy and a focus on high schools. There is virtually no federal policy affecting high schools, he writes, since the overwhelming share of federal compensatory spending goes to elementary schools. Grubb says that adult job training and other remedial efforts later in life are no substitute for modernizing the high school curriculum to

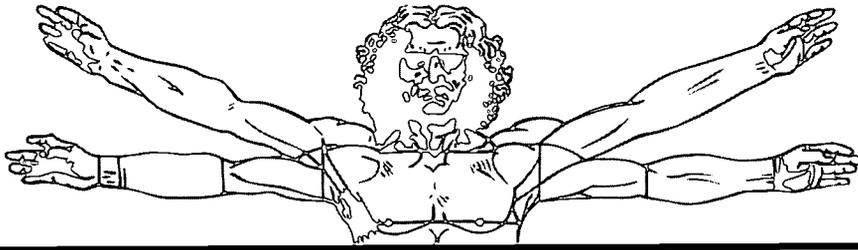
make it more relevant and engaging, reducing high school dropout rates, improving the core competencies of graduates, and encouraging the completion of a coherent postsecondary program to increase earnings. Unlike Donahue and Hettleman, Grubb is not optimistic that federal education spending will increase substantially enough to fund these priorities directly. Instead, he suggests it may be more realistic for the federal government to begin by funding research and pilot programs, publicizing exemplars, and lending its moral weight to the national importance of addressing educational inequities that are linked so directly to growing earnings inequality among graduates.

* * *

Public education must be strengthened if it is to serve as an engine for social integration and economic mobility while re-enforcing the values of democratic institutions through civic engagement. The over-arching concern at the dawn of a new century and millennium is how public education, supported by the formulation and execution of public policy, can serve the twin goals of equity and excellence in a racially and ethnically diverse society in which socio-economic stratification becomes more pronounced each day.

My thanks to the Center for National Policy, to our six authors, and to our focus group participants and research team, for providing the ingredients for an excellent report. The ideas and information here will provide policy makers, the press and public with a better understanding of the continuing struggle to achieve a good basic education for all of America's children. Finally, thanks to all of our readers who share in the love of learning and the knowledge that children are our tomorrow.

Donald M. Stewart
 Carnegie Corporation of New York
 March, 2000



PART I

THE NATIONAL INTEREST IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY: THE NATION REMAINS AT RISK

MILTON GOLDBERG

In 1983 and 1984 the launching of a battery of reports touched off a sharp national debate regarding the quality of American education. *High School* by Ernest Boyer, *The Paideia Proposal* by Mortimer Adler, *Horace's Compromise* by TheodoreSizer, and *Making the Grade* from the Twentieth Century Fund, all appeared during this period. While each of them provided unique perspectives and solutions, they did achieve some consensus. First, they said that as a nation we must agree on common goals of schooling. Second, every student should be expected to build all future learning on the foundation of "basics." Third, we must establish standards of excellence. Fourth, we must attract and retain quality teachers. Finally, an increasingly competitive and global economy requires higher levels of achievement for all students so that they have the opportunity to benefit from full participation in American life.

This last objective — promoting the nation's economic competitiveness — was explicitly defined by the most explosive of all the reports issued in the early 1980's, *A Nation at Risk*. The members of the commission who produced the report believed strongly in the link between education and the demands of a rapidly changing economy and workplace. They heard from leaders of both small

and large businesses across the nation that while the skill levels of high school graduates were at best static and even declining, the competency demands of the workplace were accelerating. Commission member William O. Baker, then Chairman of Bell Laboratories, noted that the long-term U.S. position in the global marketplace would ultimately depend on the skills and talents of American workers and that federal activity to support improved education was critical.

The federal government's release of *A Nation at Risk*, occurring in the context of the Reagan Administration's promise to eliminate the Department of Education, symbolized the continuing importance of federal education leadership. Some op-ed writers, sympathetic to the administration's proposals, claimed *A Nation at Risk* was part of a plot to ensure a federal role in education. Plot or not, the federal role survives. The report noted that federal investments of money, data, and ideas were critical to education progress. Such is still the case. The debate today is about how to make best use of federal investments and the federal role.

The link between educational achievement, national competitiveness and the national interest is valid. Each citizen's skills and talents are keys to opportu-

nity and — in combination with all other individuals — constitute the human resources that fuel our nation’s competitiveness and relative prosperity. American ingenuity and inventiveness got us here. Yet many thousands of young people are diverted from full participation in this robust economy because of inadequate skills. They may have jobs, but their long-term career growth is stunted. They suffer and so, ultimately, will the nation’s competitive position.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS: RAW MATERIALS OF THE NEW ECONOMY

Having listened to the nation’s leading education and business leaders, the National Commission on Excellence in Education concluded in *A Nation at Risk* that:

“History is not kind to idlers. The time is long past when America’s destiny was assured simply by an abundance of natural resources and inexhaustible human enthusiasm, and by our relative isolation from the malignant problems of older civilizations. The world is indeed one global village. We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. America’s position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer.

“The risk is not only that the Japanese make automobiles more efficiently . . . or that American machine tools, once the pride of the world, are being displaced by German products. It is also that these developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe. Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of interna-

tional commerce and are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans did earlier. If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all - old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority. Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the “information age” we are entering.”¹

These words were written in 1983. But the link between educational achievement and national competitiveness is even truer today in a time of accelerated change. Some of those who claim that *A Nation at Risk* over-emphasized this education-competitiveness link fail to note that the Commission also wrote:

“Our concern, however, goes well beyond matters such as industry and commerce. It also includes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society. The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life. A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom.”

For our country to function, citizens must be able to reach some common understandings on complex issues, often on short notice and on the basis of conflicting or incomplete evidence. Education helps form these common understandings, a point Thomas Jefferson made long ago in his justly famous dictum:

“I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.”²

INNOVATION IS OUT-PACING PROGRESS IN EDUCATION

Sixteen years have passed since the issuance of *A Nation at Risk*. There has been some modest progress:

- Forty-nine (49) states have developed or are developing statewide academic standards. Most states have or are developing assessments.³
- The percent of high school graduates taking the “new basics” curriculum (which includes four years of English and three years of math, science, and social studies) has tripled since 1982.
- The percentage of high school students taking math and science courses has also increased significantly over the same period.
- U.S. fourth grade students scored above average in both mathematics and science compared to the 26 nations participating in the Third International Math and Science Study assessments.
- College entrance exam scores show improvement, especially in math, despite a much larger share of all high school graduates taking these tests.
- Between 1972 and 1997, the proportion of high school graduates going directly to postsecondary education has risen rapidly.

But there is also discouraging data:

- U.S. 12th graders score below the international average in mathematics and science compared to the 21 nations participating in the TIMSS assess-

ment. Indeed, performance of U.S. 12th graders was among the lowest of all the countries participating.

- The high school dropout rate has declined since peaking in 1979 but has been slowly rising in the 1990s (to 5.4% in 1995, up from 4% in 1990), according to the National Center for Education Statistics.
- Even though more students are entering postsecondary education, Census data show that the percent of persons between the ages of 25 and 29 who have completed four or more years of college has not increased dramatically.
- We have a serious problem concerning the percentage of public school teachers who teach math and science classes without even a minor in those subjects.

Even with these negative trends, the nation can claim incremental improvements in education. But at the same time the economy and the business world have experienced radical shifts. The pressures and opportunities of global commerce and new technologies are creating new definitions of change cycles in business. It’s not just change that characterizes business today. It’s the rate of change. Robert Atkinson, director of technology policy at the Progressive Policy Institute, described this quickening pace of innovation and productivity in PPI’s New Economy Index:

“One of the most striking structural changes in the New Economy is the degree to which dynamism, constant innovation, and speed have become the norm. Autos that took six years from concept to production in 1990 now take two years....In the frenetic Internet economy, people now talk about technological evolution in ‘Web years’ (...roughly one fiscal quarter) because the rules of the game seem to change that quickly.”⁴

A key response to this acceleration is an adaptable, skilled, and knowledge-rich workforce. The people who work in our businesses are key to American economic progress, which in turn is vital to the well being of these individuals and their families.

But, as noted earlier, it is not just the need for better educated workers that causes business to care about improving American education. Business recognizes that a solid well-rounded education is the thread that knits the intellectual and moral quilt of our nation. It has been so throughout our history. The ill-educated and ill-rewarded will not be intelligent consumers and surely will not create the leadership essential to all parts of our social, civic and economic life. Business knows that good schools and good communities go together.

When we told the nation in 1983 that only 14% of American high school graduates had taken what we called the New Basics Curriculum — four years of English, three years of math, three years of history and geography, and three years of science — people were shocked. Too little was being expected of 86% of U.S. high school graduates. Note that if foreign language study were added to the New Basics, the figures would be dramatically lower.

RENEWED COMMITMENT BY THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Business was key to putting up the stop sign to such malfeasance. Business leaders proclaimed the evidence — people who have a good education have better jobs and make more money. Other countries including our fiercest competitors and emerging market nations, identified accelerating improvement in education as key to their economic success. Were we satisfied to become, as one CEO said, “not so much a nation of haves and have-nots . . . as a nation of educated and uneducated”?

While they applaud signs of progress, business leaders continue to complain about the employability of young people. In part, the complaints of employers about young workers incorporate the perennial concerns of older people about a generation that must inevitably replace them: young people lack discipline; they expect to be catered to; they don't want to do the dirty jobs; they don't respect authority. To these more or less traditional concerns are added worries about the quality of educational attainment: young people lack communication skills; they are neither sufficiently numerate nor literate; they can't make change; they don't understand the importance of providing customer service.

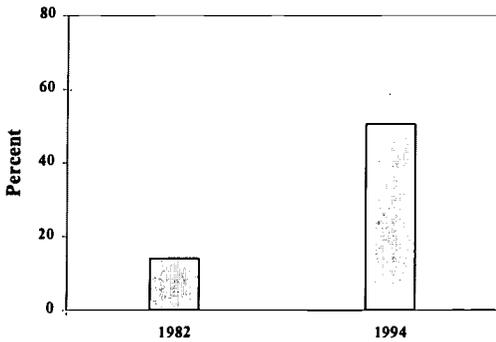
These complaints are more than a fashionable echoing of the media's current fascination with educational deficiencies. Almost everyone has a story to tell — such as honors students who can't spell; sifting through hundreds of job applications and resumes in search of potential candidates capable of making a reasonably neat and complete presentation of their skills and aptitudes; firing one young worker after another who did not measure up on the job.

In October 1999, Lou Gerstner, CEO of IBM, hosted a national education summit involving governors, CEOs and education leaders. The action statement adopted at that meeting begins with an affirmation of the participants' views about the current state of education. That statement represents the business perspective today:

“Sixteen years ago, an urgent wake-up call went out to Americans about the declining quality of education in our nation's schools. *A Nation at Risk* warned of a 'rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and people.' While significant progress has been made, the threat remains.

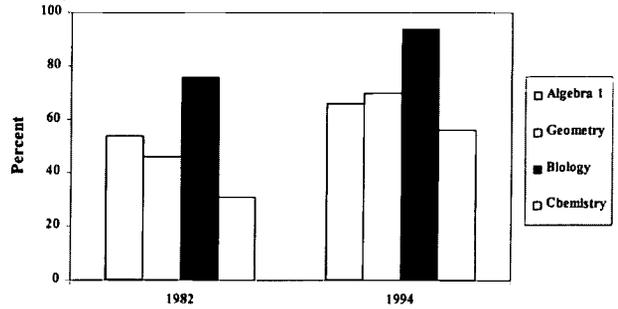
PASSING THE TEST

I. U.S. High School Students Earning "New Basics" Units
(Percent)



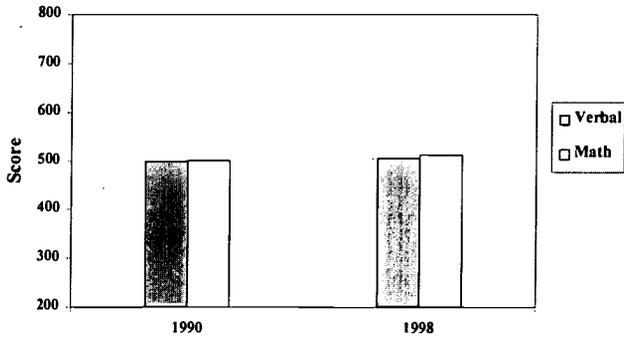
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

II. U.S. High School Graduates Who Took Math and Science
(Percent)



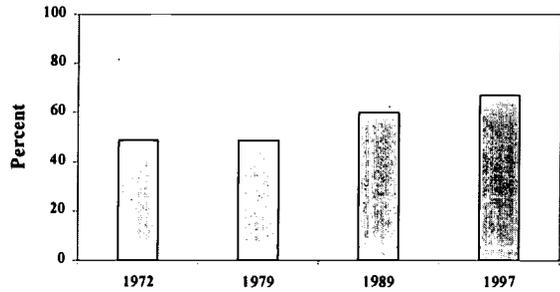
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

III. Average Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) Score



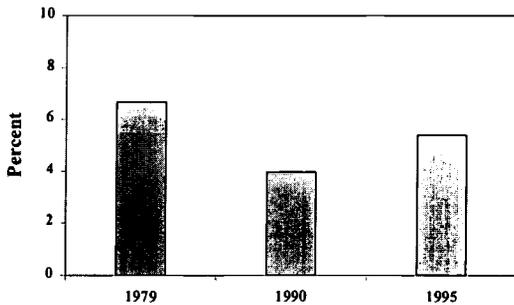
Source: College Board

IV. U.S. High School Graduates Going Directly to Post-Secondary Education
(Percent)



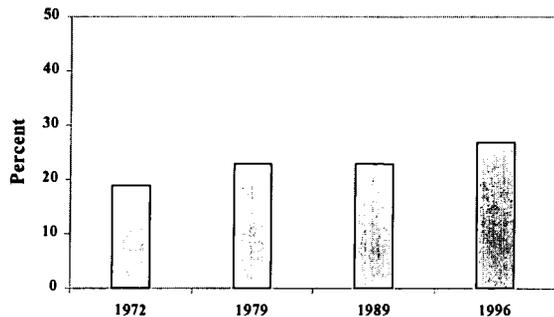
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

V. U.S. High School Dropout Rate
(Percent)



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

VI. Americans Under Age 30 Completing Four Years of College
(Percent)



Source: Census Bureau

“There is now abundant evidence that our nation has awakened. We have awakened to the challenge of creating world-class schools, but we are impatient with the pace of improvement. We refuse to be lulled into thinking that our recent military and economic supremacy diminishes the need for reform. In fact, the American public demonstrates, in its response to every poll, that it clearly understands that our continued economic vitality, social stability, and quality of life depend on our ability to dramatically improve our schools.”⁵

Recently the National Alliance of Business, together with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable, issued a Common Agenda statement which said among other things that:

“As organizations representing American business and employing some 34 million people, we are concerned that the graduates of America’s schools are not prepared to meet the challenges posed by global economic competition. Our nation’s future economic security, and our ability to flourish as a democratic society, demand a generation of high school graduates with solid academic knowledge, world-class technical skills, conscientious work habits, and eager, creative and analytical minds. Despite some encouraging recent gains, business continues to have trouble finding qualified workers. The time has come for business to participate far more actively in generating high achievement.”

The Common Agenda endorsed by these leading business associations went on to recommend:

“If we want our public education system to be truly world-class, there is no substitute for rigorous, measurable, world-class standards of performance . . . This is where we can begin to turn around America’s public education system. This focus on common standards and assessments has led recently to a major national campaign to encourage business

to ask for high school transcripts as part of the hiring process, to send the message that school counts.

“When employers bring academic records into the hiring decision, they motivate students by sending a powerful message: We care about your performance and attendance in school, and we will reward hard work and accomplishment with better employment prospects.

“So where are we today? Standard setting has become relatively common although there is a major debate about the quality and rigor of the standards. On balance, there are many examples of improvement throughout the system to suggest we are doing better but we believe we are losing ground anyway because we are not moving as fast as other countries. What we need now in American education is the same culture of change and innovation that has characterized American business success — a culture that is output driven. One-time quick fixes won’t work.”⁶

As never before, the well being of American business and our nation is dependent on a well-educated populace. We did not overstate it when we decried the low quality of schooling in America in 1983. We have moved since then but we have got to move much more quickly now because the times demand it. Business has already demonstrated its ability to lead this charge. We can’t let up.

THE NEED FOR NATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

A Nation at Risk was not an attack on educators and education as some critics have complained. Nor is business’ critique of and participation in education a negative. In 1984, President Reagan told the members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education who assembled on the South Lawn of the White House that “it’s not overstating things at all to say that your report changed our history by

changing the way we look at education and putting it back on the American agenda.” For history’s sake it should be noted that the Commission was not a presidential commission, but was created by Secretary of Education T.H. Bell.

In fact, the Commission explicitly made a strong case for federal leadership in education. It called for the federal government to work closely with states and localities to address the needs of economically disadvantaged and minority students. It spoke of federal responsibility for protecting the civil rights of students, supporting curriculum improvement and teacher training, and continuing to provide financial assistance to the states. It reinforced federal responsibility for data collection and research. Finally and perhaps most often overlooked, *A Nation at Risk* said that the federal government has the primary responsibility to identify the national interest in education and it should help fund and support efforts to promote that interest. While states have assumed greater leadership for education over the last 15 years, the appropriate federal investments and participation, while appropriate for political debate, remain a key part of sustaining and expanding the education reform movement.

A Nation at Risk was chosen as the title by the Commissioners based on their conclusion that America’s unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation was being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. Further, we appeared to have forgotten that it is our collective intellectual, moral and spiritual values that knit together the fabric of American society. The Commission did not believe that education alone was at fault, observing that education is only one of many causes and dimensions of the problem. Education is nevertheless the one that undergirds our “prosperity, security and civility.” Having made this case, a federal leadership role is inevitable.

HISTORY’S LESSON:
AMERICA CAN DO IT

The Excellence Commission was delighted to come across extraordinary examples of dedicated men, women and students excelling throughout American education, from kindergarten through postgraduate work. In its report it paid tribute to “heroic” examples of excellence as individuals struggled, sometimes against all odds, to bring out the best in themselves and in others. But, on balance, mediocrity and not excellence had become the norm in American education. What the Commission called “a rising of tide of mediocrity” threatened to overwhelm the educational foundations of American society.

But Commission members also believed that “America Can Do It.” In that section of the report, the Commission expressed confidence that we can meet our goal. It cited the remarkable success of the American educational system in responding to past challenges as evidence of its optimism that we can meet the current challenges.

This hopeful message can be found throughout the report: in the letter from David Gardner transmitting the report to Secretary Bell; in the first paragraph noting the “justifiable pride” we can take “in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished”; and in the recommendations which constituted not simply a prescription for improving American schooling, but also a context within which parents and educators across the nation can consider their own unique situations and themselves determine how best to proceed. Indeed, within that context — the time devoted to learning, the content to which students are exposed, the expectations we hold for ourselves and our children, and the quality of teaching and leadership — the tools are at hand to improve the processes of education. Note that all these factors are key to today’s reform movement as well.



Yes, business affirms the link between education and competitiveness. But it does so because it recognizes the essential value to the entire nation of an educated populace. Business knows that education is a chief engine of our society's well-being. Business knows, too, that education is the common bond that ties us to others around the globe and to our own neighbors in our own communities throughout the nation. Thousands of individual businesses and business groups are working to improve education. Students and their families will benefit from a healthy economy fueled by business creativity and initiative. Nothing is more important to both business and our people than seeking and accomplishing the best education system in the world.

CONCLUSION

Human capital, the knowledge, skills, and abilities of people, will be the common denominator determining individual, business, and national economic success. Human capital is our nation's most critical asset. Education represents the cornerstone on which individual, company, and economic growth and development will depend. Individuals with more education not only earn more and have improved employment prospects, but they are less likely to receive public assistance, are generally healthier, are more likely to vote and participate in civic affairs, less likely to be involved in criminal activity. Increased investments in education and training boost business productivity and the bot-

tom line. National, state, and regional economic growth will depend on the knowledge and skills of the workforce, which are also the foundation for personal and family well-being.

The purpose of a solid education is to open doors. There is no question that only the best should be good enough for every American student. Our nation's continued and future economic prosperity depends on a well-educated workforce. Further, our nation has, since its beginning, viewed education as the underpinning for not only economic but also for social and personal well-being. The connection between quality education and U.S. competitiveness should be strengthened and national efforts in this direction supported by all clear-thinking citizens because the ultimate beneficiaries are our citizens themselves.

