

EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Earlier we presented conservative, liberal, and radical perspectives on educational problems. Throughout this book, we have examined a number of educational problems from the foundations perspective. This chapter looks at the most significant educational problems and the role of teachers and schools in solving them. To what extent do teachers and schools make a difference? To what degree can they make a difference? Most importantly, to what extent are teachers and schools limited in their ability to solve educational and social problems, without significant changes outside the schools?

We related the stories of two teachers. The first, memorialized by the late *New York Times* education writer Fred Hechinger, was a beloved teacher who made a significant impact on the lives of her students. The second, a veteran teacher in an urban school district, retired from teaching because of the difficult problems she faced. We asked to what extent do the structural problems faced by teachers limit their ability to affect meaningful change and, conversely, to what degree do talented, enthusiastic, and excellent teachers have the ability to affect educational change in spite of the significant problems that they face. Although there is no easy answer to this question, it is clear that teachers work within social and organizational environments that indeed have profound effects on them and often limit their ability to affect meaningful change. It is also clear that teachers can and do make a difference, often in spite of what may seem like intractable problems.

Thus, although teachers can and do make a difference, the research indicates that solutions to educational problems cannot rely on the talent, energy, and hard work of teachers alone, but must reform the social and organizational conditions of schooling (Sizer, 1992). Before we examine ways in which educational reforms have attempted to do this, let us first look at some examples of how individual teachers make a difference.

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Jessica Siegel taught high school English and journalism at Seward Park High School, on New York City's lower east side, for 10 years. Samuel Freedman's *Small Victories* (1990) poignantly chronicles Jessica's struggles, triumphs, and defeats as she attempted to teach her students, most of them poor and immigrants, to value an education and to make their dreams a reality. Teaching in a neighborhood long a haven for immigrants and their children—first for East European Jews and Italians at the turn of the twentieth century, and now for Asians, Dominicans, and other Latinos—Jessica battles against the effects of poverty, drugs, gangs, homelessness, family violence and abuse, and language difficulties to give her students an opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

As the advisor to the Seward Park student newspaper, she uses journalism as a vehicle to involve students in the learning experience. Freedman captures the daily struggles, the long hours, and the selfless dedication of a teacher committed to making a difference in the lives of her students. He also captures the bureaucratic nonsense, the petty collegial jealousies, the social problems, and the school conditions that make success difficult, if not impossible. Jessica encourages students to go to college, she helps them with their applications, and she even drives them to college interviews. For every student she helps succeed and who gets into college, there are many others with talent and dreams who do not graduate.

After 10 years of heroic and successful teaching, Jessica decides to leave teaching and return to her first career as a journalist. In part, she leaves because she wants to be a journalist; in part, she leaves because to be a successful teacher required too much personal sacrifice, with too little reward. Freedman's book portrays the limits and possibilities of good teaching—that teachers like Jessica make an important difference, but that without reform of schools, teachers like Jessica may leave teaching. In her review of the book, Johnson (1991, p. 184) stated:

Freedman leaves us with admiration for Jessica Siegel, respect for many of her colleagues, compassion for her students, anger at a seemingly impersonal school bureaucracy, and remorse for a society that values cash more than children. . . . Yet it is clear that much more can be done to support exemplary teachers like Jessica Siegel. The moral of *Small Victories* is sobering and unequivocal: If we do not change schools to support good teaching, many good teachers will leave schools.

The film *Stand and Deliver* chronicles the work of Jaime Escalante at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles, a poor neighborhood of African Americans, Mexican Americans, and other Latino Americans. Jaime Escalante refuses to

accept the stereotype that students from low-income neighborhoods cannot succeed at high-level academic work. He came to Garfield as a computer teacher after a successful career as a computer analyst in the corporate world and immediately instituted an Advanced Placement (AP) Calculus program, despite the objections of the chairperson of the Mathematics Department, a woman who did not want to set the students up for failure.

Stand and Deliver portrays the heroic efforts of Jaime Escalante to teach his student advanced mathematics. He demonstrates what positive expectations can do and how hard work and dedication on the part of teachers and students can often overcome the pernicious effects of poverty, racism, and social problems. Despite a shortage of materials, the accusation of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) that his students cheated on the AP test (according to ETS, because they had many of the same wrong answers; according to Jaime Escalante, because they did too well for students from their backgrounds), and numerous personal hurdles that students had to overcome, all 18 students passed the AP examination the first year of the program. Within four years, over 85 students passed the AP calculus examination.

The film demonstrates a number of important points. First, a talented and dedicated teacher can make a difference. Second, if teachers expect all students to learn and excel, they can and do. Third, it is possible to institutionalize the effective teaching of one teacher into an overall school philosophy, as Garfield High School had to do in order to serve as many students as it now does. Despite these positive lessons, however, there has been a tendency to romanticize the work of Jaime Escalante, or worse to use his success as an example that all that is necessary to improve schools in low-income neighborhoods is to raise expectations. The fact is that although Jaime Escalante did make a difference, students at schools like Garfield High School still have significantly fewer opportunities than students at more affluent high schools. Furthermore, teachers like Jaime Escalante cannot eliminate the negative effects of poverty and other social problems.

These two stories of wonderful teachers can be supplemented by your own recollections of wonderful teachers who have influenced your lives. Unfortunately, they can also be countered by your own stories of terrible teachers and ineffective schools. Our point in telling these stories is to indicate that, as teachers, you can make a difference. However, they also demonstrate that wonderful teachers alone cannot ameliorate societal and school problems, and that wonderful teachers in ineffective schools are severely limited in what they can accomplish. The foundations perspective enlightens one to the importance of changing structures, not just individuals, if the educational system is to improve. For the past decade, there

have been a number of significant reform efforts aimed at doing just this. The following section explores some of these efforts.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM FROM THE 1980s TO 2005

The 1980s and 1990s and into the twenty-first century were periods of significant debate and reform in U.S. education. Beginning in 1983, with the National Commission on Educational Excellence's report *A Nation at Risk*, government leaders, educational reformers, teacher organizations, administrators, and various other interest groups attempted to improve the quality of U.S. schools. Although the decades included two specific waves of reform, the first beginning in 1983 and the second beginning in 1985 and continuing through 2005, the period must be understood as a conservative response to the progressive reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, if not the entire progressive agenda of the twentieth century.

In the 1980s, the major reform actors shifted from the federal to the state to the local levels. In the 1990s, President Clinton's *Goals 2000* and President Bush's *No Child Left Behind* placed the federal government back at the forefront of educational policy. From the outset, the federal government, through the Department of Education, attempted to balance its ideological belief that education is not a federal governmental matter, with its commitment to providing the impetus for change. First, through its influential report *A Nation at Risk*, written during the tenure of Secretary Terrel Bell, and second, through his successor William Bennett's use of his office as a "bully pulpit," the U.S. Department of Education played a significant role in keeping the pressure on states and localities to improve educational outcomes, which for Secretary Bennett defined the goals of educational reform. Finally, NCLB placed accountability at the forefront of reforms aimed at reducing the achievement gap.

The educational reforms from the 1980s to today consisted of two waves of reform (Bacharach, 1990; Passow, 1989). The first wave, marked by the reports of the early and mid-1980s and the educational initiatives directly responding to them, were concerned primarily with the issues of accountability and achievement (Dougherty, 1990, p. 3). Responding to the call for increased academic achievement, many states increased graduation requirements, toughened curriculum mandates, and increased the use of standardized test scores to measure student achievement.

