

## CHAPTER 1

# Our Schools Are at Risk

In the early years of the twenty-first century, a bipartisan consensus arose about educational policy in the United States. Right and left, Democrats and Republicans, the leading members of our political class and our media elite seemed to agree: Public education is broken. Our students are not learning enough. Public schools are bad and getting worse. We are being beaten by other nations with higher test scores. Our abysmal public schools threaten not only the performance of our economy but our national security, our very survival as a nation. This crisis is so profound that half measures and tweaks will not suffice. Schools must be closed and large numbers of teachers fired. Anyone who doubts this is unaware of the dimensions of the crisis or has a vested interest in defending the status quo.

Furthermore, according to this logic, now widely shared among policy makers and opinion shapers, blame must fall on the shoulders of teachers and principals. Where test scores are low, it is their fault. They should be held accountable for this educational catastrophe. They are responsible because they have become comfortable with the status quo of low expectations and low achievement, more interested in their pensions than in the children they teach.

In response to this crisis, the reformers have a ready path for solving it. Since teachers are the problem, their job protections must be eliminated and teachers must be fired. Teachers' unions must be opposed at every turn. The "hoops and hurdles" that limit entry into teaching must be eliminated. Teachers must be evaluated on the basis of their students' test scores. Public schools must be evaluated on an "objective" basis, and when they are failing, they must be closed. Students must be given choices other than traditional public schools, such as charter schools, vouchers, and online schools.

In Hollywood films and television documentaries, the battle lines are clearly drawn. Traditional public schools are bad; their supporters are apologists for the unions. Those who advocate for charter schools, virtual schooling, and “school choice” are reformers; their supporters insist they are championing the rights of minorities. They say they are leaders of the civil rights movement of our day.

It is a compelling narrative, one that gives us easy villains and ready-made solutions. It appeals to values Americans have traditionally cherished—choice, freedom, optimism, and a latent distrust of government.

There is only one problem with this narrative.

It is wrong.

Public education is not broken. It is not failing or declining. The diagnosis is wrong, and the solutions of the corporate reformers are wrong. Our urban schools are in trouble because of concentrated poverty and racial segregation. But public education as such is not “broken.” Public education is in a crisis only so far as society is and only so far as this new narrative of crisis has destabilized it. The solutions proposed by the self-proclaimed reformers have not worked as promised. They have failed even by their own most highly valued measure, which is test scores. At the same time, the reformers’ solutions have had a destructive impact on education as a whole.

Far from being progressive, these changes strike at the heart of one of our nation’s most valued institutions. Liberals, progressives, well-meaning people have lent their support to a project that is antithetical to liberalism and progressivism. By supporting market-based “reforms,” they have allied themselves with those who seek to destroy public education. They are being used by those who have an implacable hostility toward the public sector. The transfer of public funds to private management and the creation of thousands of deregulated, unsupervised, and unaccountable schools have opened the public coffers to profiteering, fraud, and exploitation by large and small entrepreneurs.

As a historian of American education, I have seen, studied, and written about waves of school reforms that came and went. But what is happening now is an astonishing development. It is not meant to reform public education but is a deliberate effort to replace public education with a privately managed, free-market system of schooling.

mid-nineteenth century, born of advocacy and struggle, is now in jeopardy. This essential institution, responsible for producing a democratic citizenry and tasked with providing equality of educational opportunity, is at risk. Under the cover of “choice” and “freedom,” we may lose one of our society’s greatest resources, our public school system—a system whose doors are open to all.

I was not always a critic of test-based accountability and choice. For many years, I too agreed that our public schools were in crisis. I wanted them to be far better. I worried about the content of the curriculum. I worried about low standards for students and for teachers. As a graduate of the public schools of Houston, I was an ambivalent supporter of school choice and certainly had no desire to replace public education with a voucherized, privately managed system of schools. In 1991–93, I served as assistant secretary of education in the administration of President George H. W. Bush, and I was in charge of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement. I was a strong supporter of standards, testing, and accountability. It was only after I saw the corrosive effects of No Child Left Behind that I reconsidered my long-held beliefs. In 2010, I published *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*. In that book, I recanted my earlier support for what is now known as the “reform” agenda in education: high-stakes testing, test-based accountability, competition, and school choice (charters and vouchers). When the book appeared, it was widely reviewed, hailed by most experienced educators, and predictably scorned by advocates of these policies.

Their most typical complaint was that while I was long on criticism, I offered no solutions. They, on the other hand, had solutions.

I contend that their solutions are not working. Some are demonstrably wrong. Some, like charter schools, have potential if the profit motive were removed, and if the concept were redesigned to meet the needs of the communities served rather than the plans of entrepreneurs. It is far better to stop and think than to plunge ahead vigorously, doing what is not only ineffective but wrong. We must always be open to trying new ideas in the schools, but we should try them first on a small scale and gather evidence before applying and mandating new ideas nationwide. When evidence is lacking, we should not move forward with a sense of urgency. The reformers are putting the nation’s children

on a train that is headed for a cliff. This is the right time to stand on the tracks, wave a lantern, and say, "Wait, this won't work. Stop the train. Pick a different route." But the reformers say, "That's no solution. Full speed ahead," aiming right for the cliff.