* * *

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *A Nation at Risk*, The National Commission on Excellence in Education, pp. 6-7, 1983.
- ² *Ibid.* pp. 7-8.
- ³ American Federation of Teachers
- ⁴ Robert Atkinson, *The State New Economy Index*, (Washington, DC: Progressive Policy Institute, 1999), p. 3.
- ⁵ National Education Summit Action Statement, 1999.
- ⁶ *Common Agenda for Improving American Education*, Business Roundtable, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Alliance of Business, 1996.

THE CIVIC ENDS AND MEANS OF EDUCATION

AMY GUTMANN

Constitutional democracy, more than any other kind of government, depends on an educated citizenry. Although schooling has many important purposes, its distinctive aim in a constitutional democracy is to develop the capacities of individuals to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Education is therefore publicly mandated for all children. Education in citizenship is a public trust whose basic terms are that all children learn to live together as free and equal citizens. To carry out their responsibilities as citizens, children need an education that helps them to understand and evaluate received opinion about politically relevant issues. And, because civic responsibilities do not stop at national borders, they need to understand differing points of view, not only of their fellow citizens, but also of all their fellow human beings.

So much is at stake in securing an adequate civic education for all children, and yet it hardly registers as a concern in the political debates raging over the role of government in education. Which government—national, state, or local—is responsible for what aspects of civic education, and why? This essay focuses on the role of the national government in civic education.

For some people the priority of education on our national agenda may be a self-evident truth and therefore a discussion of reasons to sustain the priority at the national level may seem unnecessary. For other people, however, education is primarily local and parental, and therefore the national interest in education—insofar as it implies that the federal government should be involved in funding or regulating education—is anything but self-evident. A little boy tugging on the coat tails of Thomas Jefferson once asked (in a *New Yorker* cartoon): “If you hold these truths to be self-evident, then why do you keep harping on them so much?” A Jeffersonian answer is that self-evident truths in democratic politics only become so if they are defended publicly against the strongest challenges, ideally in open deliberative forums in which citizens can contest conventional understandings, and reaffirm them if they withstand the strongest challenges. Rather than treat the national interest in education as self-evident, this essay therefore considers the strongest challenges to the national government’s role in supporting education, and asks what the most constructive role for the national government might be.

This essay draws upon the conception of education for democratic citizenship developed more fully in Democratic Education (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

To say that education should be a national concern is not to say that the national government should be the provider of education to any child. It is widely and wisely agreed that elementary and secondary education is best provided and primarily controlled at the local level. But the question still remains: Is schooling solely or primarily a local and parental concern? Although education is importantly both a local and a parental concern, educating all children for democratic citizenship is as importantly the concern of every American citizen.

Although the content of a good civic education in the modern world extends well beyond our national borders, the most inclusive level of citizenship that exists in the United States today is at the national level. It therefore is the duty of the national government of the United States to see that all children—not only the most affluent or the most academically able—are adequately educated for citizenship. If some state and local governments in the United States are unable to fund an adequate education for some children, those of us who are residents of another state cannot simply say that this is their concern, not ours. One of our civic responsibilities is that we do our part to ensure that our country secures an adequate civic education for all children, so that they can become fully participating citizens and reasonably carry out the responsibilities of democratic participation.

Our collective concern over the education of citizens implicates both the ends and the means of educating children. In order to deliberate as democratic citizens, we need to share an understanding of public goals and civic purposes. We also need to be open-minded and informed about various means of achieving those ends. To deliberate about civic ends and means of education at the national level, however, does not entail finding, let alone imposing, a single best system on every child. Many interpreta-

tions and modes of implementation are consistent with the aim of offering all children in this country an education that is adequate to their becoming free and equal citizens, individuals who can enjoy their rights and fulfill their responsibilities. Education for citizenship on any such interpretation integrates a concern for both equity and excellence. All children who reside in this country are entitled to an excellent education for free and equal citizenship.

THE CIVIC ENDS OF EDUCATION

What reasons can American citizens offer each other in support of the national importance of mandatory primary and secondary education at a high level of excellence for all children? The most enduring public justification for effective schools is strengthening our constitutional democracy by providing a fair opportunity to all children to acquire the skills and virtues of democratic citizenship. There is a greater need than ever before for schools to focus on the civic purposes of schooling, or “civic education,” in light of the decline over recent decades of other civic associations and the increasing demands placed on parents. Parents undoubtedly have more influence over children than do schools, but parents have a big enough job to do without saddling them with the *entire* responsibility of education for civic participation. Historically, the emphasis on civic responsibilities has been the cornerstone of strong public support for schools.

Civic education for constitutional democracy—particularly in a pluralistic society—is demanding. It requires the pursuit for all children of intellectual skills, knowledge of society and of the world, and civic virtues. A fully participating citizenry must be literate, numerate, honest, tolerant and respectful of racial and religious differences, able to deliberate about shared problems and hold representatives accountable for acting for the public good. Basic skills of numeracy and literacy are essential but

they are not enough. Advanced skills—capacities to analyze and synthesize information—are increasingly important, but not enough. To function adequately, constitutional democracy also depends on the prevalence among citizens of civic virtues such as honesty, toleration, non-violence, respect for reasonable differences, and courage to stand up for what is reasonably believed to be in the public interest. Without high-level cognitive skills and broad-based knowledge, citizens can be too easily manipulated by skillful political leaders. Without civic virtues, citizens as well as public officials can be too eager to manipulate each other.

Ignorance and intolerance—two primary signs of educational failure—are a lethal combination in a constitutional democracy, where every citizen has an equal right to influence laws and public policies. The combination becomes all the more problematic as issues in the public domain become more complex and affect more people. By extension, it is clear that we all suffer when a child, because of bad luck in the lottery of birth, is deprived of an education adequate to exercising the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. An adequate education should cultivate both skills of responsible citizenship—which are demanding—and civic virtues, which are not blind but informed. An uneducated citizenry is anathema, both morally and practically speaking, to a constitutional democracy.

The project of civic education, therefore, is essential and the challenges in fulfilling its demands have only increased over time. The skills of an educated citizenry entering the new millennium include an increasingly high level of literacy, numeracy, and also knowledge about one's own society and the world that is becoming ever more interdependent.

With computers affording access to so much knowledge and so many job opportunities, the

“digital divide” between the most and least advantaged children is doubly troubling: it reflects the failure effectively to provide excellence and equity in education to many children, through no fault of their own. Rather the fault is ours as a society. We the citizenry of the United States are ultimately responsible for the lack of access to an adequate education of many children whose parents and local communities are unable (or in some cases unwilling) to provide them with an education for free and equal citizenship into the 21st century.

The challenge is not only or perhaps even primarily to provide more material resources (although more instructional resources are often needed). It is also finding better ways of teaching, and teaching both civic skills and civic virtues in addition to academics. The more meritocracy is defended and defined by rewarding only those who score high on SATs and similar multiple choice tests, and the more schools teach to the test, the greater the risk that this country loses sight of the meaning and value of civic virtues from the perspective of constitutional democracy. Civic virtues include truthfulness, toleration and nondiscrimination, respect for individual rights and legitimate laws, civic courage (to stand up for one's publicly defensible convictions and to evaluate the performance of officeholders), and open-mindedness to deliberate with others about politically-relevant issues.

These civic virtues should be accessible to all citizens, and they are not readily testable. They are not peculiar to saints, or members of a particular religious congregation, or followers of a particular philosophy of life. Civic virtues, along with cognitive skills and knowledge, are necessary to realize the promise of constitutional democracy, which is neither individual salvation, nor earthly utopia, but liberty and justice for all individuals.

Neglect of our national interest in education for citizenship is one of the single biggest mistakes a democracy can make. Citizens of all countries have a stake in the civic education of their children, but a democracy more than any other form of government depends on an educated citizenry. Educating all children to exercise their rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens encompasses the aims of academic achievement, but it also requires schools to teach the civic virtues upon which a constitutional democracy equally depends.

One of our rights and responsibilities as citizens is holding our representatives accountable for the laws and public policies they make in our names. High levels of knowledge and understanding—two components of academic achievement—help citizens hold their representatives accountable. But academic achievement alone is not enough for a constitutional democracy to fulfill its promise to its citizens. Civic virtues distinguish democratic citizens from self-interested citizens, who will violate each other's rights if they can get away with it (and some people will always be able to get away with it), or who work and obey the law only to advance their own interests (and therefore harm others when it satisfies their self-interest). Civic virtues also distinguish democratic citizens from deferential or indifferent citizens, who turn themselves into passive subjects by submitting unthinkingly to political authority even if it is being abused. The public ideals of our constitutional democracy are far more likely to be served by active citizens who are willing and able to reason together about public issues than it is by passive citizens who are uninformed or uninterested in public issues.

* * *

Education is a public good which helps citizens enjoy their rights and carry out their responsibili-

ties as citizens. But education is also more than a public good. The most inclusive *public* aim of elementary and secondary schooling, and the primary reason to publicly mandate it, is civic education: preparing all children to exercise their rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens. But the aims of educating children and adolescents are not only public. There are also educational aims that are specific to families. Parents are a child's primary educators, and the U.S. constitutional democracy recognizes the rights of parents to educate their children in the family or to choose private schools for their children. Moreover, because the ends of education are not only public, private schools may supplement a state-mandated education with a religious or secular curriculum that is not (and in some cases cannot be) offered by a public school.

Our constitutional law has long recognized that children are not the mere creatures of the state or their parents. Parents have constitutional rights, which all individuals and institutions must respect, but parents also have constitutional responsibilities. They must recognize that their children are future citizens of a democratic society, who will have their own rights and responsibilities, which all accredited schools—both private and public—hold in public trust. It is entirely consistent with the extensive authority that parents have over the education of their children in the family that citizens mandate an education that is appropriate to a democracy of free and equal citizenship.

In sum, education is a concern that all citizens can legitimately share in all children. A public defense of mandatory, publicly subsidized schooling presupposes publicly defensible purposes of education, teaching the skills and virtues that will enable children to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

THE MEANS OF CIVIC EDUCATION

What then are effective means to the civic ends of education? Although American citizens have a common interest in education, it certainly does not follow that we should centralize control over schooling in this country. Decentralized control has proven an effective way to carry out this nation's civic responsibility for schooling. Centralized political control over schools has been a recipe for failure in American culture, and it also can subvert the aims of tolerance and pluralism.

Decentralized funding presents us with the challenge of finding effective means of providing high quality schooling for all children, as equity and academic achievement. In the absence of high quality schools, some children—those from the most advantaged families—will fare far better than children from the least advantaged families. A high quality school system helps equalize opportunity. A low quality school system does precisely the reverse.

High quality education is best delivered by decentralized means at a local level, but it would be misleading to infer from this that American citizens therefore do not share a common interest in educating future citizens. Our individual interests in the education of children diverge at many levels, depending on family status, religious belief and other factors. But our public interest as citizens in educating all children so that they can exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens is a common link among Americans, even as we disagree about precisely how to define the effective means of that education.

The good news is that there are probably many effective means of educating children for citizenship. The bad news is that there are almost certainly many more ineffective means. Good schools, of which there are not nearly enough, both teach in the classroom and model in their practices some of the most basic skills and virtues that students need

to learn. They set and enforce high standards for all students, not only those who are easiest to teach (because they come to the classroom with the greatest advantages). They give all students the encouragement and attention they need to meet those standards. They institutionalize fair procedures. They honor individual rights and enforce individual responsibilities. They expect all students to demonstrate mutual respect by doing their share to contribute to the schools' educational mission. They involve parents and they contribute to the community of which they are a part.

Some of the most successful educational practices bring together the teaching of cognitive skills and civic virtues. Talented teachers who create cooperative classrooms teach virtues of democratic citizenship, such as toleration and mutual respect, together with high level cognitive skills and knowledge, all of which are important components of effective citizenship. Civic education at its best is not easy, but neither is it utopian, or an all-or-nothing proposition. The willingness and ability to engage in democratic deliberation—the give and take of respectful argument about a common politics among citizens and our accountable representatives—is a basic skill and a basic virtue of democratic citizenship. Teaching students the skills and virtues of deliberation is pedagogically demanding, as is democracy, because both depend on developing and combining empirical knowledge, cognitive skills, and civic virtues. Teaching that engages students in developing deliberative skills and virtues anticipates democratic politics at its best. It actively engages students by challenging them to learn a body of knowledge in order to develop their own thinking and to engage effectively with their fellow students.

In judging the extent to which various means of pursuing civic education are effective, we need to consider far more than a single successful classroom,

or even the most successful classrooms and schools around the country. We need to ask how well all the available means of educating our children in primary and secondary schools, taken together, can withstand a test of equity across the entire population of school-age children. All children who reside in this country are entitled to receive an education that is adequate to democratic citizenship. Moreover, the country requires it to function well as a democracy. An adequate education has become more demanding over time, as more and better schooling is necessary for children to understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens. To be able to enjoy their right to choose among a range of good jobs and good lives, students need more education than ever before. To be able to fulfill their civic responsibilities, they need a higher level of cognitive skills, more knowledge, and a greater concern for more of their fellow human beings than ever before. The world today is far more complex and more interdependent than it was at the turn of the 20th century, and the United States in particular is far more involved in profoundly affecting the lives, livelihoods and civic opportunities of people around the globe.

There is no educational panacea at our political disposal. Some prominent proponents of school choice have said that it will achieve, by itself, all the important educational goods that citizens have long been seeking, as long as it is not combined with any other reforms. The idea that a single sweeping reform can be an educational panacea may be alluring, but we have learned by now that no single reform can promise anything close to a panacea. Increasing school choice may be one partial means of school reform, but if it is taken to be the single correct and comprehensive means, the results are bound to be disappointing. School choice at its best, the evidence now suggests, may be a means of marginally improving some test

scores. But school choice is certainly not an end in itself. And at its worst, school choice neglects the challenge that educational equity poses to a democratic society: it is not enough to educate only the children who are easiest to teach. Any means that creams off into the best schools the students whose parents are most concerned about their education and leaves the other students behind in failing schools falls significantly short of the publicly defensible ends of civic education. Our present public school system falls significantly short as well. Many children need much better schools. Parental choice alone is not an answer.

There is no simple substitute for improving schools and judging them on their civic educational merits. As citizens, we have a right and responsibility to ask: To what extent do our country's schools succeed in effectively teaching literacy, numeracy, toleration, mutual respect, and the other fundamental skills and virtues of a free and equal citizenry?

When we judge the many school systems of the United States by civic standards today, most are lacking, some sorely so. But their problems are not attributable to a single simple mistake, whether it be the failure to increase competition among schools, decrease bureaucracy, raise teaching salaries, or decrease the power of teachers' unions. Each of these criticisms of specific school systems is worth considering, alongside the available evidence, in deliberations about school reform at local, state, and national levels. The deliberations also need to be informed, however, by our sense of the publicly justifiable aims of mandatory education in a constitutional democracy. The more explicit we are about the civic aims of education, the more likely we are to acknowledge that there is no single means to solve all the problems of elementary and secondary schooling in this country. Many different means, including the hard work

and inspiration of many dedicated people, are necessary to deliver an adequate education to all children, one that enables them to act effectively as free and equal citizens.

Concern for civic education implicates government in a broad range of social policies, extending from schooling to welfare reform. There is no escaping this implication: a democratic government must share responsibility for providing children with the necessary means of becoming free and equal citizens. Some critics of big government worry that public oversight of schools, civic education in particular, is educationally counterproductive. They believe it is a recipe for a highly bureaucratized school system, and highly bureaucratized schools cannot teach anything well, except perhaps the inevitability of their own failure.

Too much bureaucracy *is* an obstacle to an effective civic education. It takes effective teachers to convey to students the importance and substance of the skills and virtues of citizenship, and teachers are typically not very effective in highly bureaucratic schools. The “effective schools research” of the past three decades has demonstrated that many of the major characteristics of effective schools (and by extension effective teaching) are incompatible with large bureaucratic structures. Decentralization and diversity among public and private schools, however, are not ends in themselves; they are means to achieving the civic educational ends that we the people may legitimately set for our schools.

Decreasing bureaucracy, especially in big city schools, is necessary but not sufficient for making schools satisfy the aims of a civic education. Our choice among school systems is not so stark as the defenders of a market system in schooling sometimes suggest: Do we want decentralized market control or centralized public control? A more moderate and publicly defensible choice is a decentral-

ized and democratic mixed (public and private) system of schooling. Such a system has many variations, subject to the discretion of democratic citizens: it may include charter schools, theme schools, neighborhood schools, schools-within-a school, vouchers that may be used for any public school, and private schools that are privately funded (but also publicly regulated, as all accredited schools must be). The more moderate, mixed system is therefore not one but many alternatives. It supports a variety of decentralized public school systems and private schools. Parents are free to use the public schools at taxpayers’ expense or an accredited private school at their own expense.

Under our present system, many poor parents cannot afford a private school option for their children. Poor parents also cannot afford adequate childcare or a house in a better public school district for their children. A voucher system for elementary and secondary schooling would give at least some poor parents the option of choosing a better school for their children, although the voucher plans that have been proposed and implemented would not give poor parents the choices among good schools that affluent parents have for their children. Whatever we think of educational vouchers, we should be careful not to locate the unfairness of our present system in the absence of educational vouchers rather than in the persistence of poverty and inadequate schools for all children. It is an injustice—and a public shame—from a democratic perspective that all children are not provided an adequate education. School vouchers of the sort that are generally proposed cannot solve this problem. They cannot come close to guaranteeing good schools for all children. Yet a democratic society owes all children good schools.

A free market in education is not a promising means to the civic ends of elementary and secondary schooling. Because mandatory, publicly subsidi-



dized schooling is a public trust, citizens have good reason to resist privatizing schools on the strictly free (unregulated) market model. Even if a state government completely privatized the delivery of elementary and secondary schooling, the oversight of all accredited schools would still be a public matter. Democratic control works best when it is decentralized within a system that includes competition among private and public educational sectors. Among the advantages of decentralized democratic control of public schools is that it expresses the idea that civic education is a public trust, and it encourages citizens, parents, teachers, and public officials to work together through public institutions to create better public schools. Although the free market model of (mandatory and publicly subsidized) schooling cannot guarantee good educational outcomes, neither can a decentralized democratic model. No model of governance *by itself* can guarantee good educational outcomes.

Good civic educational outcomes are more likely if no student gets lost in a good school; teachers engage all their students; and principals communicate a clear vision of the school's mission to parents, students, and teachers, who share in shaping and carrying out that mission. Choice among effective public schools is also important. There are few schools that are "just right" for all students. A school system that provides relevant information to parents about the distinctive features, successes, and failures of different schools is better than one that tries to fit all children into a single school mold.

Yet another consideration is important in thinking about civic education: schools need to avoid segregating the most and least advantaged students. Racial and class segregation have been obstacles in our constitutional democracy to achieving equity in education. Racial segregation and class segregation impede the pursuit of fair educational and econom-

ic opportunities for less advantaged Americans. The academic achievement of students from less advantaged families improves when they are educated in cooperative classrooms with students from more advantaged families. The civic education of all students suffers when classrooms and schools are economically and racially segregated. Learning from and with people who have different life experiences is part of the promise of civic education in our constitutional democracy. Students from different backgrounds can learn from one another in the classrooms and on the athletic fields of economically and racially integrated schools. The means of an effective civic education therefore implicate far more than the classroom curriculum.

Schools cannot count on universal agreement about the value of racial or economic integration, or for that matter about the value of any specific set of civic skills and virtues. Universal agreement is typically beyond our reach in a free society. But the lack of universal agreement is not a good argument against pursuing the aims of civic education. Even in the absence of universal agreement, citizens may legitimately support schools that teach toleration and other civic values. Were civic values completely uncontroversial, citizens would have less need to deliberate about them and to authorize schools to teach them to children. Schools in a constitutional democracy are public trusts that cannot avoid teaching values. The choice that schools confront is not whether they should teach values, but what values they should teach, and how they should teach them. These choices can be made intentionally or unintentionally, and with or without public deliberation. The choice that citizens confront when thinking about mandatory education is not whether we should defend the teaching of values in schools, but what values we should defend, and whether we should publicly deliberate about them.

THE ROLE OF DEMOCRATIC DELIBERATION

Because mandatory schooling is a public trust, citizens and public officials are responsible for publicly deliberating about its ends and means. Public deliberation in a federal system may take place at a variety of levels, including schools, school districts, state legislatures, and national politics. Each level has something to contribute to the complex task of educating children in ways that are conducive to exercising the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a constitutional democracy. There are multiple ways that schools can further education for citizenship. A constitutional democracy committed to educating all children for citizenship does not depend on instituting a single best system. It depends on the deliberations of citizens and their accountable representatives to develop publicly defensible understandings of the ends and means of civic education.

Public discourse about the purposes of education is an important part of democratic politics at all levels. A federal system of government holds out the promise of establishing a middle ground between two unacceptable extremes. At one extreme, control over schooling would be entirely at the state or local level, and national politics would neglect society's collective interest in education for citizenship. At the other extreme, control over schooling would be centralized at the national level, creating an extraordinarily cumbersome bureaucracy and stifling participation, experimentation, and context-appropriate variation at the local and state levels.