By the mid to late 1980s, however, it became increasingly clear that such top-down reform would be ineffective in dealing with the schools' myriad problems. Although raising achievement standards for students and implementing accountability measures

for evaluating teachers had some positive effects, many (including the National Governors Association, which took a leading role in reform) believed that educational reform had to do more than provide changes in evaluation procedures. The second wave of reform, then, was targeted at the structure and processes of the schools themselves, placing far more control in the hands of local schools, teachers, and communities. Whereas the first wave was highly centralized at the state level, the second wave was more decentralized to the local and school levels. What they had in common, however, was what the Governors Conference emphasized as the "triple theme of achievement, assessment, and accountability" (Bacharach, 1990, p. 8). By the mid-1990s, however, the first and second waves began to overlap, with top-down federal and state mandates defining the goals and standards of education, but leaving it to local districts to implement them.

Despite the second wave's insistence that locally based reforms were central to success, many critics (including teacher organizations and unions) argued that the reforms were highly bureaucratic and aimed primarily at assessment procedures. Significant reforms, they suggested, had to emphasize both changes within schools and changes that involved teachers, students, and parents as part of the reform process, not merely as objects of it. From the latter part of the 1980s through the end of the 1990s, reforms that emphasized teacher empowerment, school-based management, and school choice, charter schools, and tuition vouchers became the most important ones under consideration.

To summarize, the first wave of reform reports stressed the need for increased educational excellence though increased educational standards and a reversal of the rising tide of mediocrity. Passow (1989, p. 16) stated the following themes as essential to the first wave of educational reform:

1. The need to attain the twin goals of excellence and equity
2. The need to clarify educational goals, unburdening schools from responsibilities they cannot or should not fill
3. The need to develop a common core curriculum (not unlike the standard college-bound curriculum) with few or no electives, little or no curricular differentiation, but only pedagogical differentiation
4. The need to eliminate tracking programs so that students could tackle the common core courses in a common curriculum in different ways
5. The need for major changes in vocational education: in the student populations served, the curricula provided, and the sites of such education if offered
6. The need for education to teach about technology, including computer literacy, and to become involved in the technological revolution

7. The need to "increase both the duration and intensity of academic learning," lengthening the school day and the school year
8. The need to recruit, train, and retain more academically able teachers, to improve the quality of teaching, and to upgrade the professional working life of teachers
9. The need to redefine the principal's role and put the "principal squarely in charge of educational quality in each school"
10. The need to forge new partnerships between corporations, business, and the schools

Typifying the second wave of educational reform were the recommendations of the State Governor's Conference. Governor Lamar Alexander, in *Time for Results: The Governor's 1991 Report on Education* (1986), summarized the Governor's Association's year-long analysis of a variety of issues, including teaching, leadership and management, parental involvement and choice, readiness, technology, school facilities, and college quality, with (among others) the following recommendations:

1. Now is the time to work out a fair, affordable Career Ladder salary system that recognizes real differences in function, competence, and performance of teachers.
2. States should create leadership programs for school leaders.
3. Parents should have more choice in the public schools their children attend.
4. The nation—and the states and local districts—need report cards about results, and about what students know and can do.
5. School districts and schools that do not make the grade should be declared bankrupt, taken over by the state, and reorganized.
6. It makes no sense to keep closed half a year the school buildings in which America has invested a quarter of a trillion dollars while we are undereducated and overcrowded.
7. States should work with four- and five-year-olds from poor families to help them get ready for school and decrease the chances that they will drop out later.
8. Better use of technologies through proper planning and training for use of videodiscs, computers, and robotics is an important way to give teachers more time to teach.
9. States should insist that colleges assess what students actually learn while in college. (cited in Passow, 1989, p. 23)

During both waves of educational reform, a number of programs and initiatives received considerable attention. Among these are school choice, charter schools, tuition vouchers, school-business partnerships, privatization, school-to-work programs, school-based management, reform of teacher education, the effective school movement, state intervention in local districts, and school finance litigation.

School Choice, Charter Schools, and Tuition Vouchers

During the 1980s and 1990s, many educational researchers and policy analysts indicated that most public schools were failing in terms of student achievement, discipline, and morality. At the same period, some researchers were investigating private schools and concluding that they were more effective learning environments than public schools. Private schools were reputed to be accountable, efficient, and safe. Moreover, the work of Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982) seemed to prove that private school students learned more than their public school counterparts. Other research on *magnet schools* (schools with special curricula and student bodies) seemed to indicate that public schools that operated independently of the public school bureaucracy were happier, healthier, and more academically productive than zone schools where students were required to attend based on their residence.

As the 1980s came to a close, some researchers reasoned that magnet schools and private schools were superior to neighborhood public schools because schools of choice reflected the desires and needs of their constituents and were thus sensitive to change. For several decades, the idea of school choice had been on the fringes of the educational policy world in the form of voucher proposals. Essentially, voucher proponents argued that if families, rather than schools, were funded, it would allow for greater parental choice and participation. Moreover, by voting with their dollars, parents would reward good schools and punish bad schools. A voucher system, in effect, would deregulate the public school system. That a voucher system might also privatize the public school system was a muted issue.

By the late 1980s, however, school choice was at the forefront of the educational reform movement. Presidents Reagan and Bush supported choice and one influential White House report enumerated a number of reasons why choice was the right reform for the times (Paulu, 1989). In essence, choice was a panacea that was nonbureaucratic, inexpensive, and fundamentally egalitarian because it allowed market forces to shape school policy rather than subjecting educators to

the heavy hand of the educational bureaucracy. A very influential book by John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (1990), seemed to provide empirical evidence that unregulated school choice policies, in and of themselves, would produce a structural reform in U.S. education.

Congressional support for greater school choice was expressed in a bill that was passed by the House of Representatives in the summer of 1990, which, among other things, provided direct federal support for open enrollment experiments. Needless to say, all this political activity stirred up a great deal of controversy and confusion. Choice is controversial because it is deeply political and rests on a set of assumptions about educational marketplaces and private schools that are questionable. It is confusing because choice is a rubric that covers a wide variety of policies that are quite different, except that they include an element of student and parental choice. Next, we briefly touch on some of the major types of school choice plans that have been recently implemented in the United States (see Cookson, 1994, for a complete discussion).

Intersectional choice plans include public and private schools. For example, the cities of Milwaukee and Cleveland provided tuition vouchers to students who attended private neighborhood schools. The inclusion of private schools in choice plans stirred a great deal of debate among policy makers because there are fundamental issues of constitutionality and equity inherent in any public policy that transfers funds from the public sector to the private sector. In the United States, there is a constitutionally protected division between church and state that forbids the establishment of any state religion and thus forbids state support of any particular religion. Because an overwhelming number of private schools in the United States are religiously affiliated, this issue is critical. However, in 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* ruled that the Cleveland voucher program did not violate the First Amendment separation of church and state, making future voucher programs more likely. Additionally, equity issues arise from the fact that some private schools are believed to contribute to the maintenance of social inequalities. The most elite secondary schools in the United States, for instance, are private. A public policy that would transfer funds to these schools would clearly raise issues of equal educational opportunity.

Intrasectional school choice policies include only public schools. States, such as Minnesota, permit students to attend school in any public school district in the state, so long as the nonresident school district is willing, has space, and the transfer does not upset racial balance. Statewide choice plans, such as Minnesota's, have been adopted by a number of other states. Most choice plans, however, are more limited geographically. The most common form of intrasectional choice plans

permit students to attend schools outside of their community school district. These interdistrict choice plans commonly allow urban students to cross district lines and attend suburban schools and vice versa. In St. Louis, for example, minority students from the inner city are able to attend suburban schools that are located in relatively affluent white neighborhoods. In theory, students from the suburbs are supposed to be drawn into the inner city by some outstanding magnet schools, but, in fact, only a handful of white students have traveled into the inner city to attend school.

Intradistrict choice plans refer to any option available to students within a given public school district. These options range from a choice of curriculum within a particular school to allowing students to attend any school in the district. One particular intradistrict choice plan that has gained a great deal of recognition is *controlled choice*. In this type of plan, students choose a school anywhere in a district or within some zones within a district. The key to this policy is that student choices are not allowed to upset racial balances. In effect, some students may not be able to enroll in their first-choice schools if it would mean increased districtwide racial segregation. Often, other factors are also taken into consideration, such as whether an applicant has a sibling already in his or her school of choice. There are several successful controlled choice districts in the United States, including Cambridge (Massachusetts), Montclair (New Jersey), and District 4 located in the borough of Manhattan in New York City. District 4 also allows students outside its boundaries to attend schools within the district, thus combining intradistrict and interdistrict features.

Boston initiated a controlled choice plan that may serve as a test of whether these types of plans can be successfully implemented on a citywide basis. According to Charles L. Glenn, executive director of the Office of Educational Equity in the Massachusetts Department of Education, the choice plan in Boston appears to be operationally successful, although "vulnerable schools" (i.e., those with declining student populations) need extra assistance to remain open and to provide services to the students who attend them. According to Glenn (1991, p. 43), "Public school choice will not produce overnight miracles, and the Boston experience—like that of Soviet-bloc economies—shows how very difficult it can be to reform an entrenched institution with a monopoly position and a tradition of top-down decision making."

Throughout the 1990s, public school choice, tuition vouchers for private schools, and charter schools (schools that are publicly funded by state charters but independent of many school district mandates) have been key educational reforms. Powers and Cookson (1999) summarized the available evidence on

school choice and concluded that (1) market-driven choice programs increase stratification within school districts; (2) choice programs increase the educational opportunities for minority students, who, without these programs, would be limited to their neighborhood public schools; (3) choice parents tend to be more involved in their children's education; (4) choice parents tend to be more satisfied with their children's education; and (5) there is disagreement among researchers about the effect of choice on student achievement. For example, using the same data on Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), Witte (1996; Witte, Sterr, & Thorn, 1995; Witte et al., 1994) argued that the effect of choice has been inconsistent; Greene and Peterson (1996) argued that MPCP has resulted in significant achievement gains; and Rouse's (2002) findings are in the middle.

A longitudinal study of the Cleveland Scholarship Program concluded that there were no significant differences between voucher students and students in the Cleveland public schools, when controlling for race and income of the students. Ladd (2002), in a balanced and exhaustive review of the literature, concluded:

Contrary to the claims of many voucher advocates, widespread use of school vouchers is not likely to generate substantial gains in the productivity of the U.S. K-12 education system. Any gains in overall student achievement are likely to be small at best. Moreover, given the tendency of parents to judge schools in part by the characteristics of students in the school, a universal voucher system would undoubtedly harm large numbers of disadvantaged students. Although small means-tested voucher programs might provide a helpful safety valve for some children, policymakers should be under no illusion that such programs will address the fundamental challenge of providing an adequate education to the large numbers of disadvantaged students in many of our large cities. At the same time, there are good arguments for giving families, especially those who are economically disadvantaged, more power to choose the schools their children attend. The challenge for policymakers is to find ways to expand parental choices without excessively privileging the interests of individual families over the social interests that justify the funding of K-12 education.

The choice movement resulted in the development of charter schools and tuition vouchers for private schools. Whereas conservatives became the major proponents of tuition vouchers, advocates of charter schools often came from all sides of the political spectrum. Wells and colleagues (1998) summarized the claims by charter school advocates: charter schools (1) are more accountable for

student outcomes; (2) have greater autonomy and thus are empowered to better serve their students; (3) are more efficient; (4) provide greater choice to more families; (5) create a competitive market and will force public schools to change; and (6) are more innovative.

The UCLA Charter School Study of 10 California school districts (Wells et al., 1998) reported the following findings:

1. California Charter Schools (CCS) are most often not held accountable for increased student achievement.
2. School boards are ambivalent about monitoring CCS.
3. CCS are accountable to multiple constituencies.
4. CCS vary greatly in their autonomy.
5. CCS funding varies widely between and within districts.
6. Private resources are needed for CCS to survive.
7. CCS differ greatly in their ability to raise private funds.
8. CCS depend on strong leadership.
9. CCS have significant control over the types of students they admit.
10. The requirement that CCS reflect the racial/ethnic makeup of their districts has not been enforced.
11. Teachers in CCS welcome their freedom, small-class size, and collegiality, but note their heavy workloads.
12. Although it is not required, most CCS have state-credentialed teachers.
13. Teachers in schools converted to CCS continue to belong to unions, but teachers in new CCS do not.
14. There are few formal ways for public schools and CCS to learn from each other.
15. Public school educators believe that CCS have an unfair advantage that limits competition.

The UCLA study indicates that charter schools in California have not fulfilled many of their advocates claims and suggests that charter schools may continue to advantage already advantaged families. However, since the study did not include an empirical investigation of achievement outcomes, it is still premature to reach any overall conclusions about the efficacy of charter schools, particularly for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

In a recent study by the U.S. Department of Education, researchers found that students in district public schools had higher achievement than comparable students in charter schools (*Education Week*, 2005). Tractenberg, Sadovnik, and

Liss (2004) found that the performance of New Jersey's charter schools has been mixed at best, and Barr (2004a) found that there were no overall significant differences between New Jersey's public and charter schools, when controlling for student background. He also found that charter schools are among some of the highest- and lowest-performing schools in New Jersey. Hoxby (2004a, 2004b), however, in a study comparing students in charter schools with those who applied through lotteries, but were put on waiting lists and stayed in public schools, found that charter school students had higher achievement. Hill (2005) and Miron and Nelson (2004), in looking at the disagreements over charter school achievement, have cautioned that difficulties in study designs make it hard to reach reliable conclusions.

Clearly, it is too early to tell whether school choice will lead to the revitalization of public education in the United States. It may well be that choice is a method of school improvement, but cannot by itself resolve many of the fundamental problems associated with public education. Moreover, choice plans usually involve complex and volatile issues of constitutionality, equity, and feasibility. For instance, how will already impoverished school districts pay for the increased transportation costs required by many choice plans? In sum, there is evidence that school choice can lead to improvement in individual schools, but there is little convincing evidence that choice will result in the overall improvement of U.S. education.

Privatization

From the 1990s, the traditional distinction between public and private education became blurred, with private education companies increasingly becoming involved in public education in a variety of ways. First, for-profit companies, such as the Edison Company, took over the management of failing schools and districts. The Philadelphia Public Schools, taken over by the state of Pennsylvania in 2003 due to low student achievement, hired for-profit companies, including Edison, as well as local universities, including Penn and Temple to manage its schools. Second, for-profit companies, such as Kaplan and Sylvan Learning Centers, have the majority of contracts for supplemental tutoring under NCLB. It is too early to assess the efficacy of such privatization, but it is clear that corporations see the multi-billion-dollar education industry as a lucrative market.

Teacher Education

The emergence and development of teacher education as an educational problem was a response to the initial debates concerning the failure of the schools

(Labaree, 1992a, 1992b, 1996). If the schools were not working properly, then teachers and teaching—perhaps the most important piece in the puzzle—had to be looked at critically. In addition, teacher organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), fearing the scapegoating of their members, took an active role in raising the debate as the opportunity to both recognize and improve the problematic conditions under which, from their perspective, most of their members work.