In our federal system, democratic politics at local and state levels permits citizens to deliberate about alternative ways of structuring and giving content to publicly subsidized schooling. Citizens also deliberate outside the formal channels of politics, in families, friendship circles, and civic associations. Democratic politics at the national level enables citizens to express and maintain a shared commitment

to universality helping all children, not just our own or our neighbor's children, achieve a high level of educational achievement. The national government can help ensure that disadvantaged children are not neglected due to lack of resources at the state or local levels of government. The national government can also collect and disseminate relevant information about the most effective educational programs. All citizens have a legitimate interest in knowing how well all schools are doing in carrying out their public mission.

The national government can facilitate and encourage effective pursuit of the civic aims of education, but it should not dictate one exclusive means, because there are many different means of achieving those aims. A federal system is well designed to encourage the use of different means at the state and local levels. It is also well designed for national oversight and incentives to ensure that all children are afforded the educational opportunity that is their due as citizens of a constitutional democracy, and that in turn the success of that democracy requires.

CONCLUSION

Civic education in today's democracy is increasingly demanding. There is no simple structural reform that can realistically promise to deliver an excellent education to all children. Democratic citizens have no better alternative than to judge all elementary and secondary schools on their educational merits. Those merits include the teaching of civic skills and virtues—civic education, for short. All citizens have a right and a responsibility to concern themselves with the civic education of all children in schools. Deliberating about the ends and means of mandatory public schooling is more important today than ever before because civic education is so demanding. Like constitutional democracy itself, civic education is an ongoing project of democratic citizens. Nothing is more worthy of our national attention.

PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION AMID DIVERSITY

RICHARD D. KAHLBERG

While elementary and secondary education remain primarily a function of state and local governments as a matter of philosophy, custom, and practice, national political figures are now playing an increasingly prominent role in the debate over public education reform. Is this new involvement merely a matter of good politics, or is there an increasing awareness of the national interest in primary and secondary education as well?

Of the various rationales advanced in support of a national (as opposed to a local) interest in education, among the most basic is the interest in promoting social cohesion and national unity in a country possessing an extremely rich diversity of people by race, ethnicity, and class. Public education has historically played a very important role in providing the glue that holds the people of the United States together. While the public debate has in recent years focused primarily on ways to raise academic achievement — an extremely important goal — schools are also social institutions that help to shape our identity as Americans. As the U.S. increasingly draws its population from every corner of the world, the role the public schools play in keeping the country from balkanizing becomes more and more important.

The first part of this essay lays out a theory about why there is a national interest in elementary and secondary education as a way of assimilating diversity and building American unity. The second part addresses the question of whether in practice our schools are doing all that can or should be done to promote cohesion. Finally, the policy implications that emerge from this discussion are advanced and an argument is made for a restoration of public “common schools,” institutions that educate children from all walks of life under one roof.

EDUCATION AND ASSIMILATION: THE THEORY

Is there a national interest in using public schools to instill in children an American identity and belief in American democratic institutions? While many Americans agree that assimilation is a compelling aim, the goal is by no means without controversy. On the right, some argue that education reforms should stick to a focus on raising achievement and test scores rather than promoting national unity through “social engineering.” On the left, some believe “assimilation” is a dirty word that spells a dull homogeneity at best and means annihilation of diverse minority groups at worst.

In fact, education should be about more than test scores. Of three types of assimilation — political, economic, and cultural, — there is a strong national interest in the first two, but not in the third.

BEYOND TEST SCORES

Today, discussion of schooling is overwhelmingly a discussion about academic achievement. Academic achievement is very important, and today it relates more to life chances than ever before. Raising the achievement and skills of poor children must be the central purpose of major education reform.¹ But there is clearly more to education than boosting SAT scores. Alongside cognitive development, there must be a place for moral and social development. Apart from educating workers, schools educate citizens. UCLA's Amy Stuart Wells has argued that the goal of education must be more than "having American students score higher on standardized tests than Japanese students"; it should also be to create responsible citizens and to prepare "future generations for participation in a fair and just society."² Education, Deborah Meier notes, is "not primarily a private good, a competition over who gets the goodies"; public schools are to "serve democracy," as Jefferson said, to make "wiser citizens."³ Author Amy Gutmann presents an extensive discussion of this argument elsewhere in this volume.

In the present era education must also be about creating Americans. We are now experiencing levels of immigration unknown since the late 19th century.⁴ The question becomes, as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. asks in *The Disuniting of America*: "What happens when people of different ethnic origins, speaking different languages and professing different religions, settle in the same geographic locality and live under the same political sovereignty?" His answer: "Unless a common purpose binds them together, tribal hostilities will drive them apart."⁵ The public schools have always been

understood to be a key source of that common purpose and unity. Public education, wrote U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter in 1948, is "the most powerful agency for promoting cohesion among heterogeneous democratic people...at once the symbol of our democracy and the most pervasive means for promoting our common destiny."⁶

THREE TYPES OF ASSIMILATION: WHAT'S APPROPRIATE, WHAT'S NOT.

Today, however, as Schlesinger notes, the notion of schools as an assimilating force has come under attack from ethnic groups associated with the political left. The melting pot analogy has been replaced with the tossed salad metaphor, where each ingredient remains distinct. The word "integration," with its emphasis on unity, has lost favor as the word "diversity," with its emphasis on difference, has gained ascendance. Is assimilation still a proper goal, or is it a destructive, even racist aim?

There is something to be said for both sides of this argument. Schools must have some unifying effect, or we will be torn asunder; but schools must not completely homogenize the population, or we will lose the rich and valuable diversity of our communities. The key is a balance. Balance involves an important emphasis on political and economic assimilation, while avoiding what might be called cultural assimilation. Where it is highly appropriate and important to assimilate children politically (to believe in constitutional democracy, balancing the will of the majority and respect for minorities), and economically (inculcating values, habits and skills so they can become contributing middle class adults), it is inappropriate to promote cultural assimilation (promoting a religious faith, or a particular taste in music or food). It should not be controversial to assert a national interest in ensuring that schools unify Americans behind shared democratic values. Princeton professors Jennifer

Hochschild and Nathan Scovronik note that common values include “loyalty to the nation, acceptance of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as venerable founding documents, appreciation that in American constitutional rights sometimes trump majority rule and majority rule is supposed to trump intense desire, belief in the rule of law as the proper grounding for a legal system, belief in equal opportunity as the proper grounding for a social system, willingness to adhere to the discipline implied by rotation in office through an electoral system, and so on.”⁷

But political assimilation requires more than the teaching of values. It also requires that elites be taught that each individual does deserve an equal vote, and that the alienated be given hope in the possibility of democratic ideals and instilled with a commitment to country. While “Americanization” took on a negative connotation in the 1920s, the late Barbara Jordan noted the fact that the “word earned a bad reputation when it was stolen by racists and xenophobes does not mean we shouldn’t take it back.”⁸ The Immigration Commission that Jordan chaired until her death defined Americanization as “the cultivation of a shared commitment to the American values of liberty, democracy, and equal opportunity.”⁹

The goal of political assimilation is widely shared by Americans of all ethnic backgrounds. A 1998 survey conducted by Public Agenda found that 80% of Americans in all racial groups said it was “absolutely essential” for schools to teach students that “whatever their ethnic or racial background, they are all part of one nation.” The survey found that Americans also want students to learn “the common history and ideas that tie all Americans together.”¹⁰ Likewise, it should not be controversial to assert a national interest in insuring that schools assimilate the poor economically — giving them the tools to join the middle class as adults — to bet-

ter unify the country. For if the education of certain groups is so inferior that it results in a permanent underclass, that too threatens democracy. As Christopher Lasch noted, earlier in this country’s history, it was understood that “democracy had to rest on a broad distribution of property . . . that extremes of wealth and poverty would be fatal to the democratic experiment.” This was held true not only because it was believed the “mob” might threaten stability, but also because only self-reliant people are likely to participate responsibly in a democracy.¹¹

There is broad agreement among both conservatives and liberals that schools should seek to promote social mobility. The late conservative commentator Edward Banfield wrote: “To say that the school cannot change the class culture is to deny that it can serve what many believe to be its principal purpose.”¹² On the left, the Parliament of Norway acknowledged in 1994 the need for assimilating immigrants as a matter of fairness to them, noting: “Newcomers to a country who are not immersed in its frames of reference often remain outsiders because others cannot take for granted what they know and can do.”¹³ By contrast, cultural assimilation — assimilation of ethnic groups in the sense that they should surrender distinctiveness — is an inappropriate and harmful goal of public policy. The assimilationist model of racial desegregation, which seeks to make blacks more like whites, University of Minnesota law professor John Powell notes, “is one of racial supremacy.”¹⁴ While it is appropriate to seek to eradicate a culture of poverty, or even an anti-democratic culture, it would be very wrong to try to subjugate Black or Latino or Jewish culture. Historically, there has been a dark side to the assimilation ideal. It often involved, for example Protestant-dominated public schools trying to stamp out diversity by using explicitly anti-Catholic textbooks, but today most Americans reject that approach.¹⁵

Of course, some economic and political assimilation may cross over to involve what some will consider cultural assimilation. Language, for example, is a significant component of any culture, but failure to equip students with English language skills will impede their economic advancement and assimilation. The balance struck must expand options for language minority students without denigrating the language that is spoken in the home. Parents who wish to avoid all exposure to the possibility of cultural assimilation have the constitutional right to send their children to private schools. But much of this assimilation occurs outside schools anyway — through television viewing most notably. And most parents welcome the role the public schools have played in promoting political and economic assimilation. Some cultural assimilation will inevitably take place in the public schools as well, but today that assimilation is likely to take place in all directions.

ENSURING THE NATION'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE COMMON SCHOOLS

If there is a national interest in political and economic (but not cultural) assimilation, are these positive forms of assimilation occurring in schools today? The key prerequisite for both political and economic assimilation is what the 19th-Century educator Horace Mann called the “common school,” schools populated by students of different economic, racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

If schools educate well-off and poor, or majority and minority students, separately, they are unlikely to promote the national interest in political and economic assimilation. Teachers can stand in front of the classroom and tell students that all are equal under the law, but the message may fall flat in schools where all students are white and middle class, or all students poor and of color. Horace Mann noted that if the children of laborers attend-

ed different schools from the children of doctors and lawyers, the “children of the less favored class” would be degraded by “the consciousness that they are attending a school unworthy of the patronage of those whom they have been led to regard as the better part of the community.”¹⁶

Economically separate schools are unlikely to teach the poor that they are truly equal members of a democracy, and the wealthy may, if taught separately, come to believe that poorer members of the community are not in fact deserving of an equal role in society’s governance. Charles Peters, editor of the *Washington Monthly*, notes that one of the benefits of growing up in his economically integrated public school is that the better-off children developed a social conscience, viewing low-income students as members of the same larger community. The better-off students also surely benefited educationally from a greater diversity of viewpoints.

Indeed, businesses today spend millions of dollars on “diversity training,” helping employees learn to get along better with others who are different in background. Economically and ethnically diverse schools will better prepare future workers not to assimilate culturally, but to come to tolerate and understand cultural distinctiveness. As Celinda Lake and John Deardourff discovered in their focus group research for CNP, reported elsewhere in this volume, the public perceives that success in the real world requires negotiating diversity. “Most respondents mention diversity and exposure to children from different backgrounds” when identifying what is good about public schools, they reported.

Ethnically separate schools, likewise, can produce black students who think that most whites are members of the KKK or are conspiring to infect black babies with AIDS, or white students who fear black people because their only exposure comes from the nightly news crime report. Such is not a

unified nation. In 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court noted in a school desegregation case:

“If children of different races and economic and social groups have no opportunity to know each other and to live together in school, they cannot be expected to gain the understanding and mutual respect necessary for the cohesion of society.”¹⁷

Certain private schools also emphasize students’ sectarian group identity more than any shared American identity. Sometimes, separate schools consciously promote disunity. According to reporter Thomas Toch, an Afrocentric charter school in Michigan observes African Independence Day, and Malcolm X Remembrance Day, rather than Labor Day, Memorial Day, or Presidents’ Day. The school newsletter says, “The traditional concept of Thanksgiving, like the Fourth of July, really has nothing to do with us and the school day begins with, “I pledge to my African nation. . . .”¹⁸ Another Michigan charter school has an almost entirely Armenian student body and faculty, and the principal keeps a small Armenian flag next to the American flag on her desk.¹⁹

By contrast, economically and ethnically integrated schools have been shown to produce a more unified adult population. In a 1974 school desegregation case, Justice Thurgood Marshall declared, “unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together.”²⁰ The studies support this claim. Students who attend interracial schools are more likely to attend desegregated colleges, to live in integrated neighborhoods and have interracial friendships as adults.²¹

Economically integrated public schools also do a better job of raising the academic achievement of poor students — which translates into greater economic assimilation as students enter the workforce. Low-income students generally do better in pre-

dominantly middle class schools because their middle class peers have high aspirations, the middle class parents are actively involved in the school governance, and the teachers are generally more qualified than those found in high poverty schools. Indeed, studies find that poor children attending middle class schools do better academically than middle class students attending high poverty schools.²²

THE LACK OF ECONOMIC AND RACIAL INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE.

If unity requires integration, the bad news is that American public schools are increasingly segregated by class and race. Residential areas, which form the basis for most school assignment, are becoming more and more economically stratified. Before World War II, John Goodlad notes, “the sons and daughters of mill owners, shop proprietors, professional men, and day laborers attended [school] side by side. School boundaries, reaching out into fields and hills to embrace the pupil population, transcended such socioeconomic clusterings as existed.”²³ Then, with the invention of the automobile, people no longer walked to work and the economically homogenous suburb was born.²⁴

By the 1970s, the black middle class joined in the migration to the suburbs as well, leaving poor blacks increasingly isolated. According to the University of Texas’ Paul Jargowsky, between 1970 and 1990, the number of people living in black ghettos, Latino barrios or white slums grew 92 percent.²⁵ Today, U.S. poverty concentrations are greater than in any other leading industrial democracy. Writes William Julius Wilson, “No European city has experienced the level of concentrated poverty and racial and ethnic segregation that is typical of American metropolises.”²⁶ All in all, about 25% of the nation’s schools now have a majority of students who are poor enough to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals.²⁷

For a while, increasing residential poverty rates were offset by strides in racial school desegregation, which often had the effect of desegregating schools by class as well as race. But today, efforts at school desegregation under *Brown v. Board of Education* are winding down, and now even the voluntary use of race to create diversity in schools is being questioned by the courts.²⁸ In 1999, Gary Orfield of the Harvard Desegregation Project reported that the percentage of black students attending predominantly minority schools had increased from 63% in 1980-81, to nearly 69% in 1996-97.²⁹

PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Two major public policy implications flow from the national interest in political and economic assimilation. First, nationally-driven efforts should be made to promote school integration, particularly integration by socioeconomic status. Second, national government should support public education and resist a greater reliance on private school vouchers.

INTEGRATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS BY CLASS AND RACE

A new national public policy to promote economic integration of schools explicitly is the single most effective educational strategy for fostering greater national unity. As efforts to desegregate schools by race are curtailed by the courts, some communities are moving directly to a consideration of socioeconomic status as a way to indirectly promote racial school integration without running afoul of the Constitution. (While racial classifications are generally disfavored and require a compelling justification, considering socioeconomic status in student assignment is perfectly legal.) Specifically, we should integrate the 25% of schools with majority low-income populations and the other 75% of schools so that 100% of schools have a majority of students who are middle-class (defined as too well-off to be eligible for free or reduced-price lunch).

Economic integration will clearly produce a lot of racial integration as well. If there is a strong overlap between race and poverty in the United States, there is an even stronger correlation between race and concentrated poverty. While only 5% of predominantly white schools have high poverty rates, more than 80% of predominantly African American and Latino schools are high poverty.³⁰ In fact, schools with 90-100% black and Hispanic representation are 14 times more likely to be majority poor than schools which are 90% or more white.³¹ At the same time, because socioeconomic integration is race-neutral, it avoids not only the legal difficulties but also the potentially balkanizing effects of using race per se.

Socioeconomic integration can be achieved by better balancing the number of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch in each school. Because neighborhoods are economically stratified, the old common school ideal should be married with the new trend toward public school choice. Under a system known as “controlled choice,” students and families choose from a number of specialty schools within a given geographic region—one emphasizing the arts, another computers, for example. Choices are honored by the school system with an eye to promoting economic integration.

Because local jurisdictions often have a parochial interest in building walls between wealthy and nonwealthy, promoting the national goal of greater unity and integration by race and class will take national efforts. Clearly, middle class schools will need an incentive to take in moderate numbers of low-income children. In programmatic terms, the federal government could sponsor a demonstration program in which compensatory education funds from Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act travel with low-income children to their new-middle class public schools.

This experiment could help determine how much extra money is needed to provide middle-class schools with a sufficient incentive to integrate economically. Alternatively, the federal government could make the receipt of federal funds contingent upon a state's taking steps to promote public school choice and economic integration. In the 1970s, this approach was used with great effect to desegregate public schools by race in the South.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS VS. VOUCHERS FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

In theory, because publicly funded vouchers for private schools break the iron lock between economically segregated neighborhoods and school assignment, they could promote greater socioeconomic integration. Indeed, in the 1960s, some liberals proposed structuring voucher schemes in a way that encourages integration, either by providing incentives for middle-class private schools to take poor students or by requiring schools benefiting from vouchers to take a certain percentage of students who are either low income or minority.

But the vast majority of voucher schemes will further separate students by socioeconomic status and are likely to undercut the goal of promoting national unity through education. In *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), the U.S. Supreme Court recognized “public education as the most vital civic institution for the preservation of a democratic system of government” (emphasis supplied).³² Private schools are unlikely to perform the democracy-promoting or national-unification functions as well as public schools for three reasons.

First, the use of private school vouchers is likely to result in greater student stratification by economic status. Studies of vouchers in Sweden and Chile have found that the programs resulted in better-off students fleeing to private schools with the poor and ethnic minorities further concentrated in pub-

lic schools.³³ The fundamental flaw of most voucher plans in the United States is that they give choice not to parents, but to private schools that choose which students to accept. Schools will naturally cream the most motivated families and the easiest children to educate, leaving the poor and troubled students behind. When voucher schemes have tried to get around the creaming issue by requiring private schools to accept students by lottery, the number of schools expressing interest in participating has been very small.³⁴

Second, private school voucher plans make unification more difficult because many private schools are explicitly set up to emphasize religious, ethnic, or racial differences. In the Netherlands, for example, vouchers were found to have “reinforced the religious segmentation within society.”³⁵ Albert Shanker the late president of the American Federation of Teachers, noted that while public schools “take all comers,” with vouchers “you’ll end up with kids of different religions, nationalities and languages going off to different schools to maintain their separateness, and I think we’d have a terrible social price to pay for it. This type of “market segmentation” may be a desirable way to differentiate consumer products for sale to a diverse population, but with schools the appeal to non-education related characteristics of competing schools will only serve to fragment rather than to unify the community and ultimately the nation. As Shanker argued, “Now, when the ties that bind us seem especially fragile, shouldn’t we be working to strengthen [the Common School] ideal instead of abandoning it?”³⁶

Third, private schools cannot be required to teach a curriculum that promotes unity or democracy. The Supreme Court noted in the case of *Ambach v. Norwick* that public schools are responsible for “inculcating [the] fundamental values necessary to the maintenance of a democratic political system.”³⁷ By contrast, private schools can teach a

broad range of values, which can include, for example, racial supremacy, black separatism, Marxism or Naziism. And because they are private, such schools do not have to respect Constitutional rights, much less teach them. In Milwaukee, a child who gave a speech criticizing her private school for racism was suspended and was told by the courts that she had no recourse because private schools are not governed by the Constitution.³⁸

The central problem with vouchers, columnist Michael Kelly notes, is that, "A pluralistic society cannot sustain a scheme in which the citizenry pays for a school but has no influence over how the school is run."³⁹ Kelly declared, "Public money is shared money, and it is to be used for the furtherance of shared values, in the interests of e pluribus unum." The problem with vouchers (and some charter schools) is that, "They take from the pluribus to destroy the unum."⁴⁰

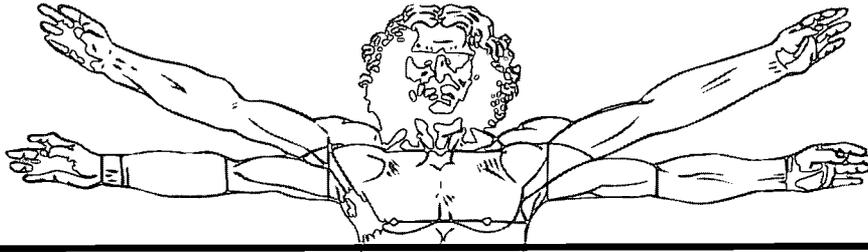
CONCLUSION

Defending public education, and promoting integrated common schools, will take tremendous efforts. Because of the tradition of local education control in the United States, attempts to assert the national interest in cohesion will be met with resistance. But it is important to remember that an earlier effort to promote a national interest in the education of poor children - the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 - passed 100 years after the first piece of legislation calling for federal aid to education was introduced. Attempts in 50 straight congressional sessions ended in failure. Today, ESEA is a widely supported fixture in our educational landscape. If the controversial notion that we should spend extra resources on poor children is now accepted, should not the strong national interest in preserving unity and cohesion take a similar place?

ENDNOTES

- ¹ In a forthcoming book on K-12 public education reform, I argue that the central reason for promoting a policy of economically integrated common schools is that they will promote the achievement and life chances of poor kids. My secondary argument — outlined in this chapter — is that economically integrated schools promote social cohesion and harmony.
- ² Amy Stuart Wells, *Time to Choose: America at the Crossroads of School Choice Policy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 4.
- ³ Deborah Meier, Letter to Author, June 17, 1998, p. 3.
- ⁴ Carol Ascher, Norm Fruchter, and Robert Berne (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1996), p. 99.
- ⁵ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991) p. 10.
- ⁶ *McCullom v. Board of Education*, 333 U.S. 203, 216 and 231 (1948) (Frankfurter, J. concurring).
- ⁷ Jennifer L. Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, "One, Some and Many: The Problems of Democracy in Education Policy," July 14, 1998 draft, p. 8.
- ⁸ U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, *Becoming an American: Immigration and Immigrant Policy*, (Final Report), September 1997, p. 26 (quoting speech from Barbara Jordan.)
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ David Broder, "The Unity Among Us," *Washington Post*, November 25, 1998, p. A21 (reporting findings of Public Agenda report).
- ¹¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995) p. 7.
- ¹² Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nation and the Future of our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968, 1970), p. 140.
- ¹³ Quoted in E.D. Hirsch, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (New York: Doubleday, 1996) pp. 18-19.
- ¹⁴ John Powell, "Living and Learning: Linking Housing and Education," *Minnesota Law Review* 80 (1996), pp. 775-776.
- ¹⁵ See Wells, *Time to Choose*, p. 169. See also David Tyack, "Choice Options," *American Prospect*, January-February 1999, p. 63 (noting common schools imposed the reading of the Protestant King James Bible on Catholics and non-Christians).

- ¹⁶ See Mann, quoted in Charles S. Clark, "Public, but not common, schools," *St. Petersburg Times*, August 18, 1996, 1D (reprinted from *CQ Researcher*).
- ¹⁷ *Sheff v. O'Neill*, 678 A.2d 1267, 1285 (Conn. 1996).
- ¹⁸ See Thomas, Toch, "The New Education Bazaar," *U.S. News and World Report*, April 27, 1998, p. 46.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717, 783 (1974) (Marshall, J., dissenting).
- ²¹ Jomills Braddock, Robert Crain and James McPartland, "A Long Term View of School Desegregation," *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 1984, p. 260; Derek Bok, *The State of the Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 185; James S. Liebman, "Desegregating Politics: 'All-Out' School Desegregation Explained," *Columbia Law Review*, 90 (October 1990), pp.1626-1627; and Nancy A. Denton, "The Persistence of Segregation," *Minnesota Law Review*, 80 (April 1996), pp. 822-823.
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- ²³ John I. Goodlad, "Desegregating The Integrated School," in U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial Isolation In the Public Schools*, Vol.2, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1967), p. 260.
- ²⁴ Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 214.
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- ²⁶ William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Knopf, 1996), p. 149.
- ²⁷ U.S. Department of Education, *The Distribution of Chapter 1 Services* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1992) p. 8.
- ²⁸ See, e.g., cases in Montgomery County, Maryland; Arlington, Virginia; and Boston, Massachusetts.
- ²⁹ Gary Orfield and John Yun, *Resegregation in American Schools*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Project on School Desegregation), June 1999, p. 13 (Table 9).
- ³⁰ Gary Orfield et al, *Deepening Segregation in American Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Project on School Desegregation, April 5, 1997) p. 2.
- ³¹ Gary Orfield and Susan Eaton, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: The New Press, 1996), p. 55.
- ³² *Abingdon School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 230 (1963).
- ³³ Martin Carnoy, "National Voucher Plans in Chile and Sweden: Did Privatization Reforms Make for Better Education?" *Comparative Education Review*, August 1998, pp. 309-337; Gary Miron, "Free Choice and Vouchers Transform Schools," *Educational Leadership*, October 1996, p. 79.
- ³⁴ Gordon MacInnes, *Kids Who Pick the Wrong Parents and Other Victims of Voucher Schemes*, mimeo (NY: The Century Foundation, 1999); William Raspberry.
- ³⁵ Michael Kremer, *Education Reform*, (Draft, August 19, 1998) p. 23.
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- ³⁷ *Ambach v. Norwick*, 441 U.S. 68, 77 (1979).
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PART II

PUBLIC VIEWS ABOUT THE NATION'S SCHOOLS

REPORT ON FINDINGS FROM SEVEN FOCUS GROUPS

Lake Snell Perry & Associates conducted focus groups for the Center for National Policy in August 1999 among middle-income voters in two cities. A bipartisan team of nationally-known pollsters led by Celinda Lake and John Deardourff observed the groups, which convened in Richmond, Virginia, and in Oak Park, Illinois, a close-in suburb of Chicago. Each session consisted of between 8 and 10 participants and lasted between two and three hours.

The purpose of the research was to discuss with voters how they think their own families and the nation are doing now and will be doing in the future, to discuss the priorities they have for themselves, to explore voters' perceptions of the economy and education, and to gauge what policies they believe would bring improvements in these arenas.

All participants described themselves as either independent, weakly Democratic or weakly Republican voters. In Richmond the focus groups included one group of white non-college educated women, one group of white college educated men, and one group of African-American non-college educated voters. In the Chicago area the groups consisted of one group of African-American and Hispanic non-college educated

women, two groups of white non-college educated men, and one group of white college educated women. The groups included parents of small and grown children and non-parents. Participants had experience with public schools and with non-public schools themselves, or as parents.

The following pages contain edited excerpts from the report on these focus groups prepared by Lake Snell Perry & Associates.

* * *

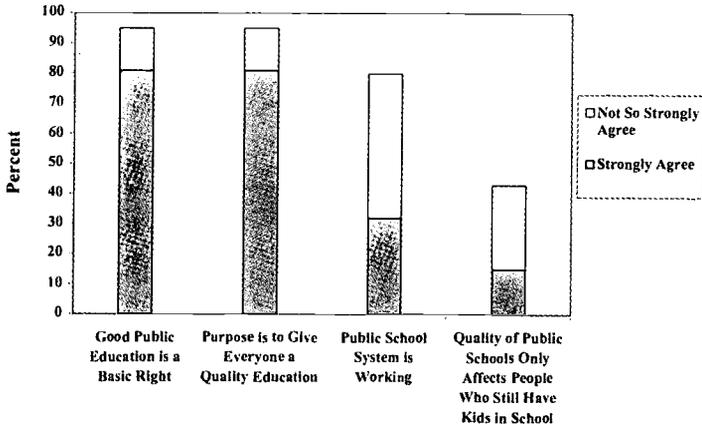
In addition to the focus group report excerpts, the following section contains a number of charts displaying findings from a national poll of public school parents. The poll was conducted in October 1999 by Lake Snell Perry & Associates for the American Association of School Administrators in partnership with the Great American Life Insurance Company.

The data presented here were excerpted with the permission of AASA. They serve to reinforce and expand on a number of the key focus group findings gathered several months prior to the poll.

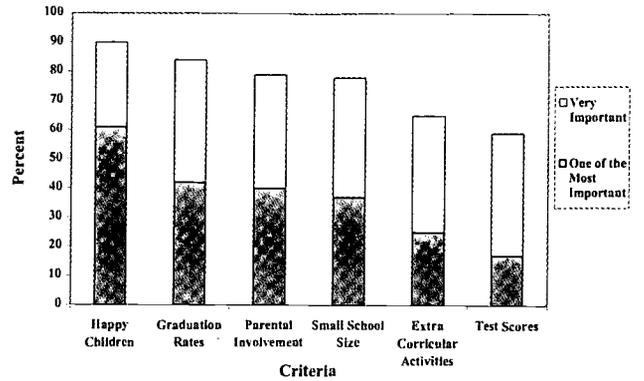
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PASSING THE TEST

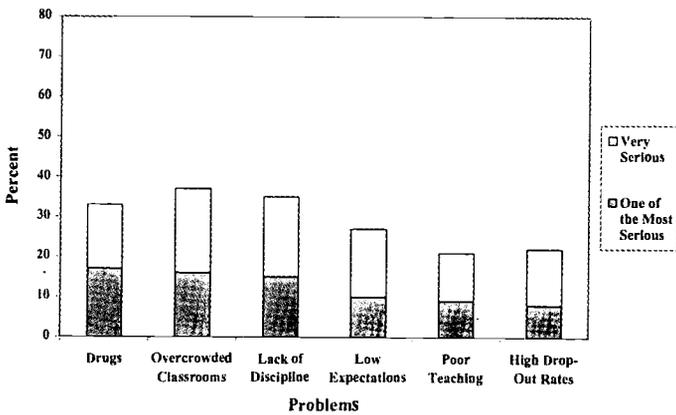
I. Parents Assess Public Education



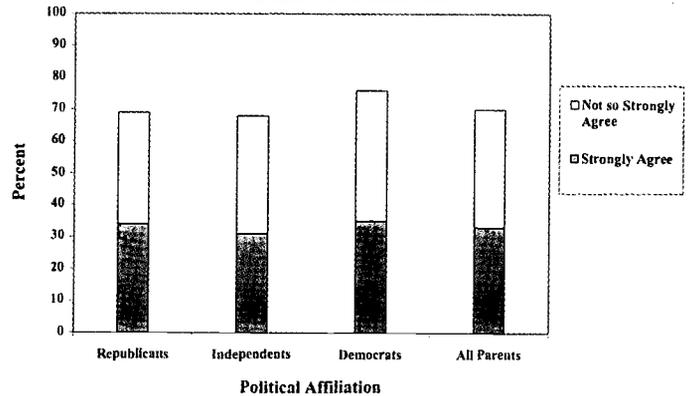
II. How Parents Assess Quality of Schools



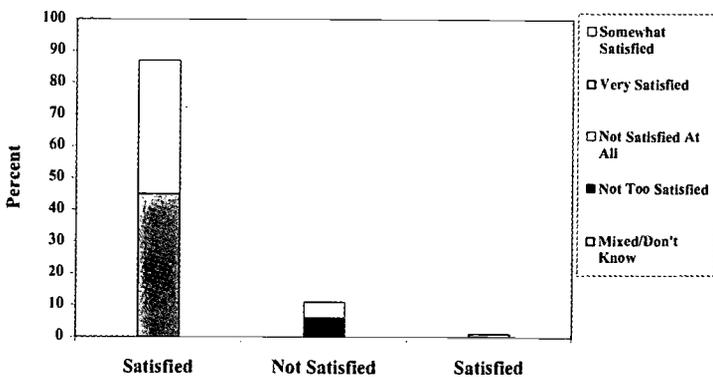
III. The Problems Parents See With Schools



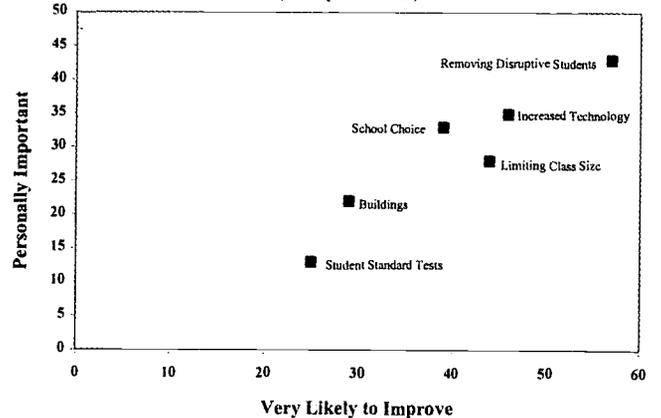
IV. Would Parents Pay More in Taxes for Education?



V. Parents' Satisfaction With The Schools Their Children Attend



VI. What Parents Think Will Improve Public Schools (Examples/Percent)



Despite a record economy, many middle-of-the-road voters are remarkably ambivalent and negative towards what is happening in the country today, saying they are “disappointed,” “discouraged” and “upset” when asked to fill in the blank, “I’m feeling _____ about the way things are going in the country these days.” Many mention their disgust with the political system. Once they get beyond their feelings towards politics, they talk about their fear for their children and violence in schools.

“When you first asked that first question [asking how things are going in the country today] I immediately thought that I feel great, [because] the economy is good, but then there is always this black cloud hanging over us. No matter how well things are going that way, you know, our kids, what’s happening to our kids?”

(Chicago-area woman)

There is a strong general consensus, however, that the one thing going right with America today is the economy. These voters are enthusiastic about the state of the economy and feel we are currently riding an economic high. Many do worry that the prosperity has not eased families’ struggles to make ends meet. The macro economy and jobs are good, but individual family economics can still be tough. There is an economic barometer by which voters measure their feelings. For people who have positive feelings about the country, many say it is because the economy is going well.

“I mean the economy’s doing good. Employment is there. Everybody’s working. Everybody seems to be doing all right. I think twenty, thirty years from now you’re just going to see a ridiculous amount of millionaires with the stuff people know about.”

(Chicago-area man)

“Good as far as the economy’s concerned. The stock market is going up. Unemployment is pretty much down.”

(Chicago-area man)

When voters think about the winners in today’s economy, many mention the “people that already have money,” and some feel the winners are people who work hard or who want to work. They say the losers are “the young people starting out today,” the poor ones, “the people who make enough to support themselves and want to get a little bit further.”

Throughout these groups, voters’ top concerns for others are about seniors and children. They are unusually protective and sympathetic about seniors. They tend to be both concerned about and fearful of children but most of their priorities center around children – making sure they have a good education, getting their kids through school, instilling morality in children, having mothers stay at home, having a better life than they did, and wanting their children to be happy in their lives.

LOOKING AT EDUCATION

These voters worry about a broad and diffuse range of issues around education — lack of discipline, the quality of the teachers, the quality of education, parental involvement, cost of higher education, out-of-date texts, the safety of the school buildings, and violence.

“The problem with the schools right now is that kids are controlling the schools. I think somebody is going to have to take the strong hand and take back the schools from the kids.”

(Richmond man)

Discipline in the schools is a big worry to voters. Almost all groups touch on this problem. They say teachers are scared of the children which makes them unable to discipline the children.

An African-American woman said, “The teachers just cannot discipline kids. You’ve got problem kids and the teacher — they will not allow you — you cannot touch them. You can’t even make them get out of your class because somebody is causing a disturbance because if you touch them, the teacher is in trouble.” A Chicago woman said, “The teachers and the parents need to be able to say something to the children, like if they’re doing something wrong. The teachers shouldn’t have to walk on egg shells because of like what you were saying about the parent going and scolding the teacher for not giving Johnny an ‘A’ for him failing his test.” They believe the solution to discipline problems cannot just come from the schools, but must also come from the parents as well.

Parental involvement is a concern to participants. They worry that parents are not as involved in their children’s education as they need to be. They believe if more parents take an active interest in their child’s schooling then children would be more interested and willing to achieve more. A Richmond man observed, “The kids that excel are the ones the parents work with. The problem in public school is so many parents don’t participate in their kid’s lives.” Some say they would like to require parental involvement, but they worry how this would be operationalized. They say some parents’ schedules do not always allow for extensive involvement.

EDUCATION LINKED TO ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Education is also an economic issue for these voters. They see the attainment of a quality education as inextricably linked to the economy. A Chicago woman said, “You can always educate the mind and the more education you have the better off you will be no matter what time you’re in.” Many feel that in today’s world there is no way to get ahead without a college degree. They say a high school diploma is

obsolete and that people who “do not have education are not going to make it. They are not going to have the opportunity to get the good jobs.”

“If you give the kids the opportunity to get a good education who knows where they can go. I mean if you deprive the education of the kids well then they’re going to stay ignorant.”

(Chicago-area man)

As noted, in spite of the strong positive consensus about the economy, many participants mentioned that individual families are still struggling and that money is still a problem, and this, in turn, is seen as linked to concerns about what is happening to children.

A number of participants said they are worried that although people have more money, many families have to work two jobs and because of this children are on the losing end. A Richmond woman said, “I can go back to what is going wrong because there are so many double income—both man and wife are working. That can be where the kids are being lost.”

THE GOOD AND THE BAD ABOUT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Participants volunteered support for the institution of public education. These voters think it is important to have good public schools because many parents cannot afford to send their children to private school. They also say it is important because public schools are where the majority of students go to be educated and they feel “you need to have a choice if you don’t want to send your children to a private school.”

“It’s the basis for free society to have an educated population to make decisions to be able to read the ballot.”

(Chicago-area woman)

When they think about what is good about public schools, most respondents mention diversity and the exposure to children from different backgrounds. They like the aspect that it costs them nothing to send their children to public schools, although several mention the increasing amount of fees they have to pay. They also mention variety in the curriculum and the extracurricular opportunities available to students such as sports, reading clubs, foreign language clubs, etc.

When they think about the job schools are doing to prepare children for the real world, voters are uncertain how to answer. They say in some aspects, like computers and technology, schools are doing a good job, but in teaching the basics, like reading and writing, they are failing. An African-American woman said, “A lot of people finish school and graduate now and they still can’t read. They still can’t write. They still can’t perform menial tasks on a job, so I don’t think that is preparing them.” Others feel they are being prepared because of the introduction of technology into the classroom. Some also say schools are preparing children better because of the introduction of courses which teach them how to prepare their tax returns and other practical skills they need to know.

“I think we do a really good job of teaching the very top kids and an okay job of teaching the very bottom kids, the kids that really have some problems and have some special programs. But the vast majority I think that we are doing a pretty poor job. So we’re doing an okay job at the extremes.”

(Richmond man)

There is concern surrounding statewide testing which varies with state experience and publicity. In Virginia participants may have been more focused on tests because of their recent implementation.

But parents in both locations worry standardized tests are not accomplishing what they set out to do; instead, they feel teachers are teaching to the test. As one African-American mother wrote, “The SOL [Standards of Learning] , have no bearing on knowledge obtained. Kids must pass a test on things not being taught. Some schools do nothing but drill kids on SOL and the overall objective of education is lost.” A white college-educated father complained, “The schools are having to teach to a test and not to the subject matter so the students understand the concept.”

“They teach them what’s on the standardized tests. They prepare them for those tests and the scores go up.”

(Chicago-area man)

They also worry about the quality of teachers today, as well as the quality of education students receive. An African-American woman remarked, “A lot of teachers aren’t as dedicated as they used to be to the profession.” A Richmond man said, “There are a lot of teachers who can teach, but there are teachers who can’t teach.”

PUBLIC SCHOOL VS. PRIVATE SCHOOL

When participants measure public schools against private schools, they credit private schools with having some important advantages. They think the class sizes are smaller in private school, there is more discipline, they are safer, and religion can be taught. A few women in the Chicago area feel private schools have more parental involvement and that it is required. A Chicago-area white college educated woman remarked, “They [private schools] can spend less time maintaining control and discipline problems of a certain type.” A Chicago-area man agreed, “They have higher standards for discipline for the children than the public schools.”

A downside to private schools, volunteered by a number of participants, is that they are seen as isolating the children and not exposing them to people different from themselves. A Chicago-area woman observed, "I lived in the South for a while and I found that [private school] was a way that parents would use as an excuse to segregate their kids." An African-American woman explained, "I personally think kids need to see what the world is really all about, the good and the bad. You can't shield your child because you are going to hurt him in the end." Some also mention the greater resources and opportunities in higher grades in public schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC ACTION

Participants name numerous items which they think can improve our schools. They list "make the parents responsible for the kids' behavior," teach the basics, parental involvement, prayer in school, up-to-date facilities, discipline, increased pay for teachers, standards for teachers, limit classroom size, up-to-date texts, require uniforms, more money to the schools that have less to start with, and more accountability for administrators. Noticeably, their volunteered agenda does not include much support around vouchers or moving to private schools.

When given a list of items to improve schools, all groups, except white non-college educated men, place more discipline in their top tier. African Americans also list prayer in school as what they think would most improve our schools, while the other groups say "teaching the basics." White women also place zero tolerance for guns in school high on their lists, while white non-college men include smaller class size and tougher standards for students. Parental involvement ranks high among most groups; white non-college men put it at the top of their list.