Finally, if teachers and teaching were indeed part of the problem, then perhaps the education and training of teachers was a good starting point for analysis. Thus, teacher education and schools and colleges of education, long the object of critical scrutiny within universities, became the subject of intensive national investigation. By 1986, at least five major reports (by the National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education, the California Commission on the Teaching Profession, the Holmes Group, the Southern Regional Education Board, and the Carnegie Report of the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession) outlined major problems in teacher education and the professional lives of teachers, and proposed a large-scale overhaul of the system that prepares teachers. Although the reports differed in some respects, there was widespread agreement about the nature of the problem. The debate revolved around three major points:

1. The perceived lack of rigor and intellectual demands in teacher education programs
2. The need to attract and retain competent teacher candidates
3. The necessity to reorganize the academic and professional components of teacher education programs at both the baccalaureate and post baccalaureate levels (Teacher Education Project, 1986).

Although all five reports contributed to the ongoing discussions, the Carnegie and Holmes reports attracted the most public response and became symbolic of the teacher education reform movement. (Perhaps this was because they represented two of the major interest groups in teacher education—in the case of Carnegie, major political and educational leaders, and for Holmes, the Deans of Education from the major research universities.) Therefore, this section will analyze the Carnegie and Holmes reports as representative of the current attempts to improve the training of teachers (see Labaree, 1992a, 1992b, for a detailed discussion).

The Carnegie Report, entitled *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (1986) and prepared by its Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (including representatives from corporations, the NEA and AFT, school journalists and

administrators, legislators, the Governor of New Jersey, and a Dean of Education of a major research university), focused on the necessity of educational quality for a competitive U.S. economy and the value of education in a democratic political system. Building on the critique offered by *A Nation at Risk*, the Carnegie Report suggested that improvements in teacher education were necessary preconditions for improvements in education.

In addition to this underlying democratic-liberal model of education, the report argued that the decline in traditional low-wage jobs in the U.S. economy and the corresponding increase in high-technology and service positions would require the schools to better prepare its students for this "new" economic reality. In this regard, also, the Carnegie Report stressed the centrality of better prepared teachers to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Echoing this political-economic perspective, the report stated:

If our standard of living is to be maintained, if the growth of a permanent underclass is to be averted, if democracy is to function effectively [in the twenty-first] century, our schools must graduate the vast majority of their students with achievement levels long thought possible for only the privileged few. The American mass education system, designed in the early part of the century for a mass production economy, will not succeed unless it not only raises but redefines the essential standards of excellence and strives to make quality and equality of opportunity compatible with each other. (1986, p. 3)

In order to accomplish these democratic-liberal goals, the Carnegie Report (1986, p. 3) called for "sweeping changes in educational policy," which would include the restructuring of schools and the teaching profession, the elimination of the undergraduate education major, the recruitment of minorities into the teaching profession, and the increase of standards in teacher education and in teaching.

The Holmes Group, on the other hand, avoided explicit political-economic goals, but focused on the relationship between university-based teacher education, the professional lives of teachers, and the structure of the schools themselves. Arguing that their role as teacher educators gave a unique and also perhaps subjective perception of these issues, the Holmes Report, entitled *Tomorrow's Teachers* (1986), outlined a set of five goals and proposals for the improvement of teacher education. Michael Sedlak, one of the original coauthors of the report, introduced his brief summary of the document by stressing that "the Holmes Group is dedicated not just to the improvement of teacher education but to the construction of a genuine profession of teaching" (1987, p. 315). The goals of

the report included raising the intellectual soundness of teacher education, creating career ladders for teachers, developing entry-level requirements into the profession, linking schools of education at the university level to schools, and improving schools for students and teachers.

In two subsequent reports, *Tomorrow's Schools* (1990) and *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* (1995), the Holmes Group advocated systemic changes in professional development and radically altering schools of education with an emphasis on school-university partnerships and professional development schools (PDS). Critics of the Holmes Group (Labaree, 1992a, 1992b, 1996) argued that its proposals represented a "disabling vision" for schools of education, as they limit their roles to teacher education only, while deemphasizing their other important roles in research and education in broader societal and psychological contexts.

Despite differences in tone and some minor differences in emphasis, both the Carnegie and Holmes Reports focus on the same general concerns:

1. They agree that overall problems in education cannot be solved without corresponding changes in teacher education.
2. Teacher education programs must be upgraded in terms of their intellectual rigor and focus, their need to emphasize the liberal arts, their need to eliminate undergraduate teacher education programs and, like other professions (i.e., psychology, social work, law, medicine), move professional training and certification to the graduate level.
3. Rigorous standards of entry into the profession must be implemented, and systematic examinations to monitor such entry must be developed.
4. University teacher education programs and schools must be connected in a more systematic and cooperative manner.
5. Career ladders that recognize differences in knowledge, skill, and commitment must be created for teachers.
6. Necessary changes must be made in the schools and the professional lives of teachers in order to attract and retain the most competent candidates for the profession.

John Goodlad, in *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools* (1990), proposed a radical transformation of the way teachers are prepared, requiring an overhaul of university-based teacher preparation. Echoing many of the recommendations of the Carnegie Commission and the Holmes Group on school-university cooperation, Goodlad stressed the importance of rewarding teacher-educators for their work, rather than relegating them, as is currently the case, to the bottom rung of the university status hierarchy.

In the 1990s, teacher education and professionalization continued to be significant issues. Talbert (1996) argued that both teacher education and professional development programs have been inadequate for equipping prospective teachers and teachers to fulfill their myriad responsibilities. Most teachers receive one-shot professional development workshops that have little effect on their performance. She argued that long-term systemic professional development is needed.

As head of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, Linda Darling-Hammond (1996b) has been one of the recent leaders of the teacher education reform. The commission report indicated that the criticisms presented by the Carnegie and Holmes reports in the 1980s had not been adequately addressed. It pointed out that "school reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions in which teachers can teach, and teach well" (p. vi) and it identified the following barriers to improving teacher education development: (1) low expectations for student performance, (2) unenforced standards for teachers, (3) major flaws in teacher preparation, (4) slipshod teacher recruitment, (5) inadequate induction for beginning teachers, (6) lack of professional development and rewards for knowledge and skill, and (7) schools that are structured for failure rather than success. Therefore, the Commission recommended the following:

1. Get serious about standards, for both students and teachers.
2. Reinvent teacher preparation and professional development.
3. Fix teacher recruitment and put qualified teachers in every classroom.
4. Encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skill.
5. Create schools that are organized for student and teacher success. (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996, pp. vi-vii)

Representative of the second wave of educational reforms, the effective school movement's recommendations, as well as those of the Carnegie, Holmes, and National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reports, emphasized the processes of teaching and learning, the school environment, and especially the need to improve the professional lives and status of teachers.

The Effective School Movement

In response to *A Nation at Risk* and other reports criticizing the effectiveness of U.S. public schools, the school effectiveness movement emerged and suggested that there were characteristics in good schools that could be used as models for improving educational effectiveness. The late Ron Edmonds, one of the early leaders of this movement, argued that educational reform and improvement must consider problems of both equity and quality. Based on Edmonds's work on

effective schools for disadvantaged students (Edmonds, 1979a), research on school effectiveness sought to identify the characteristics of effective schools (Brookover et al., 1979, 1982).

The school effectiveness research points out five key factors that define successful schools: (1) high expectations for all students, and staff acceptance of responsibility for student learning; (2) instructional leadership on the part of the principal; (3) a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning; (4) a clear and focused mission concerning instructional goals shared by the staff; and (5) frequent monitoring of student progress (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987, p. 389).

Based on this research, educational policy makers focused on how to build the capacity in districts, schools, and classrooms to improve student achievement and to reduce the achievement gaps. Research suggests that districts have a specific role to play in assisting schools to build the necessary capacity to improve student achievement. Districts can assist schools in developing organizational/structural and instructional capacity. Research provides advice to districts about how they can build organizational capacity, and suggests a focus on the following five dimensions:

1. Vision and leadership
2. Collective commitment and cultural norms
3. Knowledge or access to knowledge
4. Organizational structures and management
5. Resources (Goertz et al., 1995, p. 3)

Research also argues that the reform process itself is instrumental in building capacity, and indicates four strategies for building the capacity for standards-based reforms:

1. Articulating a reform vision
2. Providing instructional guidelines
3. Restructuring governance and organizational structures
4. Establishing evaluation and accountability mechanisms (Goertz et al., 1995, p. 4)

In other words, it is incumbent on districts to do the following:

- Assist schools in using achievement data as a baseline for targeted improvement.
- Provide districtwide professional development aimed at improving teacher knowledge and skills.
- Help schools align their curriculum and instruction to state learning standards and assessments.
- Target those students and schools with the most need for districtwide help.

Efforts aimed at capacity building must start with a vision of what an effective school should look like. After all, it is at the school level—more than at the district—that student achievement is most directly impacted. There is general agreement in the research conducted on the effective practices of high-performing, high-poverty schools. These schools (American Federation of Teachers, 1998, 1999; American Institutes for Research, 1999; Carter, 2000; Connell, 1999; Haycock, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999; Lein et al., 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 1998, 2001):

- Set high standards and develop curriculum and assessment tools based on those standards.
- Hold teachers and school administrators accountable for student performance and meeting goals.
- Create a safe and orderly academic environment.
- Employ teachers who are experienced and qualified to teach their subject matter and have access to quality professional development and school administrators who are committed to education.
- Encourage parental and community involvement.
- Enjoy administrative flexibility in making decisions involving curriculum, personnel, and school budgets.

Research from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2000b) summarized the key components of school quality as follows:

- Teacher quality and experience, including the academic skills of teachers, teachers who are teaching in their field of preparation, teacher experience, professional development
- Classroom climate, including course content and alignment with learning standards, technology, class size, pedagogy
- School context, including school leadership, goals, professional community, discipline, academic environment

In order to be more specific about school capacity, it is useful to look at what the research says about the characteristics of effective schools and classrooms, and also about effective teachers. The characteristics described encompass structural issues, broad school and classroom-culture issues, and specific instructional issues.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2000b) concluded that there are five characteristics of effective schools that have a positive effect on student learning:

1. School leadership that provides direction, guidance, and support;
2. School goals that are clearly identified, communicated, and enacted;
3. A school faculty that collectively takes responsibility for student learning;
4. School discipline that establishes an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning;
5. School academic organization and climate that challenges and supports students toward higher achievement (p. 36)

At the level of the classroom, research indicates that a variety of factors—including course content, pedagogy, technology and class size—have an impact on student achievement. However, without effective teachers, these factors mean little. Research indicates that at the classroom level, effective instructional practices, implemented by knowledgeable teachers, are a prerequisite for school improvement (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Vasquez-Helig, 2005).

Research reveals a lot about the characteristics of effective teachers. What this research means on a practical level is that the state must partner with districts and schools to build an infrastructure that will increase the likelihood that every teacher possesses the characteristics listed below. According to the research, the most qualified teachers possess the following characteristics (Ingersoll, 2003):

- Strong academic skills
- Teaching within the individual's field of expertise—having an equivalent of a major in the field
- At least three years of teaching experience
- Participation in high-quality professional development programs

Class size is another component of effective schools, especially for low-income students. A Tennessee class size study provides important evidence on the value of small classes (Krueger, 1998; Mosteller, 1995; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Based on a random assignment experiment, this study indicated that there were significant achievement gains made by students in the smaller classes, when controlling for all other factors. Further, the greatest gains were made by black students in the early grades. Further studies confirmed that the largest gains were made by black, disadvantaged students (Achilles, 1996; Finn, J. D., 1998; Grissmer, Flanagan, & Williamson, 1998; Hanushek, 1998; Krueger, 1998; Mosteller, Light, & Sachs, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). A report by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2000b) suggests that reductions in class size have the potential for helping all students in the primary grades (U.S. Department of Education, 2000b, p. 35). Based on the Tennessee evidence, it appears that for disadvantaged students the gains are

especially strong. Beginning in the 1990s, a number of nonprofit organizations developed models for school improvement, based on the research evidence on effective schools. These include Success for All, a highly structured and scripted program founded by Robert Slavin at Johns Hopkins University; Accelerated Schools, a program that provides rigorous curriculum for students at risk, founded by Henry Levin at Stanford and now at Teachers College, Columbia University; the Coalition of Essential Schools, a progressive school reform program, founded by TheodoreSizer at Brown University; a capacity building model founded by the Hudson Institute; the Comer School Development Program, a program based on school-family partnerships, founded by James Comer at Yale Medical Schools; Core Knowledge, a program based on "traditional" core knowledge, founded by E. D. Hirsch at the University of Virginia; and America's Choice, a program based on standards and assessments, aligned instructional systems, focus on literacy and mathematics, leadership, and professional learning communities, founded by the National Center for Education and the Economy (for a complete list see www.nwrel.org/scpd/catalog/modellist.asp).

Federal funds are available for comprehensive school reform programs in low-income schools. However, the programs must demonstrate that the school reform program integrates all eleven of the components outlined in the *Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program guidance* (www.csrlclearinghouse.org/index.cgi?l=csr_program_components):

1. Proven methods and strategies based on scientifically based research
2. Comprehensive design
3. Professional development
4. Measurable goals and benchmarks
5. Support within the school
6. Support for teachers and principals
7. Parental and community involvement
8. External technical support and assistance
9. Annual evaluation
10. Coordination of resources
11. Strategies that improve academic achievement—The program must meet one of the following requirements:
 - a. the program has been found, through scientifically based research, to significantly improve the academic achievement of participating students
 - or
 - b. the program has been found to have strong evidence that it will significantly improve the academic achievement of participating children.

The evidence on the success of these programs has been the subject of considerable debate, particularly Success for All (SFA). Pogrow (1996, 1999, 2000) has argued that SFA has not significantly improved its schools, whereas Slavin (1997, 1999) has argued that there is considerable scientific evidence to demonstrate his program's effectiveness. More recent research by the American Institutes for Research (Aladjem et al., 2002) demonstrates differences in effectiveness among 24 programs, but also indicates that many programs improve low-income schools. A 2004 study by the Consortium on Policy Research in Education (May, Supovitz, & Perda, 2004) showed significant achievement gains in schools using America's Choice in Rochester, New York. Borman and colleagues (2003) have provided a meta-analysis of the studies on the effects of CSR and conclude that comprehensive school reforms have the potential for improving schools and reducing the achievement gaps.

The evidence suggests that these types of reforms have the potential for improving low-income, high-minority schools. The Education Trust (2005) provided examples of many high-performing, low-income, high-minority schools. Further, it argued that there are some districts (e.g., Aldine and El Paso, Texas) and some states (e.g., Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Texas) that have significantly reduced the race, ethnic, and social class achievement gaps through the types of educational policies outlined in this chapter. However, sometimes such reforms fail to improve consistently failing schools and more drastic action is taken.

State Intervention in Local School Districts*

For several decades at least, school accountability has been a prominent issue on the national education scene. Accountability has taken many forms, often involving state regulation or oversight. It has included state certification of school personnel and of school districts; statewide testing and assessment of pupils; state monitoring of local fiscal, management, and educational practices; local districts reporting to the state; state dissemination of report cards and other district- and school-specific information to the public; and state intervention in the operation of local districts when problems were identified and solutions were determined to be beyond the local capacity.