Participants unanimously agree that longer school days and mandatory summer school will not do much to improve the quality of education. College-educated men are less than enthusiastic about allowing parents the choice of where to send their children. White college-educated women believe prayer in school will not help improve our children's education, while white non-college men include requiring foreign language as a negative. Some feel a longer school year, as opposed to longer school days, may be one way to improve schools.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD SCHOOLS FOR ALL

Participants believe we cannot function without an educated populace. A Chicago-area man took a more personal stance: "Who's working to pay the Social Security for your retirement? If they're not educated they're not working. If they're not working, they're not funding. Not funding the economy." Public schools and the education they provide are of paramount functional importance to these participants. They see education as the one place where we can and should be equal. They would ensure a "basic" level of education in funding and quality for every child in America.

Participants also recognize the inequities among school districts as a problem with the way education is funded in communities today. They realize that some students are in school districts with more money and better schools because of their financial base, while others are in substandard schools because the economic base of their community is less

Top-tier Concepts

"Good public schools are important because they are open to all Americans and make us one nation. They teach shared American values and expose children to people different from themselves. If we do

not fix the problems in our public schools, there will be no system of community schools that are free and open to students of all backgrounds and abilities.”

“Equality of opportunity is central to the American way of life. We should not abandon our poor and minority children to substandard schools as the job market becomes increasingly technical and education based. By improving our public schools we are doing something towards giving all of America’s kids an equal start.”

“Unfortunately, there is a close connection between the economic status of a community and the quality of its public schooling. It is not fair for kids in some places to have better schools just because their parents have more money. We need to make sure all of our schools receive the necessary funding to provide a good education to all of our children.”

They would like to see more funding for education and if possible more equalization, but they do not want to just throw money at the problem. A Chicago-area woman wrote, “Our country is the land of opportunity, yet in this time there is not equal opportunity for every child in terms of education. Equal funding is necessary to equalize education.” Many would like to see schools receive equal funding, but realize this is a difficult undertaking. Men in particular do not think equalization can be achieved because if someone pays more in property taxes, then they want that money to stay in their communities for their schools, not sent to another school district.

RESPONSIBILITY AMONG LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS

When thinking about where the responsibility lies for improving our schools, many say “everyone,” specifically including parents and non-parents, all

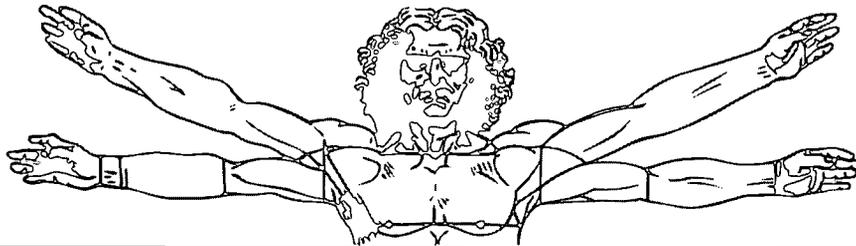
levels of government, and school boards. Some also mention business because participants believe business has a vested interest in the quality of the future workforce. However, it is noticeable that less of a role was articulated for business than we saw during the Bush years. A Richmond man felt that education “should truly be handled at the state/local level. They are more in touch with the needs, wants, desires, of those schools.” A Chicago-area man asserted, “The problem with state and national is they’re a little too distant. What works great down in one part of the state doesn’t work in another. Or the national government, what works great in Arkansas isn’t necessarily going to work in Colorado.”

Many have an easier time articulating and focusing on a state and local role than a national role. When they think about the role of the federal government respondents say it is to regulate and to fund. They do see the federal government guaranteeing equal access to education, especially if the state or local government is not providing this access. Some also think the federal government should set national standards for what children should be learning. A Richmond man commented, “Something of this importance where there is such a diversity throughout the country that there should be some federal control in this.” Another man continued, “I wouldn’t mind seeing some minimum federal standards involved. Then rewarding the states, depending upon their degree of excelling those standards so there is incentive built into this.”

“Education should be the national focus. An educated population will be able to develop the strongest defense, preserve a booming economy, effectively plan for retirement and future expenses and be most tolerant to differences.”

(Richmond man)

* * *



PART III

THE FEDERAL ROLE IN ACHIEVING GOOD SCHOOLS FOR ALL

THE TIME HAS COME: A FEDERAL GUARANTEE OF ADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

KALMAN R. HETTLEMAN

Most Americans would agree, in principle, that the nation's public schools should provide equal educational opportunity. But after that, the consensus implodes. What does equal educational opportunity mean in public elementary and secondary education? What will enable disadvantaged children to meet academic standards that keep rising? What instructional resources are necessary, and what do they cost? And how is responsibility to be apportioned among federal, state and local governments?

This essay explores these issues. It begins by describing how the compelling national interest in a high quality education for all students has not been translated into an enforceable civil right under the U.S. Constitution and other federal laws. A national problem does not require a federal solution. But states have fallen short, and "savage inequalities"¹ persist. Disparities in instructional resources and results are severe both among the states and among school districts within individual states. The history and dynamics of U.S. federalism leave little doubt that the guarantee of adequate educational opportunity for all of America's children is imperative and will necessarily involve a larger federal role.

Adequacy has replaced equality as the defining standard of equal educational opportunity. Equality – defined in terms of inputs such as per pupil expenditures – can be achieved at low levels of academic achievement. But today, in an era of technological revolution and global competition, a concept of equal educational opportunity that is not tied to high-level academic performance is not nearly good enough. All students must have a meaningful opportunity to meet the rigorous, high-stakes performance standards that states have imposed. The denial of an adequate education can do irreparable damage to a child's life chances. An adequate educational opportunity ensures that poor and other disadvantaged students have access to the more-than-equal instructional resources that will enable them to attain such "world class" standards.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, a federal guarantee of adequate opportunity is well within political and fiscal reach. The federal role has progressively expanded in recent years, and public opinion is strongly supportive. Public support for the guarantee will grow because federal aid to fulfill it – such as revenue-sharing and broad compensatory education grants – can be designed to preserve state and local control.

THE NATIONAL INTEREST IN ADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Today, the national interest in adequate educational opportunity has taken on new meaning and urgency. But it has roots throughout American history in the frequent national crusades to reform public education. In 1923 the U.S. Supreme Court stated that the “American people have always regarded education and [the] acquisition of knowledge as matters of supreme importance.”² As author Milton Goldberg reminds us at the beginning of this volume, in the 1980s, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk*, famously warned: “[T]he educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.”³

There are political, economic and social reasons why education is so vital to the nation’s future. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court pointed out that education “is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities. It is the very foundation of good citizenship.”⁴ Amy Gutmann asserts that “inequalities in the distribution of education goods can be justified if, but only if, they do not deprive any child of the ability to participate effectively in the democratic process.”⁵

One can argue that a minimal education will suffice for rudimentary political participation (for example, voting) and low-wage employment. But acquiring basic literacy is not sufficient to engage effectively in the global marketplace or in civic involvement. These days, it is in the economic realm where the national interest in adequate, rather than just superficially equal, educational opportunity is most apparent. The business community has been leading the charge for academic standards that require mastery of the higher-order content and cognitive skills demanded in a rapidly

innovating economy. The new generation of state performance standards attempts to do this; the standards raise the bar from minimal to high levels of competency. For disadvantaged students in particular, the acquisition of such high-level skills is indispensable. As the transition to a knowledge-based workplace accelerates, there are few decent-paying jobs for unskilled workers, and the income gap between workers with college and high school degrees is growing.⁶

Moreover, adequate educational opportunity is more than a bottom-line calculation. It is a moral and social imperative. The Supreme Court has declared that “education has a fundamental role in maintaining the fabric of our society.”⁷ The losers in school (and in the work place) are alienated from the larger society, creating the kind of inferiority that the *Brown* decision said “may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”⁸ As the economic and social inequality gap grows between the minimally educated and the well-educated, social order is likely to suffer.

For all these reasons, the nation has placed education – and progressively the concept of adequacy – at the top of its priorities. Reflecting education’s “supreme importance,” local, state and federal funding for elementary and secondary public schools is over \$300 billion annually, placing education second only to national defense in total governmental expenditures.⁹

THE LACK OF AN ENFORCEABLE CIVIL RIGHT UNDER THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

Still, the most compelling national interest in providing all students with adequate educational opportunity does not necessarily give rise to an individual civil right to it. The U.S. Constitution provides less equal protection than commonly thought. In *Brown*, equal educational opportunity

was limited to freedom from discrimination on the basis of race in access to public schools. But discrimination in the quality of education on the basis of economic class was not prohibited, as the Supreme Court decided in 1973 in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*.¹⁰ By a 5-4 vote, the justices held that states were not mandated to remedy the huge disparities in wealth among school districts that resulted in large differences in per pupil education spending. Equal protection did not – at least under the federal constitution – require children in poor districts to receive more than a “basic minimal” education. The Court recognized the national interest in public education but said relief must come from the states. The U.S. Constitution contains no explicit right to education, but every state constitution does.¹¹

The dismal record of the states in providing equal protection to the poor and minorities has prompted some critics to label the *Rodriguez* ruling “the *Dred Scott* decision for the underclass.”¹² It seems distinctly possible that the justices in the *Rodriguez* case would have reached a different result if Texas two decades ago had introduced the same high-level, high-stakes performance standards that it has today. Justice Powell, writing for the majority, was satisfied that students received the “basic minimal skills required for the enjoyment of the rights of speech and of full participation in the political process.”¹³ In *Rodriguez* no claim was made similar to the argument currently being made in a new round of litigation in Texas and other state courts: that equal protection requires that students receive an adequate, high-quality education – far above basic and minimal – that will enable them to pass demanding state performance tests and avoid the negative consequences of failure, such as being denied a high school diploma.

THE STATE ROAD FROM EQUITY TO ADEQUACY

Since the Supreme Court’s decision in the *Rodriguez* case, the struggle to remedy inequalities has been fought mainly in state courts and legislatures. Public elementary and secondary schools are funded primarily by state and local revenues.¹⁴ But local revenue depends upon local property wealth, leading to huge disparities in spending between districts and a flood of litigation in state courts. Suits have been filed over the past three decades in more than 40 states alleging that states have a duty – under either the equal protection or right-to-education clauses in their constitutions — to equalize the fiscal capacity of districts. Plaintiffs have prevailed in less than half the cases, and even court victories have been stymied by legislative defiance.¹⁵

However, since 1989 a large majority of state courts have decided in favor of school finance reformers. The tide has turned as a result of a change in legal strategy. Education advocates have shifted away from a focus on “equity” (or equality) under equal protection clauses, and instead emphasize “adequacy” under state right-to-education clauses. Adequacy is not uniformly defined, but it commonly implies access to instructional resources that will provide all students with the opportunity to meet state performance standards.¹⁶ More than equity or equality in funding is required. For example, some big city districts have per pupil spending that is nearly equal to surrounding suburban schools; in these districts adequacy entails unequal spending that responds to the additional learning needs of students living in concentrated urban poverty.

THE LINK BETWEEN ADEQUACY AND STANDARDS-BASED REFORM

The concept of adequacy – as the benchmark of equal educational opportunity – has gained a firm foothold.¹⁷ To a large extent, this is because it can be defined and its costs estimated through alignment with state academic standards. The standards-based movement has dominated school reform for the past decade.¹⁸ State standards prescribe content (what should students know?) and levels of performance (have they learned it?). Adequacy is linked because it prescribes the instructional resources that will enable students to meet the performance standards (have students had an adequate opportunity to learn?). The linkage can not be ignored since there are high stakes consequences for failure to attain the performance standards.

In the early stages of standards-based reform, nearly half the states passed “academic bankruptcy” laws to allow takeovers of entire districts or “reconstitution” of individual schools that perform poorly.¹⁹ Many large districts have been fully or substantially taken over. Now, despite modest or meager progress in student achievement (opinions differ, as explored later), states are raising the bar and stakes even higher. Most states are replacing high school graduation exams pegged to minimal proficiency with a new generation of much more rigorous tests.²⁰ Consequences now attach to individual students, who can be denied high school diplomas if they fail the tests. The failure to offer adequate instruction thus imposes a potentially severe economic penalty on students without diplomas, who will be denied access to higher education and well-paying jobs.

In the face of such high stakes reliance on testing, a backlash is erupting. State tests are being attacked as invalid, racially biased, intrusions on local control and forcing teachers to “teach only to the tests.”²¹ Yet, these objections pale in comparison to the

near-panic setting in among elected officials, educators and child advocates who fear alarming numbers of at-risk students will fail to graduate from high school unless vast improvements in achievement occur. In several states, notably Texas, a new round of litigation claims the tests violate civil rights laws because of their disproportionate adverse impact on minorities.²² Several states have already eliminated, delayed or watered down the high school exam requirements. And many states are beginning to fund expensive instructional interventions – such as preschool programs, smaller class size and summer school – that are regarded as the best ways to boost student test scores.

Ironically, the “does money matter?” controversy has come near full circle. The crusade for higher standards after a *A Nation At Risk* coincided with rising political sentiment – part of the conservative ascendancy of the late 1980s and early 1990s – that too much money was already being spent on public schools.²³ This view prevailed at the celebrated first education summit in 1989, which marked the onset of the standards movement. A decade ago business leaders and governors saw higher standards as re-engineering school reform from inputs (more money) to outputs (measurable academic outcomes). The theory was that rigorous content and performance standards would raise expectations and put schools and teachers on the hot spot. Teachers would teach to the tests and, presto, academic scores would soar. Warnings that “opportunity to learn” standards – prescribing the resources needed by students to achieve the high standards – were equally necessary were dismissed.²⁴

Since then, however, the facts on the ground have changed dramatically. The standards movement has prevailed, but, as detailed later, the levitational magic that its proponents predicted has not materialized. There is now wide acceptance that

standards alone can not do the trick. After the most recent education summit in 1999, Hugh Price, president of the National Urban League and a participant, observed that this was the first time that those who tried to discuss more help for disadvantaged children beyond just content and performance standards were not “ruled out of order.”²⁵

HOW MUCH DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS OF THE ADEQUACY CONCEPT?

Several methodologies have surfaced in the courts and legislative studies for defining and estimating the costs of the instructional components of adequacy. The methods vary considerably, but in a comparative analysis commissioned by the National Research Council, James W. Guthrie and Richard Rothstein make a persuasive case for the “professional judgment” model that relies primarily on the expert opinions of public school practitioners.²⁶

This professional judgment method should be incorporated in a three-tier adequacy structure patterned after several decisions of the New Jersey Supreme Court in that state’s landmark case on adequacy, *Abbott v. Burke*.²⁷ The first tier is the base. It establishes the right of all students to the educational programs commonly found in high-wealth and high-performing districts. Such programs are presumably adequate to enable the average student to succeed. The second and third tiers provide interventions — identified through research and professional judgment — that address the special needs of disadvantaged students. The second tier consists of systemwide-prevention programs targeted to districts and schools that have a large concentration of at-risk students: for example, preschool programs for three- and four-year olds, smaller class sizes, teacher training and incentives and comprehensive “whole-school” models.

The third tier adds remedial interventions that are available as-needed to individual students who fall behind: for example, tutoring and summer school.

But, in the fractious and politicized climate of American school reform, what are the chances of reaching agreement on any list of specific interventions? Surprisingly good. First, educators and elected officials will be forced to take action to avoid the educational catastrophe (and toxic political fallout) that will occur if large numbers of students are denied high school diplomas. Second, although empirical evidence on what works in elementary and secondary education has been notoriously weak, negotiators can turn to a growing body of credible research on proven or promising instructional “best practices” — such as preschool programs, smaller class size in early grades, teacher quality, summer school, tutoring and whole-school designs.²⁸ At the same time, professional judgment will have to fill some of the gap. For example, there is no research showing the benefits of smaller class sizes in middle and high schools. Yet, few persons would doubt that 35-45 predominantly at-risk students per class, often found in low-wealth districts, is too many. Other instructional components — such as arts and physical education, professional development, technology and facilities — are overwhelmingly regarded as educational necessities, although research rarely isolates the effectiveness of particular models.

WHY IS A FEDERAL GUARANTEE NEEDED?

Both the states and the federal government have taken significant steps over the past two decades to improve educational opportunity for disadvantaged children. Yet, their separate and collective efforts have fallen well short of a guarantee of an adequate education.

The states – despite their education activism – have had limited success in raising student achievement and remedying disparities in funding between local school districts and between states.²⁹ A national debate has been raging over how to grade the states on the extent of academic progress. The picture can be viewed as half-full or half-empty. Over the past two or three decades, the average achievement of students, including minorities, has risen significantly; at the same time, performance falls far short of excellence, and, since the early to mid-1990s, gains have slowed. Blacks have slipped a little in reading. Beyond dispute are a significant black-white gap, and the deeper chasm that lies between the test scores of poor children and rising state performance standards.³⁰ Of New York City eighth graders taking new state exams, 65 percent failed English and 77 percent failed mathematics.³¹ In Massachusetts, 83 percent of Latinos and 80 percent of Blacks failed 10th grade math exams in 1999.³²

There is less controversy over how much progress states have made in reducing funding inequalities. Very little, according to researchers in the field. While noting the absence of complete data past 1991-92, the National Research Council recently concluded: “The main lesson from the past 30 years is how persistent spending inequalities are in American education. The long period of active reform has yielded only modest change.”³³ The disparities are particularly acute when comparing states to each other in spending.³⁴ At the same time, inequalities are also severe among school districts within an individual state. The General Accounting Office in a 1998 report (using 1991-92 data) estimates that wealthy districts spend 24 percent more per pupil than poor districts.³⁵

Historically, the federal government has stepped in to remedy inequalities and injustices within and among the states: witness the New Deal, civil rights

laws and the Great Society. In public education, the federal role has progressed over the past 35 years but has not lived up to its promises.³⁶

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the largest federal program for schools, provides grants targeted at low-income students. In fiscal year 1999, \$8 billion was appropriated and about 10 million students were served.³⁷ On the surface, Title I constitutes “for participating students, a right to a high quality education program.”³⁸ But Title I is under 3 percent of all local, state and federal school expenditures and does not come close to remedying interstate and intrastate funding disparities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, originally enacted in 1975, is unique in its creation of a federal civil right to adequate educational opportunity. However, the right applies only to students who meet one of the statutory categories of disability. Moreover, IDEA has mushroomed into an enormous unfunded mandate.³⁹ Congress originally set 40 percent as the federal share of the costs of compliance. But federal funding has never exceeded 12.5 percent and now, at less than \$4 billion, covers around 7 percent. Costs have soared, and states have dumped a substantial part of the burden on local districts. If sufficient and sustainable funding were made available, IDEA could be viewed as a model framework for a federal guarantee of adequate educational opportunity because it creates an entitlement to whatever instructional resources are necessary to enable children with disabilities to succeed academically. Stated another way, the biggest problem with special education is that not all disadvantaged children are special enough to be covered by its entitlements.

In addition to Title I and IDEA, hundreds of other federal grant programs have proliferated over the years. Still, federal aid as a percentage of all public

school funding peaked at 9.8 percent in 1980 and is now below 7 percent.⁴⁰

THE POLITICS OF A FEDERAL GUARANTEE

Conventional wisdom holds that local control of elementary and secondary education is sacrosanct, and therefore a federal guarantee of adequate educational opportunity is politically doomed. But public opinion has turned around dramatically in recent years. The politics of education has become nationalized, as school reform has climbed to the top of voter priorities. Recent public opinion surveys, including the focus groups conducted by the Center for National Policy that are summarized in this volume, indicate support for increased federal funding and even a willingness to pay more taxes for it. After Republicans found themselves on the defensive on education in the 1996 and 1998 elections, Senate GOP Majority Leader Trent Lott recently declared “Education is No. 1 on the Republican agenda.”⁴¹

Congressional Republicans tried to one-up the Democrats by adding funds to President Clinton’s budget request in 1999 (education funding rose over 6 percent in the final budget agreement for fiscal year 2000).⁴² In the debate around reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Republicans in Congress strongly advocated super-block grants to reduce what they decry as massive federal interference with local control. Yet the parties may not be as philosophically at odds over federal control as their rhetoric suggests. The GOP has not hesitated to put strings on federal aid that would require states to meet certain performance goals and to offer public school choice.⁴³ They have not shied away from old and new categorical initiatives of their own, such as special education, charter schools and vouchers, capital improvements, school safety and gifted programs.⁴⁴ And

GOP presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush has conspicuously promised an expanded federal role.⁴⁵ During the 2000 presidential campaign, leading candidates of both parties seem to be trying to outbid each other in their support for public schools. Their proposals have particularly focused on preschool programs and compensatory education for low-income children.⁴⁶

One implicit rationale for current federal activism is the enormous distance between the rhetoric of local control and the reality. Local decision-making has been a myth for a long time, usurped mainly by states, not the federal government. Standards are only the most visible layer of the state laws, regulations and bureaucracies that govern local schools. Local control is further limited by the tendency of educators to travel in national pedagogical packs and by the pervasive influence of nationwide vendors of textbooks and standardized tests. Other factors – from the growth of school-wide reform models to the Internet – will accelerate the nationalization of instruction. What little local authority remains is of least consequence in poor school districts where community and parent participation and discretionary money are in shortest supply.