Virtually all state accountability systems focus on rewards and sanctions. State policy makers increasingly are directing their attention to how to reward schools

*This section is adapted from P. Tractenberg, M. Holzer, G. Miller, A. R. Sadovnik, and B. Liss (2002), *Developing a Plan for Reestablishing Local Control in the State-Operated School Districts*. Newark, NJ: Institute on Education Law and Policy, Rutgers University (<http://ielp.rutgers.edu>).

and districts that perform well and how to sanction those that do not. Currently, 38 states have some form of rewards or sanctions in place: 8 states reward school districts, 20 reward schools, 29 impose sanctions on school districts, and 32 impose sanctions on schools. Three states (Delaware, Oklahoma, and Texas) do all four. For an excellent description and analysis of the accountability structures in each state, see CPRE (Consortium for Policy Research on Education), *State Assessment & Accountability Systems: 50 State Profiles* (2000).

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FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

By the early 1990s, it was still unclear as to whether school reforms would begin to produce some of the improvements they promised. In 1990, President G. H. W. Bush—with the support of the National Governor's Association—announced six national goals for U.S. education:

1. Goal 1: By the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn.
2. Goal 2: By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. Goal 3: By the year 2000, American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
4. Goal 4: By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
5. Goal 5: By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6. Goal 6: By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning. ("Text of Statement of Goals Adopted by the Governors," 1990, pp. 16–17)

Until 1993, President Bush's educational reform proposal *America 2000*, based on these national goals, was in the implementation stage. *America 2000* built on four related themes:

1. Creating better and more accountable schools for today's students;
2. Creating a New Generation of American Schools for tomorrow's students;

3. Transforming America into a nation of students; and
4. Making our communities places where learning will happen. (*America 2000*, 1991)

Within each of the objectives, *America 2000* proposed a number of specific goals:

- Creating better and more accountable schools for today's students:
 1. World Class Standards in Five Core Subjects (English, mathematics, science, history, and geography).
 2. A system of voluntary national examinations.
 3. Schools as the site of reform.
 4. Providing and promoting school choice.
 5. Promoting outstanding leadership by teachers and principals.
- Creating a New Generation of American Schools for tomorrow's students:
 1. The development of Research and Development teams, funded by the business community, to develop these schools.
 2. The creation of at least 535 New American Schools that "break the mold" of existing school designs.
 3. The development of leadership at all levels, federal, state, and local.
 4. The commitment of families and children devoted to learning.
- Transforming America into a nation of students:
 1. Strengthening the nation's education effort for yesterday's students, today's workers.
 2. Establishing standards for job skills and knowledge.
 3. Creating business and community skill clinics.
 4. Enhancing job training opportunities.
 5. Mobilizing a "nation of students," by transforming a "Nation at Risk" into a "Nation of Students."
- Making our communities places where learning will happen:
 1. Developing greater parental involvement.
 2. Enhancing program effectiveness for children and communities.

When President Clinton was elected in November 1992, he already had a great deal of experience as an educational reformer. As Governor of Arkansas, he led a statewide campaign for teacher accountability, higher academic standards for students, and public school choice. In the late 1980s, he was Chair of the National Governor's Association and led the governors in establishing a national agenda for

educational improvement. As president, Clinton promised to revitalize education and to pay close attention to issues of equity and community service. To this end, he initiated legislation for national service and legislation that would make college student loans easier to obtain and at a lower interest level. His *Goals 2000* bill formally recognized the national goals and provided a framework for what is referred to as "systemic" reform. *Systemic reform* is the coordination of reform efforts at the local, state, and federal levels. It is top-down support for bottom-up reform. An important component to systemic reform is the creation of national standards; panels of experts are currently creating content standards, performance standards, and new forms of assessment. A key issue in the development of national standards is the degree to which government is responsible for providing students with equal opportunities to learn if they are to be held to high standards. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided an opportunity for the Clinton administration to fulfill its promise for greater education equity because the ESEA is the federal government's largest compensatory education program.

Goals 2000: Building on a Decade of Reform

Goals 2000 was a direct outgrowth of the state-led education reform agenda of the 1980s, which included increasing high school graduation requirements, particularly in math and science, instituting statewide testing programs, offering more Advanced Placement courses, promoting the use of technology in the classroom, and instituting new teacher evaluation programs.

Unlike the piecemeal approach favored during the Reagan-Bush years, the systemic approach to educational reform was comprehensive and focused on coordinating state policy with restructured governance. The objective of systemic reform was to create coherent educational policy. Systemic reform gave the Clinton educational agenda a set of organizing principles that were unique in U.S. educational history. Supporters of systemic reform like to describe it as "top-down support for bottom-up reform." By creating a coherent plan for reform, the Clinton administration had been unusually successful in winning bipartisan support prior to the November 1994 elections. This support resulted in the passage of several bills, including Direct Government Student Loans, National Service, the Safe Schools Act, the reauthorization of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1993, and the overall reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The key intellectual element of the administration's effort was *Goals 2000*. This law provides the framework of reform that shaped the educational ethos of the

Clinton administration. Title I codified the original six National Education Goals concerning school readiness, school completion, student academic achievement, leadership in math and science, adult literacy, and safe and drug-free schools, and added two new goals related to parental participation and professional development. Title II established the National Education Goals Panel, which built public support for the goals, reported on the nation's progress on meeting the goals, and reviewed the voluntary national content, student performance, and voluntary learning standards. Title III provided a state grant program to support, accelerate, and sustain state and local education improvement efforts. Title IV established a new program to create parent information and resource centers. Title V created a National Skills Board to serve as a catalyst in stimulating the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of occupational skills standards. Rather than seeing the federal government as an educational safety net, the authors of *Goals 2000* saw the federal government, despite the rhetoric of volunteerism, as crafting, shaping, and, to some degree, controlling education throughout the 50 states. There can be little doubt that issues of school autonomy and authority have been dramatically altered by the passage of the bill.

Borman and colleagues (1996) provided a comprehensive sociological analysis of *Goals 2000* in the following areas: (1) systemic reform; (2) national standards for content and performance; (3) opportunity-to-learn standards; (4) school-to-work standards; (5) school, parent, and community support; (6) professional development; (7) safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools; and (8) implications of the *Goals 2000* legislation. The authors indicated that although there have been some significant gains in each of the areas, *Goals 2000* is insufficient to provide significant systemic reform of U.S. schools. As sociologists of education, the authors concluded that systemic reform requires significant reforms outside of the educational context, which federal legislation has not mandated.

The bulk of educational reforms with respect to standards and assessments were initiated at the state level. By the end of the decade, 48 states had tested their students, 40 states had standards in all core subjects, and many states increased standards for teachers ("Text of Statement of Goals Adopted by the Governors," 1999, p. 5). Assessments to measure achievement continue to be controversial (pp. 11, 15-17). What is clear is that the 1990s became defined as the decade of standards, often imposed top-down by federal mandates and state initiatives. While the educational reforms implemented by President Clinton are significant, we believe that genuine reform must include issues of teacher empowerment, diversity, and creating schools that are communities. In the final section, we will propose a more systematic approach to educational reform.

No Child Left Behind

The *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* is a landmark and controversial piece of legislation that may have far-reaching consequences for education in the United States. Already there is talk of spreading similar accountability efforts to higher education in the next reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. And, of course, state governments have been busily pushing accountability requirements for K-12 and higher education for years now. No Child Left Behind is the centerpiece of President George W. Bush's educational policy. A logical progression of the standards movement initiated in 1983 by *A Nation at Risk* and in federal legislation under Presidents G. H. W. Bush (*America 2000*) and W. J. Clinton (*Goals 2000*), NCLB is the most comprehensive federal legislation governing state and local educational policies in U.S. history.