There are other reasons why a guarantee of adequate educational opportunity is not politically utopian. One is that Title I and IDEA are already intended as federal guarantees for low-income and disabled students (although nowhere near fully funded). Another is that (as discussed below) federal aid to flesh out the guarantee can be designed so that states and local school districts have maximum leeway in how they spend the money: in other words, they can completely retain their current control over curriculum and instruction.

Still, political pitfalls loom. Special interest groups are wedded to categorical programs. Then there is the red-hot and, in the minds of some, pre-emptive

option of private school choice, particularly since its proponents have begun to champion vouchers under the banner of equal opportunity.⁴⁷ However, a political deal is gaining currency. Ideas are being floated across the ideological landscape for substantial increases in federal aid coupled with maximum flexibility for states and local districts, such as permitting some form of vouchers for low-income students in low-performing schools.⁴⁸ A federal guarantee would also be more widely acceptable if the U.S. Department of Education, which has often been criticized for being politicized and ineffectual, played a diminished role.⁴⁹ A bipartisan, blue-ribbon national commission could be charged with examining the allocation of federal-state-local funding and other possible federal education functions. A key agenda item should focus on creating a quasi-public national institute of elementary and secondary education, or other autonomous body, with the credibility to address issues like standards for adequacy.

DESIGN OPTIONS FOR A FEDERAL GUARANTEE OF ADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

A federal guarantee of adequate educational opportunity can be legislatively crafted through two main approaches: one is direct federal aid; the other attaches conditions to federal aid that require states to meet equity and adequacy benchmarks.⁵⁰ The approaches can be combined, so the amount of direct federal aid relative to the burden imposed upon the states through conditions is flexible.

The principal options for direct aid are general education revenue-sharing and broad grants for compensatory programs. Revenue-sharing resembles the base in the New Jersey Court's *Abbott v. Burke*-like definition of adequacy discussed earlier. Perhaps the best path would be for the federal government to guarantee the base amount (the cost of

an adequate education for the average student), provided each state pays at least a percentage that varies based on its wealth.⁵¹ Stephen M. Barro notes several federal programs with similar fiscal equalization formulas, including the former General Revenue Sharing program.⁵² Such formulas can give extra weight to the special needs of disadvantaged students and factor in regional cost-of-living differences.

In addition, direct aid through grants for compensatory programs would typically cover the preventive and remedial interventions in the *Abbott v. Burke*-like methodology. Substantial increases or "full funding" of Title I and IDEA would go a long way towards constituting a federal guarantee. But full funding should be based on zero-based calculations of need, not current congressional authorizations.

The other approach — conditions attached to federal aid — is a potentially powerful vehicle to force states to remedy within-state inequities. However, any federal carrot or stick must be large enough to discourage state attempts to evade the conditions.⁵³

How much federal money is enough? The National Education Association has advocated "one-third, one-third, and one-third" school funding among the federal, state and local governments.⁵⁴ That would increase federal funding from around \$22.6 billion (in 1999)⁵⁵ to over \$120 billion. But let's assume a smaller goal of \$60 billion; i.e., an increase of about \$37 billion.⁵⁶ That is more than double present federal funding. On the other hand, it is less than 4 percent of the federal budget and 1 percent of gross domestic product, so it is well within fiscal reach, particularly if projected federal budget surpluses continue to grow.

Nor is it politically far-fetched. Title I alone is authorized at \$24 billion (triple current appropriations). Leaders of both parties are proposing major

increases. Republican Senator Pete V. Domenici, chair of the Senate Budget Committee, proposed to raise education spending by an additional \$40 billion over five years.⁵⁷ And Al Gore, during the presidential primary campaign, pledged an additional \$115 billion over 10 years.⁵⁸

The various design options require further analysis and detailed planning. Foundations and the federal government should step up and support this work. Most important, though, is the forging of a bipartisan consensus to steadily ratchet up the federal government's responsibility for ensuring a quality elementary and secondary education for every American.

CONCLUSION

American public schools remain “separate and unequal,” except at this point, the great divide is economic class. Children in poor school districts attend poor schools and have a poor opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. To be sure, more money is not a complete solution. Adequate funding must be aligned with more efficient use of current resources, particularly on research-driven instructional best practices. And school reform can not shoulder alone the burden of reversing the life chances of children in impoverished communities; families and neighborhoods must be strengthened in other economic and social ways as well.

In truth, no one on any side of the education debate knows exactly what instructional programs will deliver adequate educational opportunity. But we can be certain that the education reforms of the past decade have been at best necessary but not sufficient. Too many children are not coming close to attaining high-level, high-stakes state standards. The urgent national interest in a well-educated and socially cohesive citizenry and work force is not being met. This failure lies, to a significant degree, in our reliance on 50 very diverse state governments

and thousands of divergent local tax bases. We have neglected to act upon the historical fact that the federal government has proven far more effective than the states in alleviating inequalities in education and other social welfare necessities. A federal guarantee of adequate educational opportunity is therefore imperative — a progressive “big idea” whose time has come. Our national self-interest and moral duty call upon us to make it happen now.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities* (NY: Crown Press, 1991).
- ² *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 400 (1923).
- ³ National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk* (Wash. D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1983) p. 5.
- ⁴ *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483, 493 (1954).
- ⁵ Cited in the report of the National Research Council, Helen F. Ladd and Janet S. Hansen, eds., *Making Money Matter, Financing America's Schools* (Wash. D.C., Sept. 1999, prepublication copy) p. 4-5 – cited hereafter as National Research Council. The report is a thorough and balanced analysis of school finance issues. Also invaluable is a collection of papers written for the report, Helen F. Ladd et al, eds., *Equity and Adequacy in Education Finance* (Wash. D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999) – cited hereafter as National Research Council Papers. See also Amy Gutmann, this volume.
- ⁶ John D. Donahue, *Hazardous Crosscurrents* (NY: The Century Foundation Press, 1999) pp. 14-16. See also Donahue, this volume.
- ⁷ *Plyer v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 221 (1982).
- ⁸ *Brown v. Board of Education*, p. 493.
- ⁹ National Research Council, (1973) p. 1-1.
- ¹⁰ 411 U.S. 1 (1973).
- ¹¹ Molly McUsic, “The Use of Education Clauses in School Finance Reform Litigation,” *Harvard Journal on Legislation* (1991) p. 311.
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- ¹⁴ State and local shares vary considerably state-to-state but the national averages are nearly equal,

- after subtracting the 7 percent federal share. National Research Council, p. 2-46.
- ¹⁵ Paul A. Minorini and Stephen D. Sugarman, "School Finance Litigation in the Name of Educational Equity," in National Research Council Papers, pp. 34-71.
- ¹⁶ Paul A. Minorini and Stephen D. Sugarman, "Educational Adequacy and the Courts," in National Research Council Papers, pp. 175-208.
- ¹⁷ See, e.g., Education Commission of the States, "Determining the Cost of a Basic or Core Education," Clearinghouse Notes, April 1998.
- ¹⁸ American Federation of Teachers, *Making Standards Matter 1998* (Wash. D.C.: American Federation of Teachers, 1998), pp. 9-14.
- ¹⁹ Education Commission of the States, "1997-98 Collection of Clearinghouse Notes," Jan. 1999, pp. 24-27.
- ²⁰ American Federation of Teachers, p. 14.
- ²¹ See, e.g., David J. Hoff, "Standards at Crossroads After Decade," *Education Week*, Sept. 22, 1999. See also Jay P. Heubert and Robert M. Hauser, eds., *High Stakes — Testing for Tracking, Promotion and Graduation* (Wash. D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999).
- ²² Mary Ann Zehr, "Texas Exit Exam Under Challenge in Federal Court," *Education Week*, Sept. 29, 1999.
- ²³ For both sides of the debate, see Gary Burtless, ed., *Does Money Matter?* (Wash. D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1996).
- ²⁴ For the origins of the standards movement, see Diane Ravitch, *National Standards in American Education* (Wash. D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995).
- ²⁵ Jacques Steinberg, "Course of Action: Education Summit Ends in Optimism As Vows Are Made to Help the Needy," *New York Times*, Oct. 2, 1999, p. A9.
- ²⁶ James W. Guthrie and Richard Rothstein, "Enabling 'Adequacy' to Achieve Reality: Translating Adequacy into State School Finance Distribution Arrangements," in National Research Council Papers, pp. 209-259. The analysis of the different methods is convincing even in the light of the authors' potential conflict as consultants who use the professional judgment approach.
- ²⁷ *Abbott v. Burke*, 153 N.J. 480 (1998).
- ²⁸ The "best practices" literature includes, e.g.: Olatkunbo S. Fashola and Robert E. Slavin, "Effective and Replicable Programs for Students Placed At Risk in Elementary and Middle Schools," Johns Hopkins University, Jan. 1997; and Sam Stringfield et al, "Urban and Suburban/Rural Special Strategies for Educating Disadvantaged Children," U.S. Department of Education, March 1997. Obviously, not all opportunity-to-learn "best practices" cost more money. The *Abbott v. Burke* court ordered the state to pay for certain supplemental programs only if local districts came up short after zero-base budgeting that aligned all current revenues with instructional best practices.
- ²⁹ The political reasons for the failure of the states to do more to remedy funding inequalities are discussed in John D. Donahue, this volume; see also Note 6, above.
- ³⁰ For data and varying views of the extent of improvement in student achievement, see: David Grissmer and Ann Flanagan, "Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas," The National Education Goals Panel, Wash. D.C., Nov. 1998; National Research Council, pp. 2-8 to 2-9, 2-11 to 2-14, 2-26 to 2-27; Diane Ravitch, "Somebody's Children: Educational Opportunity for All American Children," in Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteritti, *New Schools for a New Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 251-252; Richard Rothstein, *The Way We Were? The Myths and Realities of America's Student Achievement* (NY: The Century Foundation Press, 1999).
- ³¹ Anemon Hartocollis, "8th Graders Fail 2 New York Tests," *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1999, p. A1.
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- ³³ National Research Council, p. 3-43.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
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- ³⁶ Other countries provide a much larger federal share of school funding and greater equity. Allen Odden and Carolyn Busch, *Financing Schools for High Performance* (San. Fran.: Jossey-Bass, 1998), pp. 8, 14.
- ³⁷ "Final Congressional Fiscal 1999 Appropriations and President Clinton's Fiscal 2000 Proposals," *Education Week*, Feb. 17, 1999, pp. 36-37.
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⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-46

⁴¹ Frank Bruni, "Bill Offers States Leeway on Education Aid," *New York Times*, June 23, 1999, p. A18.

⁴² Erik W. Robelen, "Budget Plan Includes Public-School-Choice Provision," *Education Week*, Nov. 24, 1999.

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⁴⁵ Dan Balz, "On Federal Role in Education, Bush Walks a Fine Line," *Washington Post*, Nov. 4, 1999, p. A2.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Katharine Q. Seelye, "Gore Proposal Would Create \$115 Billion Education Fund," *New York Times*, Dec. 16, 1999.

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⁴⁸ Marci Kanstoroom and Chester E. Finn, Jr., eds., *New Directions, Federal Education Policy in the Twenty-First Century* (Wash. D.C.: The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999); Matthew Miller, "A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1999; and Peter Schrag, "The Voucher Seduction," *The American Prospect*, Nov. 23, 1999. See also National Research Council, pp. 7-54, 9-16 to 9-20.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Richard C. Atkinson and Gregg B. Jackson, eds., *Research and Education Reform* (Wash. D.C.: National Academy Press, 1992).

⁵⁰ This section relies heavily on a paper, Stephen M. Barro, "Federal Options for Promoting Equity In School Finance," Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Nov. 1994.

⁵¹ Barro, pp. 14-30; National Research Council, pp. 2-39, 8-45.

⁵² Barro, p. 12. The genesis for General Revenue

Sharing came in 1971 when the Nixon administration considered dedicating the revenue from a new sales or VAT tax to public school finance and reductions in local property taxes. The dedicated education tax was rejected, but Nixon used other revenues to fund general revenue-sharing with education an intended beneficiary. Barro, p. 10.

⁵³ A technical barrier is the difficulty in measuring disparities because of the innumerable, complex variables in how states and local districts raise and spend school revenues. However, Congress has reached agreement on equity indicators in the Impact Aid and Title I programs, perhaps because the practical impact has been nil. The Title I provision authorizing additional funding conditioned on fiscal equity indicators has never been funded.

⁵⁴ William H. Clune, "Fulfilling the Promise: A Truly Integrated Federal Role for the Education of Poor & Minority Children?," unpublished paper, Sept. 19, 1993.

⁵⁵ Total Expenditures for Education in U.S: www.ed.gov/officew/OUS/Budget00/BudgetSumm/apndx-1.html, Nov. 15, 1999.

⁵⁶ In 1994, Barro (p. 11) estimated a cost of about \$20-25 billion per year to bring every state up to the national average in per pupil expenditures. Odden and Busch (p. 15) later estimated, in 1997 dollars, a cost of about \$17 billion to raise all districts to the national median of basic education revenues per pupil. Barro thought that a politically viable formula which spreads aid more widely would "double to triple" his \$20 billion projection. Clune and others roughly estimate a cost of \$2,000 per low-income child for compensatory aid; assuming about 10 million such children, the cost would be \$20 billion (less current Title I funding).

⁵⁷ Jonathan Weisman, "Clinton enlists school aid allies," *The Baltimore Sun*, Feb. 23, 1999.

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THE CASE FOR SERIOUS FEDERAL FINANCING OF AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

JOHN D. DONAHUE

The status quo has staying power. Modern computers use keyboards geared to 1800s technology. The school year features a long summer break to free up extra hands for farms long paved over. Tradition—along with the investments incurred and habits developed to accommodate tradition—can trump what makes sense now. So it may be with education finance.

America's radical decentralization of school funding—with more than 90 percent of elementary and secondary education revenue raised locally or at the state level, and little raised nationally—is a legacy from long ago. It's not how most countries pay for their schools; in other advanced nations the central government covers about half of public primary and secondary school budgets, as a rough average, versus less than seven percent for the U.S. It's not how we'd pay for our schools if we were creating public education afresh. Our population is mobile. Our economy is interconnected. Our culture is national. It's hard to argue that there is a public interest in education—justifying collective, rather than individual, financing—but a public interest that dissipates at the city limits or state border.

But despite episodic initiatives to boost this or that federal education program, the convention of decentralized funding is seldom challenged. The balance between state and local responsibility is the object of perennial debate, and periodic legislative and judicial action. Yet there have been few prominent calls for a more-than-marginal increase in federal funding. It may be time. A serious increase in the national share of school funding—in any of several variants—would offend tradition, to be sure. But it could affirm and energize our common stake in promoting shared prosperity through broad-based investment in human capital.

EARNING POWER AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

There are many good reasons to worry about the adequacy, distribution, and stability of funding for America's public schools. The focus here, however, is on one particular concern: economic inequality. Other American problems with plausible links to school finance—state and local fiscal stress, excessive tax burdens, imperiled economic competitiveness—have been getting better, by and large, over the past decade or so. Inequality has been getting worse.

Some sections of this essay appear in different form in John D. Donahue, Hazardous Crosscurrents: Confronting Inequality in an Era of Devolution (Century Foundation Press, 1999).

Figure I traces, in broad strokes, the picture of American family income distribution since the end of World War II.¹ Over the whole postwar era, the bottom twenty percent of families has collected around five percent of all family income. During parts of the 1960s and 1970s the bottom fifth's share approached six percent; more recently it has dipped toward four percent. But it hasn't changed very much for half a century. "Income inequality" served for a long time as a political euphemism for the frustrating persistence of relative poverty amid prosperity for the majority of Americans. But inequality has become something different, and more pervasive. The top tier has sprinted ahead, the income share of the broad middle class has dwindled, and Americans are increasingly separated—middle from bottom, and top from middle—by economic divides.

From 1951 through 1981 what most would consider the middle class claimed a large and fairly steady share of total family income. The middle 60 percent of families collected very close to 54 percent of the income for over a generation. The stable share (and rising total) of income concentrated in the economic mid-range solidified Americans' sense of living in a basically middle-class culture, bracketed by a moderately poor bottom fifth and a moderately rich top fifth. In 1982, however, this share fell below 53 percent for the first time since 1950. Ten years later it had declined to 51 percent, and in 1998 it was 48.6 percent. Unless there is an improbably sharp reversal of the trend, the top one-fifth of American families very soon will earn more in total than the middle three fifths combined.² And the poor, of course, are still with us.

THE INCREASINGLY STRONG LINK BETWEEN EDUCATION AND INCOME

No honest person can say with confidence what will determine the degree of income inequality in

2025. Some key factors, such as trends in family structure, are hard to predict and even harder, perhaps, to alter through policy. Yet one factor appears virtually certain to influence the degree of inequality a generation hence, and is squarely connected to policy decisions—the level and distribution of investments in education over the next ten or fifteen years.

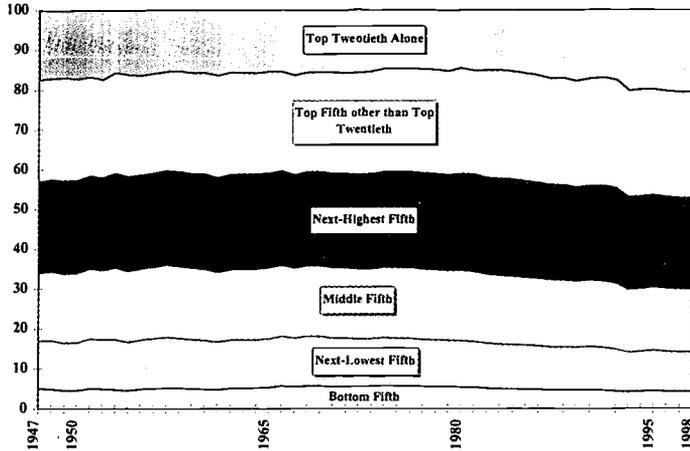
A torrent of technological progress has shriveled demand for unskilled labor and raised the payoff to advanced skills. Just as agriculture gradually faded from economic mainstay to economic marginality, so too (but much more quickly) has manufacturing's relative importance waned. Within the service sector, technological change has spawned new categories of high-skilled occupations in health care, information processing, and business services. Even within the goods-producing sector, new technologies have devalued physical strength and faithful adherence to routine while emphasizing workers' know-how, flexibility, and initiative.

Workers with advanced skills, and with the educational foundations that equip them to continually improve their skills, are hard to replace with overseas labor or smart machines. New technologies tend to amplify, not undermine, their ability to create value. Employers bid for the services of these high-skilled workers, and their earning power soars. Meanwhile, the penalties for lacking the right skills are becoming harsher. As workers without education find demand evaporating for the kinds of work they can do, their earnings decline relative to that of their more skilled counterparts. Table 1 summarizes the story on average family income by education level in 1998 and the growth in inflation-adjusted family income during the 1990s.

While the standard hazards of prediction apply, here is an assessment of the stakes: If all or most American children get high-quality primary and

PASSING THE TEST

I. Family Income Distribution in America, 1947-1998 (Percent Total)



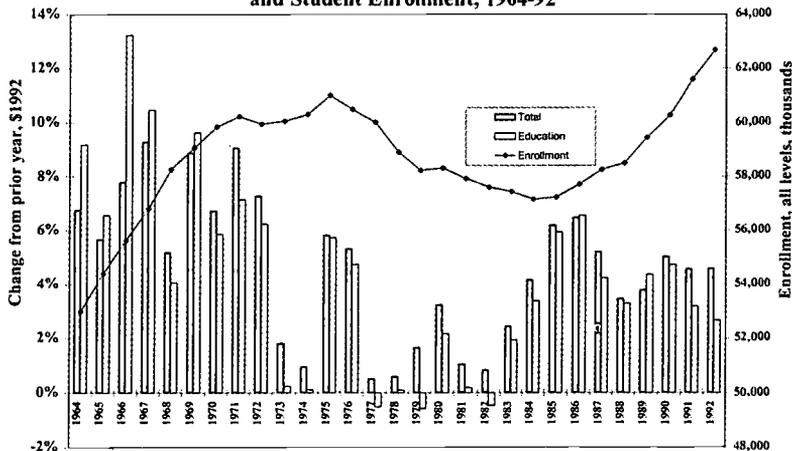
Source: March Current Population Survey

Table 1
Education and Family Income in the 1990s

Education of family head	Average 1998 family income	% real growth 1991 to 1998
High-school dropout	\$33,356	4
High-school graduate	\$48,434	8
Associate's degree	\$63,524	10
Bachelor's degree	\$85,423	13
Master's degree	\$101,670	17
Professional degree	\$147,170	24

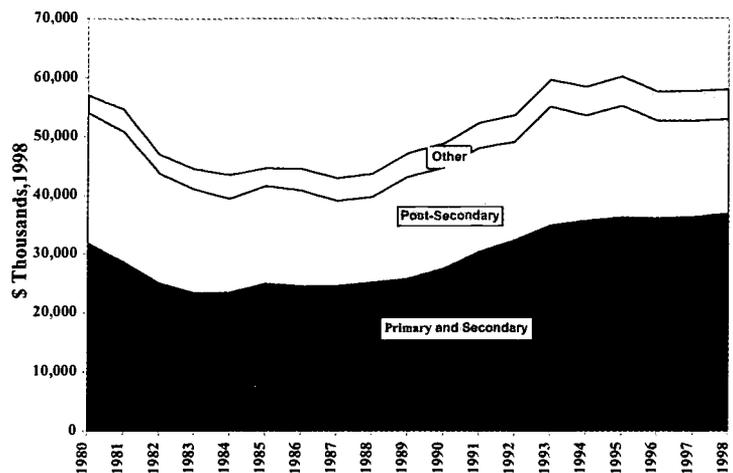
Source: Current Population Survey historical data, Table F-18, from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/f018.html>, accessed November 1999

II. Real Changes in State and Local Spending (Total and Education Only) and Student Enrollment, 1964-92



Source: NCES Digest 1996, various tables

III. Federal Education Spending, 1980-98



Source: NCES Digest 1998, Table 359

secondary schooling, followed by postsecondary training suited both to their aptitudes and to the demands of the labor market, then as these children grow into their prime earning years income gaps will tend to narrow. Universally good elementary and secondary schools will equip students for appropriate postsecondary education. This, in turn, will raise the prevailing level of productivity, including the capacity of those who (because of limited innate talent, family disadvantages, or bad luck) would otherwise produce and earn less. An abundance of educated employees, meanwhile, will whittle down the scarcity premium that has sent top workers' earnings soaring. Over the course of two or three decades more and better education will narrow the income distribution, and narrow it at a relatively high level.

Investing in human capital across the whole population may be the only aggressive strategy for restoring shared prosperity that is consistent with American values. Simple redistributive transfers tend to grate against our notions of fairness. But public spending to build earning power generally commands popular legitimacy, not least because of the value Americans traditionally place on the non-economic benefits of an educated citizenry. For those concerned about inequality—and also, of course, about economic dynamism, civic health, cultural continuity, and the other blessings good schools can promote—ensuring adequate funding for every young American's education seems like the most urgent of imperatives.

DOES MONEY MATTER?

This is the cue for a chorus of objections (much in vogue in certain quarters) that funding is simply not the issue. One variant of this argument starts with the claim that intelligence, aptitude for learning, and productive potential are predestined by one's genetic inheritance, or are so strongly affect-

ed by cultural and familial factors that good schools can't help much and bad schools can't hurt much. Another variant—less fatalistic, but a bit more cynical—concedes that uniformly good education could, in principle, work improvements on the fresh clay of young minds. But absent scorched-earth restructuring good schools are a pipe dream. According to this view, primary and secondary schools are layered with bureaucratic fat and infested with third-rate teachers entrenched by union rules and arrogantly contemptuous about quality. The solution lies not in more or better-targeted funding, but in cataclysmic reforms. Come the revolution, we can have quality on the cheap.

There is something behind such sentiments. Waste and mediocrity are dismayingly common, and nothing in this essay is inconsistent with the spirit of reform. Moreover, it is in fact quite difficult to prove that more resources equals better education. The quality of education is itself hard to define and measure. The broader and longer-term the metric of educational outcomes, the harder becomes the measurement problem. And however we choose to define educational outcomes, factors other than funding—students' innate ability, the commitment to education of their families, their classmates, and their classmates' families, the quality of school governance—assuredly do affect results. The complexity of the link between money and outcomes explains the spirited debate among empiricists as to the how and why money matters for education.³

To some extent, the claim that money doesn't matter much is simply one side of a sincere intellectual dispute. But it also serves as a shrewd rhetorical tactic on the part of those who see little benefit to themselves in public education spending, or who hope to undermine American education in anything like its current form. The tactic of highlighting examples of waste in order to divert resources

from an enterprise is sometimes used in attacks on the Pentagon's budget. The right response to inefficiency in a vital effort, though, is to fix the inefficiency, not retreat from the goal. Any veteran of World War II can recount hair-raising tales of inefficiency. But it doesn't follow that the enterprise wasn't worth it.

Money, after all, is the way we signal priorities and marshal talent to a mission. The opportunities money affords can be wasted in any enterprise; schooling is no exception. Money cannot make good every defect of planning, intellect, character, or courage. But it does tend to amplify every virtue. The level of resources a school commands greatly affects the odds for good educational outcomes.

WHAT FUNDING PROBLEM?

Even those willing to grant that money matters for education, and that education matters for future inequality, might object that there is little to worry about. In recent years there has been a veritable bonanza of increased education spending. Flush public budgets, growing awareness of the payoff to education, and the dearth of other crises to monopolize public attention have raised the political profile of education. Public spending per pupil in the United States is at or near the top of the range among OECD countries. Total spending on primary and secondary education has been close to 4.5 percent of Gross Domestic Product for most of the 1990s— about the same level that it was in the 1970s, even though school-age children form a smaller share of the population. In such a setting one risks appearing immune to the evidence, and churlish to boot, by arguing that education finance is a trouble spot in American government.

Yet for at least four reasons—the radical unevenness of school funding, the demographic dynamics of student enrollments, the deceptive precariousness of state and local funding sources, and the

latent political fragility of state and local commitments to education – the diagnosis of an incipient funding problem is all too plausible.

DISPARITIES IN SCHOOL FUNDING: Among developed nations, America presents an extreme case of decentralization in school finance. On average, 54 percent of the funding for primary and secondary education in OECD countries was from central government in 1995, with 26 percent from regional government and 22 percent from local government. In the United States, it was 8 percent central, 49 percent regional, and 43 percent local.⁴ Only three other OECD countries—Canada, Germany, and Switzerland—had a smaller share of central-government financing. Of these, only Switzerland also displayed the U.S. pattern of substantial dependence on local, rather than regional, resources.

The federal government's relative contribution to public primary and secondary schools (a slightly different measure than the OECD statistics just cited) rose to nearly 10 percent in the late 1970's. In the mid-1980's it dropped nearly to 6 percent. In recent years it has bounced back—but just a little, to something under 7 percent. State and local money dominates, with the relative importance of the two shifting over time in line with the relative fiscal health of cities and states, constraints imposed by tax limits and court decisions, and the vagaries of political fashion.

Decentralized financing, coupled with the economic and political diversity America displays, means that resources differ dramatically among schools. Current per-pupil spending in primary and secondary schools averaged \$5,656 in the 1995-96 school year. But this national average masked differences among state averages, from over \$9,000 in New Jersey to under \$4,000 in Mississippi.⁵ The differences are even more striking at the level of individual school districts. Even

within districts of the same general scale—15 thousand to 25 thousand students—current per-pupil spending ranged from \$3,271 in Desoto County, Mississippi or \$3,382 in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana to \$8,763 in Arlington County, Virginia and \$10,007 in Yonkers, New York.⁶

Federal revenues sent by Washington to cities and states to support the schools averaged \$415 per pupil. Considering that nearly half of the states departed by at least \$1000 from the national average in per-pupil spending, this is not a particularly large sum. Nor is it particularly equalizing among states. For some schools—those with large concentrations of impoverished students or military families—federal money makes a big difference. But within American primary and secondary education overall, it is a financial footnote. Leaving aside the usual exception of Alaska (where federal money approached \$1000 per pupil), federal aid ranged between a high of \$654 for New Mexico and a low of \$209 for New Hampshire. All but a dozen states were within a hundred dollars or so of the national average for federal per-pupil funding. The status quo of leaving the heavy lifting to cities and states—with national funding filling in around the edges—delivers a starkly uneven pattern of resources to America’s schools.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF RISING DEMAND: Until recently, growing income inequality has coincided with stable or falling enrollments. The 1980’s were the eye of the demographic hurricane. The baby-boom generation had mostly completed its own education, but the children of this massive cohort—the baby boom echo—had not yet flooded the schools. Enrollments in primary and secondary schools were generally around 45 million through most of the decade—lower than at any time since the early 1960’s, and down from a peak of over 51 million in the early 1970’s.

This lull is over. Student headcounts began trending upward again in the early 1990’s. As immigrants join the baby-boomers’ offspring, the burden on K-12 classrooms is expected to crest at around 54.5 million in 2006.⁷ And as the demographic demands on the school system head for a high plateau during the first decade of the century, there are only three possible responses: Efficiency will improve. Or spending will increase. Or quality will erode. It is hard to imagine anything with greater influence over income inequality for the next generation than the balance we strike, over the next few years, among these three responses.

THE PROSPECT OF FISCAL PRESSURE: As this is written, the nation’s record-length economic expansion is combining with electoral politics to generate large increases in education spending. If prosperity is permanent, there may be little cause for concern. But on the chance that the boom does not go on forever, it is worth considering how robust state education budgets are likely to be in the face of fiscal distress. The last economic slump in the early 1990’s produced excruciating budget pressures and wrenching cutbacks in the cities and states. The next recession will likely do much the same. This effect will be exacerbated by the shift of policy burdens, notably welfare, from Washington to the states; by the constriction of federal grants and their evolution from categorical grants that vary with requirements, into fixed block grants; and by the latest cycle of competitive tax cutting at the state and local levels.

If and when the states again encounter fiscal difficulties, it will be almost impossible for education budgets to escape unscathed. Education is by far the largest component of state budgets, claiming 35 percent of state general spending (as of 1997) and dwarfing every other category except “public welfare”—mostly Medicaid—which accounted for

about one-quarter. Most of the other categories of state spending are either relatively small (like corrections), or very difficult to reduce in response to bad times (like insurance trust payments), or both (like interest payments.)

Education spending, conversely, can be adjusted as budgetary conditions dictate. State aid to local primary and secondary schools can be scaled back, budgets for state universities and community colleges can be trimmed, or tuition can be increased and financial aid tightened. With some exceptions—notably cases where courts have mandated measures to smooth funding disparities within a state—recent boosts in state education spending have been extraordinary increases rather than permanent shifts in funding formulae. Many have been explicitly labeled “one-time” bonuses in local school aid or postsecondary funds. Local education spending originates overwhelmingly with property taxation. On the plus side, property taxes (unlike income and sales taxes) don’t drop much in an economic downturn. On the downside, they are hard to adjust upward to compensate for a shortfall in state funding. And (as discussed below) local funding for education has its own special vulnerabilities.

As Figure II shows, the pattern of state and local spending on education, across the cycles of boom and bust, has been at least as heavily affected by fiscal conditions as by educational requirements. During the lean years of 1973 and 1974 real education spending dropped, even as enrollments drove to then-record levels. In the flush years of the mid-1980’s, education spending rose (in pace with state and local spending overall) in spite of the fact that the number of students was relatively stable. And in the last round of budget pressure in the early 1990’s, education spending slackened, despite surging enrollment.

For the moment, the supply of education resources

and the demand for education capacity are rising in tandem. But unless the economy stays strong for a decade to come, the next fiscal crisis will coincide with historic highs in primary and secondary enrollment. Schools will have to compete with every other claim on shrinking state and local funds. The record is not reassuring about the likely consequences.

Fiscal distress can afflict the federal government too, of course. But budgetary strictures tend to be less brutal at the national level. The national government faces nowhere near the pressure cities and states confront to limit the tax burden on well-off individuals and mobile businesses, lest they opt for more accommodating locales. And if worse comes to worst, Washington (unlike cities and states) can choose to run a deficit, instead of cutting back its share of education funding. Deficit spending to fund the schools is nobody’s first choice. But it has proven handy, in the past, to have the option of running red ink—to win a war, or buy Alaska, or build the interstate highway system—when the alternative was short-changing the future. Education is arguably among the most legitimate motives for government borrowing; public investment in the young yields both benefits and burdens that belong to the future. We would rather avoid adding to the debt we bequeath to our children, but better to borrow on their behalf (if bad times come) than to fail to educate them well.

LATENT VULNERABILITIES IN STATE AND LOCAL COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION: Most state and local officials are fully aware of both education’s political popularity and of the links between skills, productivity, and earning power. Moreover, the most pragmatic sort of economic-development considerations would seem to ensure enthusiasm for human capital investment.

Yet there are a number of depressingly logical reasons for state and local officials to skimp on schools,

especially during a budget crunch. The most obvious—which applies, to be sure, across the federal spectrum—is that education is usually a long-term investment. Even when officials are utterly convinced as to the merits of human capital investment, they may be reluctant to fund education at the expense of short-term tax relief, or of competing spending with a more immediate payoff. Timing aside, moreover, people aren't fixed assets. People educated at the expense of one locale can move away and apply their productive skills elsewhere.

One bedrock justification for America's peculiar reliance on local property taxes to fund education is that it gives all homeowners—not just parents—a stake in the schools. Good schools mean high property values, the logic goes, so property owners are willing to pay what it takes to provide good local education while exercising their political voice to ensure the money is well spent. The logic holds together. But it depends crucially on the assumption that a critical mass of homeowners are themselves parents of school-age children, or expect the eventual buyers of their property to be parents of school-age children. In 1970 that assumption was a reasonably good one in most locales. Married couples with children under 18 comprised roughly half of all families. By 1996 this had dropped to around one in three families.⁸ As school-using families fall as a share of current and prospective homeowners, more local voters will reason that future home-buyers might well prefer low taxes and bad schools, instead of high taxes and good schools. (Any shift toward private schools, or regional school choice, would accelerate this development.)

Education has a redistributive element, moreover, that becomes more important as economic inequality deepens. The political tension inherent in education spending disproportionately funded by the well-off and mobile, and disproportionately urgent

for the less fortunate, could lead states and cities to scale back their overall commitment to human capital development.⁹ More likely is a selective retreat, scaling back the inequality-reducing parts of the mission and concentrating on what matters most to businesses and more-mobile individuals.

THE CASE FOR DOUBLING THE FEDERAL SHARE OF SCHOOL FUNDING

This generation of Americans confronts the challenge of shoring up our middle-class culture in a world grown rather inhospitable to that heritage. It is by no means assured (however we structure our public sector) that America's magnificent achievement of broadly shared prosperity will survive. But amid the confluence of demographic, technological, and economic forces that are driving up income inequality, our current enthusiasm for fragmented government is exquisitely ill-timed.

Debates over education finance have conventionally concerned the proper balance between local property taxes and state income and sales taxes (with a smattering of lottery proceeds and other special revenue sources.) State supreme court judgments—which currently bind 18 states to take steps to equalize school funding—have been nudging the balance toward the state level. And in recent years there have been some increases in transfers from Washington. The 2000 presidential campaign has produced some notable proposals for larger federal programs to shrink class sizes, increase teacher pay in the poorest districts, and otherwise prop up local schools.

But these measures are portrayed as helping out the cities and states in discharging their responsibilities. As Figure III shows, federal spending for primary and secondary education has risen only modestly (in real terms) from its 1980s slump. But the Constitution is silent on where within the federal

system responsibility for education should be lodged—inevitably so, since the idea of public schools took hold in America decades after that document was drafted. Our current mix of federal, state, and local funding and authority is based on convention and consensus, not the Constitution, and can be changed if and when we decide change is warranted.

If we were designing America’s system of education finance today, is it conceivable that we would rely so heavily upon state and local revenues? Preparing Americans for responsible citizenship and for rewarding roles in a changing economy—if we accept this as a public mission at all—is in substantial measure a national mission, warranting a larger role for national financing than tradition dictates. Pooling the burden of educating the next generation through greater federal funding, moreover, is consistent with almost any reform scenario, from public-school choice to charter schools to vouchers. Let the debate continue on how to improve the effectiveness and accountability of our education system. But meanwhile, we should engage a parallel debate on whether the national share of funding for primary and secondary schools should exceed the current level of about one dollar in fifteen.

Any move toward more centralized education financing is anathema to most conservatives. Heavy-handed and politicized federal education policy would doubtless be no improvement on heavy-handed and politicized state and local education policy. But that is not the choice before us. Many contemporary reform themes — such as more extensive and more realistic business engagement with the schools, a more diverse menu of governance arrangements, a richer flow of data on school performance, and various degrees and mechanisms of parental choice—promise to decouple education from local political control and weaken the conventional case against stepped-up

federal financing. We have outlived the era when reverence for the grass-roots wisdom of local school boards made decentralization a cardinal virtue in education policy.

Indeed, the standard conservative stance on elementary and secondary education rests on a contradiction. One precept is that the status quo in governance and financing has spawned a calamity of waste, muddle, and poor performance. Another precept is that the status quo in governance and financing must be preserved. Honest liberals have stopped defending every convention of public school organization and management. Honest conservatives should concede that America may have outgrown its tradition of fragmented school funding.

The watchwords for education policy should be equal opportunity to learn, ample information on performance, and accountability for results. There is room for productive debate over the precise meaning and application of each theme. But none of these is inconsistent with a doubling of the federal share in funding.

There is equal scope for argument over the priorities for extra federal education spending. Some generic criteria are fairly straightforward. Federal resources should catalyze, rather than retard, experimentation and reform. They should complement, rather than displace, other resources. They should lessen, rather than exacerbate, disparities in the opportunity to learn. There are certainly ways to spend federal money badly. There would be spirited, maybe bruising, disputes over what it means to spend it well. Equalizing grants for the poorest districts? Smaller classes? Start-up money for charter schools? Higher teacher pay? Reliable performance measures? A laser-like focus on troubled urban schools? Inducements to lure top talent to teaching? A campaign of technology investment? A rescue fund for failing schools, or for their

students? The goal here is not to settle the debate over federal education priorities, but to lay a predicate for that debate to intensify.

* * *

It remains to be seen if a real performance revolution can be engineered in American schools before the turning of the demographic tide dissipates the political pressure, roughly ten years from now. But overcoming the shibboleth against substantial and sustained federal financing promises to make deep reform more likely.

ENDNOTES

¹ The chart is based on information collected each March by the Current Population Survey, a large and systematic data-collection effort of the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This survey employs a reasonably comprehensive definition of income, and organizes Americans both as “families” (two or more related people living together) and as “households” (a broader category which also includes single people and unrelated people sharing housing.) The “family” data presented here, while more relevant to education, softens the picture of income inequality.

² All of the figures in this paragraph and the next several are from Table F-2, *Share of Aggregate Income Received by Each Fifth and Top 5 Percent of Families (All Races): 1947 to 1999*, Census Bureau on-line data compilation at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/f02.html>, accessed November 1999.

³ For a sample of this debate, see Eric A. Hanushek, “The Economics of Schooling: Production and Efficiency in Public Schools,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 24, September 1986; David Card and Alan B. Krueger, “School Resources and Student Outcomes: An Overview

of the Literature and New Evidence from North and South Carolina,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10, No.4, Fall 1996; and Gary Burtless, editor, *Does Money Matter? The Effect of School Resources on Student Achievement and Adult Success* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1996).

⁴ *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 1998* (OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, Paris, 1998) Table B6.1a, p. 137. Slightly more recent data for the U.S. alone give a breakdown of 6.6 percent federal, 48 percent state, and 45.4 percent local funding.

⁵ Statistics in this paragraph are from education finance data compiled as U.S. Bureau of the Census Annual Survey of Government Finance, published at <http://www.census.gov/govs/www/school.html>, accessed November 1999.

⁶ Figures on state and district spending are from U.S. Bureau of the Census, op. cit., Governments Division, Elementary-Secondary Education Statistics Branch, at <http://www.census.gov/govs/www/school.html>, accessed December 1999.

⁷ These enrollment figures and projections are from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 1998*, Chapter 1, Table 3.

⁸ Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Household and Family Characteristics, various years; and unpublished data, tabulated in *Digest of Education Statistics 1998*, Table 18.

⁹ Lower-level governments’ incapacity to sustain policies with a redistributive component is among the fundamentals of federalist theory, and the precept that higher levels of government should handle redistribution can be found in virtually every discussion from the classic Tiebout article onward. For example, see Albert Breton and Anthony Scott, *The Economic Constitution of Federal States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), pp. 120-125.