No Child Left Behind represented a logical extension of a standards movement that tossed the left's critique of U.S. education back on itself. Based on the critique that U.S. education has historically underserved low-income and minority children through curriculum tracking, poor instruction, and low-quality teachers in urban schools, NCLB mandates the uniform standards for all students in order to reduce and eventually eliminate the social class and race achievement gap by 2014.

The key components of NCLB are:

- Annual testing is required of students in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math plus at least one test in grades 10 through 12; science testing to follow. Graduation rates are used as a secondary indicator for high schools.
- States and districts are required to report school-by-school data on student test performance, broken out by whether the student is African American, Hispanic American, Native American, Asian American, white non-Hispanic, special education, limited english proficiency (LEP), and/or low income.
- States must set adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals for each school. In order to meet AYP, not only must each subgroup make progress in each year in each grade in each subject but there must also be 95 percent participation of each subgroup as well. The increments in AYP should be arranged so that 100 percent of students reach proficiency by 2014.
- Schools that don't meet AYP for two years are labeled "In Need of Improvement" (INOI). Initially, this means that schools must offer students the option to go to another public school and/or to receive federally funded

tutoring. Funds would also be made available for teacher professional development. In the absence of meeting future AYP targets, schools would be subject to "restructuring" (firing teachers and principal; state takeover; private company takeover; etc.).

- Schools must have "highly qualified" teachers for the "core academic subjects" (English, reading or language arts, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history and geography) by 2005–2006.

Advocates of NCLB, including progressive organizations such as the Education Trust, argue that its annual testing and disaggregation requirements will force states to ensure that low-income students who continue to lag far behind higher-income students will meet the same standards, and thus reduce the achievement gap by 2014. Critics from both the academic and political worlds argue that however noble the goal of eliminating the achievement gap, NCLB does not provide sufficient funds to improve failing schools and, more importantly, is heavy on punishment and light on building school capacity. Liberal and radical critics argue that NCLB fails to acknowledge the social and economic foundation of unequal schooling and is a backdoor to the implementation of publicly funded school vouchers and the dismantling of public education in the United States. Finally, assessment experts argue that since the types of tests and definitions of adequate yearly progress vary by state, there is no uniform definition of "proficiency," and since the assessments evaluate schools rather than students, schools with high mobility rates are punished for such a high turnover, most of the time outside of their control. In addition, because the assessments are based on a zero-sum definition of proficiency rather than a value-added one, schools whose students show significant progress but are still below proficiency are labeled as failures rather than rewarded for their progress.

Conclusion

Educational reform in the United States from the 1980s to 2005 has emphasized the excellence side of the excellence and equity equation. Although federal, state, and local reforms have resulted in some improvement in achievement, critics (Berliner & Biddle, 1995) have pointed out that the U.S. educational system was never as problematic as its conservative critics suggested. They suggest that the real problem in U.S. education has been, and continues to be, that it works

exceptionally well for children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and exceptionally poorly for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite the efforts of school choice and charter school programs to address these inequalities, particularly those in urban schools, the available evidence does not overwhelmingly support the claims of their advocates for a reduction in educational inequality. As the nation moves further into the new millennium, educational equity needs to be put back on the front burner of educational reform.

A THEORY OF EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS AND REFORMS

Earlier we examined a number of pressing educational problems and the ways in which conservatives, liberals, and radicals defined and approached them. Throughout the book, we have looked at how anthropologists, historians, philosophers, political scientists, sociologists, and educators have analyzed a variety of issues and problems.

For the past decade, the dominant political definition of educational problems has been a conservative one, with the crisis in education defined in terms of the decline of standards and authority, and the putative mediocrity of U.S. schools and students. From the *Nation at Risk* report in 1983 through President Clinton's educational reform proposal *Goals 2000* in 1994 and G. W. Bush's No Child Left Behind, the question of how to improve schools has centered on definitions of academic excellence. Although we certainly believe there is some merit to the conservative claims about the need to raise standards for all U.S. students, the preoccupation with excellence has unfortunately obscured other significant educational problems, most particularly those related to issues of equity. Despite NCLB's emphasis on reducing the achievement gaps, equity still has been less important than raising standards.

Furthermore, the emphasis on standards has defined educational problems narrowly, looking primarily on the intellectual and skills function of schooling to the exclusion of the social and psychological functions. Schools, in addition to teaching children skills and knowledge, also should provide students from all backgrounds the opportunity to succeed in U.S. society, as well as to develop their individual potential. The Deweyan conception that schools should have integrative, developmental, and egalitarian functions has been lost in the past decade, with the latter two almost fully overlooked.

Thus, school improvement ought to be aimed at all three aspects of schooling. In the *integrative realm*, schools do need to improve their effectiveness in teaching basic skills and knowledge. Although the conservative claim that the decline in educational standards is the cause of U.S. economic decline is overstated, the nation's students too often graduate from high school without the

requisite skills or knowledge for postsecondary education. In part, this is due to the erosion of the academic function of schooling in the twentieth century and the belief that all students cannot handle an academically rigorous curriculum. On the one hand, to the extent that curriculum tracking and ability grouping has limited access to an academic curriculum to working class and nonwhite students, the erosion of standards has been significantly undemocratic. On the other hand, since academic standards and performance appear to have declined across social class, race, gender, and ethnic lines, the problem of mediocrity is a problem for U.S. education in general.

Where we part company with conservatives is with regard to their preoccupation with standards as the most significant educational problem and with their emphasis on academic standards as either ends in themselves or as they relate to technological and economic imperatives. The reason a society should want a literate and skilled citizenry is not just because these traits are necessary for the economic system. They are also, as Dewey argued, the cornerstone of a democracy, where intelligent and informed citizens take an active role in their community. Thus, education is not an end in and of itself but is instrumental in the life of a democratic society.

In the *developmental realm*, schools need to become more humane institutions where students develop as complete human beings. The conservative emphasis on academic standards and the life of the mind is too shortsighted. Although the life of the mind is important, so too is the life of the heart. Schools need to emphasize, as well, values such as caring, compassion, and cooperation, as feminist educators have correctly pointed out (Laird, 1989; Noddings, 1984). Moreover, schools ought to be places that nurture the creative and spiritual (spiritual need not connote religious) lives of children and enable them to develop a thirst for active learning and creative endeavor. In far too many of this nation's schools, student creativity and imagination is stifled rather than developed.

What is wrong with U.S. schools in this regard is not new. It has been the subject of criticism from Dewey's progressive call for child-centered schools that would emphasize community and development, to the romantic progressive critiques of schooling in the 1960s as authoritarian and stifling, to current calls for educational reform from a variety of individuals and groups. All of these emphasize the need to create schools to educate children in all aspects of life—the social, psychological, emotional, moral, and creative—not just the intellectual. These efforts have included feminist educators with their concern with caring and cooperation, holistic educators with their concern for creative and spiritual dimensions, radical educators with their concern with transformative and liberating dimensions, and progressive educators with their concern for community, democracy,

and the need to connect students' lives to the curriculum. These educators encompass both the liberal and radical political spectrum and continue to define educational problems more broadly than do conservatives, and to define solutions that are aimed at making schools places where children want to be.