REDUCING INEQUALITY THROUGH EDUCATION: MILLENNIAL RESOLUTIONS

W. NORTON GRUBB

Walking south from Central Park East Secondary School along Madison Avenue, it's barely five minutes to the affluent upper East Side of New York City. Central Park East (CPESS) is in the midst of housing projects in east Harlem at 103rd Street, largely black and Latino. By 95th Street the neighborhood is vastly different: little white children are coming home from private schools with their nannies, the streets lined with precious clothing stores and art galleries. The change is swift and powerful, and examples like it can be found in many other cities. It's also a cliché, of course — poverty in the midst of wealth — and like all clichés it's both true and so familiar as to be easily forgotten.

Unfortunately, the inequality that shapes these neighborhoods and that influences the schools these children attend is getting worse. Inequality in family income has been rising steadily since the early 1970s. Although strong economic growth and low unemployment have moderated the growth in inequality over the past few years, it's unlikely to fall to the levels of the 1970s anytime soon. If current trends continue — with high growth rates of jobs requiring substantial schooling, international competition driving down the real wages of unskilled workers, and differences in educational attainment continuing unabated — inequality can

only get worse, with dreadful consequences for neighborhoods, democratic participation, and yet another generation of children.

Since the competencies acquired (or not acquired) in formal schooling are central to the upward drift of inequality, an obvious approach is to emphasize the improvement of schools as a solution. This is hardly a new idea, of course. Horace Mann argued in the 1830s that public education, in addition to preparing citizens, would also be the “the great equalizer of the conditions of men — the balance-wheel of the social machinery.” The notion of equality of educational opportunity — equality earned through education, not bestowed directly — has motivated generations of reformers since the turn of the last century. The vision is that schools like CPESS, one of the most successful urban schools in the country, can spread their practices to other schools for low-income children, and in the process shrink the distance between the life chances of east Harlem students compared to those of the upper east side.

Could we indeed reform our schools to make some headway against the market, against the tendency for economic developments to recreate inequality in every generation? Three conditions are necessary for this to happen. They begin with the way

the issue is framed to the public, continue with the development of new areas for federal policy, and end with policies to reshape inequality directly — that is, to reshape the demand for educated labor at the same time as we reshape its supply. After all, disadvantaged children, particularly at the high school level, will be motivated to stay in school and study only if they perceive a reasonable likelihood that a decent job will be their reward. The essay ends with a series of resolutions for the millennial New Year, since policy — including federal policy — has so often operated to exacerbate rather than reduce inequality.

CREATING POWERFUL NARRATIVES:
THE NATIONAL INTEREST IN EQUITY

Horace Mann had a cogent rationale for common schools, a story or narrative that proved compelling: a new democracy needed to prepare new democrats, and so public schools should be open to all regardless of class or race. Lyndon Johnson had another rationale in promoting the Great Society: “The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents.” Many current federal programs dedicated to educational equity still reflect the rationales of that narrative. A different vision, still supportive of equity, emerged with the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, and its fear that America’s economic competitiveness would be undermined unless we educated all our children to world-class levels. (Author Milton Goldberg revisits this argument elsewhere in this volume.)

In addition, the logic of social efficiency continues to be used, by advocates and policymakers alike, in arguments that the benefits of programs justify the costs of interventions ranging from Head Start to Job Corps. Often these arguments are commingled, as in this justification for Project GRAD in Houston:

Saving inner-city children from academic failure is one of the most critical issues now facing our state and country. The cost of failure is too high — a devastating waste of human potential and severe economic costs to the country. To remain competitive as a nation, we must reverse the dropout rate and insure our graduates have the skills to compete in an increasingly high-tech world. To put a dollar figure to it, an IBM study found that if the dropout rate continues unabated, by the year 2010 the state of Texas will need an additional \$1.8 billion in taxes to provide for the corresponding need for social services. On the other hand, if the graduation rate were to increase to 90 percent, these graduates would generate \$3.6 billion in new revenue (Ford Foundation).

These justifications for reform point to national policies and therefore to federal programs. Inequality has its local manifestations — up and down Madison Avenue, between Palo Alto and East Palo Alto — but those who are concerned about growing inequality cite national trends, not state or local patterns. Supporting national competitiveness cannot be left to the whims of 50 states, almost by definition. Programs to enhance equity have generally been federal rather than state, since large efforts by individual states to correct inequities are likely to cause in-migration of the poor and out-migration of the rich. (This is a traditional fear in welfare programs, for example.) Even where benefits exceed costs, programs involving redistribution and those with long-term benefits at the expense of short-run costs have never been generously funded by states. And some of the inequality that so concerns many of us involves differences among states: Mississippi is much less able to cure its own poverty than is Connecticut, for example.

If our nation is to make any substantial headway against inequality through education, therefore, it will have to come through federal initiatives. But this

conclusion runs right up against two other dominant narratives of the moment: one is faith in markets and antipathy to “big” government; the other is a strong preference, if government must be tolerated, for delegation to the state and local level. The case for federal initiatives to correct growing inequality through education must therefore create a narrative powerful enough to counter these two anti-egalitarian views of government. In addition, the older justifications for equity have failed to be persuasive. The 1960s vision of the Great Society has been roundly eclipsed by the degradation of faith in government during the Nixon and Carter presidencies, the attacks on government programs of the Reagan/Bush era, and the gradual ascent of free markets and market-like mechanisms. The justification for equity as a means of improving our national competitiveness has been rendered irrelevant by recent developments, which have restored our nation’s international economic position with little help from the schools. (A recent report of the National Research Council, *Securing America’s Industrial Strength*, attributed our improvement to conservative monetary policy, deficit reduction, deregulation, trade liberalization, lax antitrust enforcement, and the strengthening of intellectual property rights, but certainly not to improved education.) The tide has turned against some equalizing policies like welfare, affirmative action, and (in California, the bellwether state) bilingual education.

So a new narrative or vision is necessary to counteract the hostility toward egalitarian policies that has grown over the past three decades — perhaps some version of “no one left behind,” or “save the children.” But powerful visions that reshape policy normally do not spring full-blown from the head of any one individual. Occasionally, as Howard E. Gardner has reminded us in *Leading Minds*, an extraordinary leader — Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Lyndon Johnson — can enunciate a

supremely powerful vision. More likely, however, the development of a narrative propelling equity as a national policy priority requires a combination of strong economic conditions, an imperative that seems morally necessary, national leadership, political consensus, and some grounding in our history and institutions. Supportive elements that now prevail include a strong economy; an increasing tendency to look to education to resolve many social and economic problems, and a tradition of inclusiveness in American education, from the common school movement to more recent efforts expanding postsecondary education. And so the time seems right to develop a vision for achieving greater equity through education reform, a vision powerful enough to counter the current anti-egalitarian political and economic tides.

A NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR EDUCATIONAL RENEWAL

If it were possible to develop an imperative for new federal initiatives to redress increasing inequality through elementary and secondary education, what might that reform program be? Rather than elaborate a ten-point program, which realistically can emerge only by building a consensus, the purpose here is to focus on a few neglected priorities and several principles that might govern how we think about federal policy.

The federal government provides barely 7 percent of revenues for grade schools and high schools and about 14 percent for postsecondary education (much of which supports research) so that — unlike other countries that can dictate educational policy through the power of the purse — the federal government’s role will remain constrained. Moreover, the ability to establish the basic content of education, including both curriculum and pedagogy, is jealously guarded by states, and often by local districts and individual schools. Some issues

— such as standards, where the 50 states have taken more than 50 directions, and the definition of teacher quality, where state licensing standards and tests will prevail — are virtually off limits to federal action (except for research). Vouchers and choice mechanisms usually depend on state spending formulas and organizational regulations, and are similarly unlikely to be substantively affected by federal policy. Furthermore, when there have been national efforts to create consensus on issues, the ability of the federal government to implement the results of any consensus has been almost completely absent. For example, the National Education Goals Panel joined the governors in declaring six “national goals,” all of which are in shambles for failure to develop effective mechanisms for putting these slogans into effect. It makes government look inept to articulate such grandiose goals and then to fail to make much progress toward them.

Given these limits, the federal government can support exemplars, and it can fund research to clarify the effectiveness of alternative approaches. Occasionally it can provide large amounts of support for particular programs, but only when they are relatively small compared to the overall body of public education. The federal government can sometimes throw its moral weight on one side of an issue or another; probably the best example has been the federal effort to end *de jure* segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. And so, in seeking issues where the federal government might have some effect on the equity of schooling, we need to avoid those areas where the federal government cannot easily act, and find areas and issues where it might make some contribution.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

One area where the federal government might initiate new policies is the high school. There’s gener-

al consensus that the high school has been the least amenable to reform, compared to elementary schools and middle schools. While student disengagement from schooling takes place earlier, high school is the level where alienation really takes off. At this stage, the relationship of school to the adult world of employment, politics, and family life — its “relevance” — is obscure, particularly given the dominance of a conventional (and ancient) academic track; its ability to capture the imaginations of its hormone-charged students is almost completely absent, save perhaps in some upper tracks. And yet there is virtually no federal policy affecting high schools. Federal funds for compensatory education tend to go to elementary schools; other federal funds are either targeted on specific programs (e.g., bilingual education or schooling for the disabled) or directed at low-status programs like vocational education, and they are trivial in magnitude. Of course, there’s a powerful constituency claiming that high school is too late — that the federal government ought to concentrate its efforts on younger children. But there’s a need for attention to the high school too, not instead of these earlier efforts. The high school is the crucial link between schooling and the wider world, and if high schools don’t work well the messages to students about the role of schooling in later life will be garbled or, as in many urban schools, simply absent.

If less inequality and greater prosperity for all are the ultimate goals, then the intermediate goals are relatively simple and familiar. High school dropouts have fared poorly in an increasingly competitive world. (See Table 1, page 63.) Dropout prevention is therefore critical. High school graduates have fared a little better but too many of them still graduate from high school relatively incompetent (as the current debate over remediation in postsecondary education attests) and unable to compete for decent jobs in a market that demands increas-

ingly advanced skills. Furthermore, students who have done poorly in high school are unlikely to progress very far if they do manage to enter post-secondary education — so improving the quality of high schools is critical.

Admittedly, when the federal government has tried to improve high schools, it hasn't been particularly effective. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 represents a recent effort to articulate a different vision for high schools, incorporating out-of-school experiences in the form of work-based learning. But the federal government was unable to project a consistent vision of how high schools might change; state implementation often muddled the Act's intent; and local schools often could not do much more than make marginal increases in services (like counseling) that they were already providing badly. Furthermore, the legislation underestimated the time, resources, and stability necessary for serious reform. If we could as a nation absorb these lessons, we might be able to develop more effective policies the next time around.

THE URGENT NEED FOR A NEW URBAN EDUCATION POLICY

A second and more urgent priority area for an expanded federal role in elementary and secondary education involves urban schools. The imperative for creating a new urban education policy is straightforward: the majority of low-income and minority students live in cities, and improving their education requires improving urban schools. In addition, the conditions conducive to reform are often missing in urban school districts: they are plagued with shortages of qualified teachers, high turnover of both teachers and administrators, schools with demoralized and self-defeating cultures, inadequate and often derelict buildings and equipment, inadequate resources (in many but not all cities), sometimes inept central administrations

engaged in an endless series of reforms du jour, and dysfunctional political systems including vicious racial and union politics. Making matters worse, cities themselves are contradictory places: they are simultaneously the sites of economic growth and cultural richness, and places where the poor are concentrated and isolated from wider resources — where, as Jean Anyon has noted in *Ghetto Schooling*, students “are so isolated from the mainstream of American culture that they cannot profit from its curriculum”.

So the need for educational reform is most necessary precisely where it seems least possible. We might begin with those urban schools that have emerged as exemplars. CPSS, for example, has been the subject of a widely-admired book — Deborah Meier's *The Power of Their Ideas*, the bible of the small-school movement — as well as a fascinating documentary, Frederick Wiseman's *High School II*. CPSS has been widely praised for its ability to retain students and send them on to college, but relatively few policymakers have tried to imagine how we might move all urban schools in its direction. Some of the elements that have made that particular school what it is could be extended to other urban schools:

- A clear and clearly communicated educational philosophy, one that has motivated incremental improvements over 15 years.
- Small scale, of around 400 students, so that teachers can come to know students well.
- Pedagogy that stresses conceptual understanding, rather than memorization of facts and procedures.
- Stress on the importance of getting outside the school walls in order to learn directly from the wider world.

- A stable teaching force, drawn from a surplus of committed applicants.
- An effort to provide low-income students social services by connecting them with community agencies.

CPESS is hardly perfect. As I wandered its halls, the most obvious behavior among students — as in most urban schools — is inattention to schoolwork, a preference for disruption, constant bickering with (“dissing”) other students, and a barely-concealed disrespect for teachers, schoolwork, and the entire apparatus of adult control. This behavior, usually described as a lack of motivation and attention, is the subject of constant debate in many urban schools (including CPESS). It is also at the heart of teacher burnout and turnover, of time wasted and reforms undermined; it’s difficult to get students to take responsibility for their own learning or to develop new tests (higher standards!) to improve learning when students behave as if none of this matters. This too should be part of a debate over urban policy.

Imagine that we might forge a consensus to move all schools in the direction of CPESS, and to create solutions for problems (like “motivation”) where even exemplary urban schools are lacking. The details, including the particular philosophy any one school has chosen, are less important than the underlying principles: stability and persistence, certified and competent teachers in place of the legions with emergency credentials, adults knowing students well, teachers moving beyond facts and procedures to deeper understanding, experiences providing contact with the larger political and economic worlds, and programs that connect low-income students to the services they need. Imagine what it would take to introduce these conditions into most urban schools. These changes would be substantial, and would affect not only

patterns of funding but also conceptions of what ought to take place in schools. That discussion, about the goals and mechanisms of an urban educational policy, would be one worth having.

THE NEED FOR COMPLEMENTARY EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

Suppose now that we have managed to develop a narrative or vision powerful enough to justify federal policies for greater equity in education. Suppose in addition that we have managed to improve the quality of schooling for the most disadvantaged students. If the recent increases in inequality are to be reversed, however, there still remains a further task: employment opportunities for these better-educated workers must be enhanced. Otherwise the same individuals at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy might still go into relatively unskilled and poorly-paid work, unable to make use of their enhanced education. It’s asking too much for the schools of our country, even exemplars like CPESS, to shoulder the burden of decreasing inequality alone. What’s needed in addition is a national discussion about an employment policy that might complement an education policy — a policy that recognizes the limits of the current free-market climate.

There are some broad directions worth pursuing. Long unemployment periods and a larger amount of part-time and contingent work is to blame for a great deal of poverty and inequality. Simulations by Isabel Sawhill at the Urban Institute show that the overall poverty rate would fall from 12.2% to 3.6% if all family heads of household were able to work full-time. The growth of temporary, contract, and other forms of contingent work has exacerbated the amount of involuntary part-time work, the length of employment between short-term bouts of employment, and the lack of access to basic benefits, particularly health insurance and pension cov-

erage. National and state policies need to find some mechanisms of countering these trends, which appear to be getting worse despite relatively low unemployment rates. In Sawhill's simulations, other more familiar policies also matter. For example, subsidizing child care costs would further reduce poverty by 1.3 percentage points, increasing the value of the earned-income tax credit would reduce poverty a little more, and instituting universal health care coverage would presumably also help. But there's no substitute for providing sufficient employment.

Other initiatives have been proposed over the years. One would assist those living in inner cities to gain access to the booming job markets of suburban areas — like the Department of Housing and Urban Development's "Bridges to Work" program — though such efforts need to be more comprehensive and coordinated. Problems of racial discrimination in employment persist, especially for black men, and renewed efforts to identify and eliminate discrimination constitute another promising avenue. The information that low-income workers have about employment alternatives is quite limited. Perhaps the One-Stop Centers funded by the new Workforce Investment Act will provide sufficient information. If not, then alternative approaches to the information problem will need to be developed.

States have started to devise their own policies, again under the theory that developing a more educated labor force without increasing the demand for better-prepared workers is likely to be ineffective. Many states have instituted small business development centers. Oregon's efforts to diversify its economy requires local Regional Strategies Boards to target three "Key Industries," coordinating incentives for firms to expand with education to ensure a qualified local workforce. State experiences are often valuable as "laboratories

of democracy," experimenting with alternatives. A national program to encourage states to develop policies for their depressed areas might be able to eliminate pockets of poverty through carefully-coordinated and locally-oriented state programs rather than a uniform and clumsy federal approach like tax incentives.

There's no lack of alternatives to stimulate the demand for educated workers, even if there's little evidence and less consensus on what might be effective. Of course there's no ready-made demand-side policy to implement on a national scale; there hasn't been enough discussion for one to emerge. The issue is whether as a nation we can recognize that school reform is not enough — that our long history of efforts to resolve social problems through the schools cannot work without complementary employment policies.

RESOLUTIONS FOR THE MILLENNIUM

Any solution to the growing inequality in this country will require first a narrative justifying this path; then, a stable policy to improve and ensure the quality of all schools, particularly urban schools; and finally, complementary policies to stimulate the employment of newly-educated workers. This is surely a tall order, particularly because each of these three elements is necessary though not sufficient. Any one alone would certainly be valuable in its own right, but it wouldn't do much to reduce the level of inequality in an economy that is constantly recreating inequality in new forms.

But this isn't the end of the task. National developments and federal policies often undo with one hand what they are trying to accomplish with the other. Most education researchers agree that the present public education system tends to perpetuate inequality from one generation to the next, rather than to reduce it. Similarly, while some fed-

eral policies since the early 1980s have contributed to economic growth and lower unemployment, both of which have benefited the poor, other policies — conservative monetary policy and its focus on inflation rather than on unemployment, the deregulation of finance and communication, free-trade agreements, federal deficit reduction rather than increased social spending — have stimulated growth at the cost of exacerbating inequality. And so, if we as a nation are serious about using this period of growth and prosperity to reduce inequality, there are many other policies that we must avoid. The following resolutions for the millennium are intended to cover the worst of these:

First, do no harm. Many policies — both educational and non-educational — make inequality worse. A pursuit of inequality requires considering the effects on inequality of all policies — an “inequality impact statement,” so to speak — and foregoing those that undermine what education and employment policies elsewhere are trying to accomplish.

Avoid tax expenditures. It’s always tempting to use tax policy to encourage individuals and employers to move in certain directions. But tax credits and deductions can never improve the quality of either education or economic development; they disproportionately benefit middle- and upper-income taxpayers and they are often highly inefficient.

Avoid sound bites and simple solutions. The pattern of making policy via commission reports but failing to devise mechanisms for advancing the goals is quite ineffective. Simple-minded approaches contribute to perpetual reform without making any real change, and in so doing undermine the cause of reform itself.

Remember that school reform takes time, stability, and more than more money. The corollary of avoiding simple solutions is that approaches with

some prayer of working are likely to take time — usually at least twice as long as the five-year authorization period of most federal education programs. Instability in either policy directions or funding is highly destructive to reform. In addition, reform initiatives need to consider how additional resources will be used, rather than assuming that resource-starved schools will automatically figure out how to do the right thing. Additional funding may be necessary, but it’s rarely sufficient.

Remember that schooling is concerned with more than economic goals. In other essays in this volume, Richard Kahlenberg and Amy Gutmann remind us that the political and social purposes of schooling are as important today as in the days of Horace Mann. In addition, as Ray Bacchetti has written in *Education Week*, public schooling is “an extended practicum in living and learning together ... a great laboratory of shared responsibility” for the various goals and dreams of students, of parents, of communities, and of our nation itself. When schools fail in these broader ways, then they ultimately fail in everything including their economic goals. Narrow programs — narrowly vocational programs, for example, or narrow academic programs that define success in the mean, small-minded ways of standardized tests — will never be sufficient to our dreams for education

Now, making and breaking New Year’s resolutions is a national pastime, and so we need to remember why we make resolutions, both individual and collective: if only we could stick to them, the goals would be worth it. It’s instructive to remember an enormous triumph in social policy over the last third of this century: our policy for the elderly. Poverty rates among the elderly have fallen substantially since the mid-1960s. Medical care is almost universally available, and social services have expanded. Achievements of this magnitude

have not been cheap. They have required a national policy, rather than a scattering of state policies, and they have required substantial political will to maintain these benefits in periods of economic decline. Of course, our policies toward the elderly are not complete and they are not perfect, but the moving target is at least moving in the right direction. This is a collective accomplishment we ought to remember with pride. The improvement has been worth the effort.

Our task should be no less than achieving a similar success for children: to reduce the poverty and the inequality among them substantially, and to

improve the conditions of their daily lives. Enhancing their education must be a central part of this, for instrumental reasons — because the competencies that enable them to be better employed in a competitive and competence-based labor market will benefit us all — and for non-economic goals including preparation for citizenship, enhancing responsible participation in multiple communities, and nurturing the exuberance that children and youth bring to life. Achieving such goals would make these millennial resolutions worth keeping.

* * *



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