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of schooling during the past decade of conservative ascendancy has been the *egalitarian realm* of schooling. Although many of the reports on the crisis in education have stressed the need to balance equity and excellence, the role of schooling in providing equality of opportunity and possibilities for social mobility has taken a backseat. As we argued in Chapters 8 and 9, inequalities of educational opportunity and achievement have remained persistent problems. Jonathan Kozol, in his book *Savage Inequalities* (1991), pointed to the profound inequalities in funding between schools in poor urban areas and affluent suburban districts. In a muckraking style, Kozol placed the issue of equity back on the nation's front burner and demonstrated how current conditions belie the democratic and egalitarian ethos of U.S. schooling.

In a report on Kozol's book, *Time Magazine* (October 14, 1991) chronicled the political controversies over unequal funding of public schools based on property taxes. Although many child advocacy groups have called for the elimination of property taxes in educational financing because they are an advantage to affluent neighborhoods with higher property values, there is often strong opposition from parents in affluent neighborhoods against a "Robin Hood" plan, which would redistribute funds from affluent to poor districts. Kozol, who is interviewed in the article, stated that it is not that affluent parents do not care in the abstract about poor children, but that in the concrete they care more about giving their own children the best education they can afford. They believe that their tax dollars should support their own schools and that redistribution would lead to across-the-board mediocrity.

Although these conflicts point to the sharp divisions and perhaps ambivalence Americans feel about equity issues, they also point out the difficulty of ameliorating problems of educational inequality. Nonetheless, the fact seems clear that in the twenty-first century, the divisions between rich and poor and in the schooling they receive is becoming more glaring than ever. The solutions to these problems will not be easy, and certainly cannot be addressed through school reform alone, but it is apparent that the issue of equity has been relegated to the back burner for too long. Thus, efforts at school improvement must consider equity issues as central to their agenda.

What we are suggesting is that educational reform needs to be aimed at creating schools that teach students the basic skills and knowledge necessary in a technological society—where students have the opportunity to develop their

emotional, spiritual, moral, and creative lives; where concern and respect for others is a guiding principle; where caring, cooperation, and community are stressed; where students from different social classes, races, genders, and ethnic groups have equality of opportunity; and where inequalities of class, race, gender, and ethnicity are substantially reduced. These goals, which have been the cornerstone of progressive education for almost a century, are goals that progressives (both liberals and radicals) have too often felt obliged to apologize for, as they have been viewed as either politically naive or utopian. They are neither, although they certainly will be difficult to achieve.

At the beginning of this chapter, we discussed some effective teachers and suggested that effective teaching is necessary but not sufficient to solve educational problems. Without reforms aimed at societal problems, many educational dilemmas will remain unsolved. At the school level, unless schools are restructured to support good teaching and learning, teachers will continue to swim upstream against the current of school improvement.

There are, however, examples of schools that are succeeding. Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS) is a school in East Harlem, which is part of the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) in New York City. The Center consists of elementary, middle, and high schools and is affiliated with the Coalition for Essential Schools. CPESS is a progressive urban public secondary school that subscribes to the CCE's 12 principles of education:

1. Schools that are small and personalized in size
2. A unified course of study for all students
3. A focus on helping young people use their minds well
4. An in-depth, intradisciplinary curriculum respectful of the diverse heritages that encompass U.S. society
5. Active learning with student-as-worker/student-as-citizen and teacher-as-coach
6. Student evaluation by performance-based assessment methods
7. A school tone of unanxious expectation, trust, and decency
8. Family involvement, trust, and respect
9. Collaborative decision making and governance
10. Choice
11. Racial, ethnic, economic, and intellectual diversity
12. Budget allocations targeting time for collective planning

Under the leadership of Deborah Meier until the late 1990s and a committed and talented faculty, CPESS provided an alternative to the failing comprehensive

high schools for urban students. Fine (1991) used CPESS to demonstrate the possibilities for change and described it "as an example of what can be" (p. 215). Unfortunately, there is reason to believe that since Meier's departure, the school has gone downhill. Nonetheless, many of its successful features are now part of the small schools movement operated by New Visions for Public Schools in New York City and funded by the Gates Foundation, which has shown promise.

David Berliner and Bruce Biddle (1995, pp. 282-336), two eminent educational researchers, outlined 10 principles toward the improvement of education consistent with our views of educational reform:

1. Schooling in the United States can be improved by according parents more dignity and their children more hope.
2. Schooling in the United States can be improved by making certain that all schools have funds needed to provide a decent education for their students. This will require more fairness in school funding.
3. Schooling in the United States can be improved by reducing the size of the nation's largest schools.
4. Schooling in the United States can be improved by enlarging the goals of the curricula. This will require thoughtful learning environments where the emphasis is on skills needed for membership in a democratic society.
5. Schooling in the United States can be improved by adopting innovative teaching methods that serve enlarged curricular aims.
6. Schooling in the United States can be improved by adjusting the content of the curriculum. This will require deemphasizing the tie between schooling and employment and by expanding curricula tied to the productive use of leisure.
7. Schooling in the United States can be improved by rethinking and redesigning the system for evaluating student achievement.
8. Schooling in the United States can be improved by changing the ways in which schools manage heterogeneity. This change will mean abandoning the age-graded classroom and finding alternatives for ability groups and tracks.
9. Schooling in the United States can be improved by strengthening the ties between communities and their schools. Such ties can be promoted through programs that encourage more active roles for parents, more contacts between parents and teachers, and expanded visions for the responsibilities of schools.

10. Schooling in the United States can be improved by strengthening the professional status of teachers and other educators.

We began this book with the conviction that the foundations perspective (i.e., the use of the politics, history, sociology, and philosophy of education) is an important tool in understanding and solving educational problems. Throughout the book, through text and readings, we have provided an analysis of many educational problems and a look at some of the proposed solutions. We end it with the conviction that teachers can make a difference, that schools can and must be restructured, and that the types of reforms discussed here are possible. They will not happen, however, unless people make them happen. School improvement is thus a political act. As prospective teachers and teachers, you must be a part of the ongoing struggle to improve this nation's schools. As Maxine Greene (1988, p. 23) stated:

[I am] not the first to try to reawaken the consciousness of possibility . . . or to seek a vision of education that brings together the need for wide-awakeness with the hunger for community, the desire to know with the wish to understand, the desire to feel with the passion to see. I am aware of the ambivalences with respect to equality and justice as well. Fundamentally, perhaps, I am conscious of the tragic dimension in every human life. Tragedy, however, discloses and challenges; often it provides images of men and women on the verge. We may have reached a moment in our history when teaching and learning, if they are to happen meaningfully, must happen on the verge. Confronting a void, confronting nothingness, we may be able to empower the young to create and re-create a common world—and, in cherishing it, in renewing it, discover what it signifies to be free.

We believe that as teachers, you will have the opportunity to contribute to the improvement of this nation's schools. As we have attempted to indicate throughout this book, solutions to educational problems are by no means easy, as the problems are complex and multidimensional. Teachers, alone, will not solve these problems. However, they must be part of the solution. We encourage you to accept the challenge.

The following articles examine issues relating to educational reform and school improvement. The first article, "The Politics of School Choice," written by sociologists Jeanne M. Powers and Peter W. Cookson, Jr., reviews the empirical evidence on school choice in the 1990s and its effect on reducing educational inequality, especially for low-income students.

The second article, "Reinventing Teaching," written by educator Deborah Meier, analyzes the changes that will be required in schools to assure that good teaching can take place. Based on her ground-breaking work as principal of Central Park East Secondary School in East Harlem, New York City, Meier proposes significant changes in the structure of schools and underscores the importance of good teaching.

The third article, "A Level Playing Field" by journalist Catherine Gewertz, examines the effects of the historic New Jersey *Abbott v. Burke* school equity decision on schools in that state. *Abbott v. Burke* was named as one of the most important state court decisions in the last 50 years of the twentieth century.

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