What began as a movement for testing and accountability has turned into a privatization movement. President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind, with its unrealistic goals, has fed the privatization frenzy. The overreliance on and misuse of testing and data have created a sense of crisis, lending credibility to claims that American public education is failing and in decline. Yes, we have problems, but those problems are concentrated where poverty and racial segregation are concentrated. The reformers say they care about poverty, but they do not address it other than to insist upon private management of the schools in urban districts; the reformers ignore racial segregation altogether, apparently accepting it as inevitable. Thus, they leave the root causes of low academic performance undisturbed. What began as a movement to "save minority children from failing schools" and narrow the achievement gap by privatizing their schools has not accomplished that goal, but the movement is undaunted. It is now intent on advancing into middle-income districts in the cities and suburbs as well. This is already happening.

In this book, I will show why the reform agenda does not work, who is behind it, and how it is promoting the privatization of public education. I will then put forward my solutions, none of which is cheap or easy, none of which offers a quick fix to complicated problems. I have no silver bullets—because none exist—but I have proposals based on evidence and experience.

We know what works. What works are the very opportunities that advantaged families provide for their children. In homes with adequate resources, children get advantages that enable them to arrive in school healthy and ready to learn. Discerning, affluent parents demand schools with full curricula, experienced staffs, rich programs in the arts, libraries, well-maintained campuses, and small classes. As a society, we must do whatever is necessary to extend the same advantages to children who do not have them. Doing so will improve their ability to learn, enhance their chances for a good life, and strengthen our society.

So that readers don't have to wait until the later chapters of this book, here is a summary of my solutions to improve both schools and

society. Schools and society are intertwined. The supporting research comes later in the book. Every one of these solutions works to improve the lives and academic outcomes of young people.

Pregnant women should see a doctor early in their pregnancies and have regular care and good nutrition. Poor women who do not receive early and regular medical care are likely to have babies with developmental and cognitive problems.

Children need prekindergarten classes that teach them how to socialize with others, how to listen and learn, how to communicate well, and how to care for themselves, while engaging in the joyful pursuit of play and learning that is appropriate to their age and development and that builds their background knowledge and vocabulary.

Children in the early elementary grades need teachers who set age-appropriate goals. They should learn to read, write, calculate, and explore nature, and they should have plenty of time to sing and dance and draw and play and giggle. Classes in these grades should be small enough—ideally fewer than twenty—so that students get the individual attention they need. Testing in the early grades should be used sparingly, not to rank students, but diagnostically, to help determine what they know and what they still need to learn. Test scores should remain a private matter between parents and teachers, not shared with the district or the state for any individual student. The district or state may aggregate scores for entire schools but should not judge teachers or schools on the basis of these scores.

As students enter the upper elementary grades and middle school and high school, they should have a balanced curriculum that includes not only reading, writing, and mathematics but the sciences, literature, history, geography, civics, and foreign languages. Their school should have a rich arts program, where students learn to sing, dance, play an instrument, join an orchestra or a band, perform in a play, sculpt, or use technology to design structures, conduct research, or create artworks. Every student should have time for physical education every day. Every school should have a library with librarians and media specialists. Every school should have a nurse, a psychologist, a guidance counselor, and a social worker. And every school should have after-school programs where students may explore their interests, whether in athletics, chess, robotics, history club, dramatics, science club, nature study, Scouting, or other activities. Teachers should write their own tests and

use standardized tests only for diagnostic purposes. Classes should be small enough to ensure that every teacher knows his or her students and can provide the sort of feedback to strengthen their ability to write, their noncognitive skills, their critical thinking, and their mathematical and scientific acumen.

Our society should commit to building a strong education profession. Public policy should aim to raise the standards for entry into teaching. Teachers should be well-educated and well-prepared for their profession. Principals and superintendents should be experienced educators.

Schools should have the resources they need for the students they enroll.

As a society, we must establish goals, strategies, and programs to reduce poverty and racial segregation. Only by eliminating opportunity gaps can we eliminate achievement gaps. Poor and immigrant children need the same sorts of schools that wealthy children have, only more so. Those who start life with the fewest advantages need even smaller classes, even more art, science, and music to engage them, to spark their creativity, and to fulfill their potential.

There is a solid research base for my recommendations. If you want a society organized to promote the survival of the fittest and the triumph of the most advantaged, then you will prefer the current course of action, where children and teachers and schools are "racing to the top." But if you believe the goal of our society should be equality of opportunity for all children and that we should seek to reduce the alarming inequalities children now experience, then my program should win your support.

My premise is straightforward: you can't do the right things until you stop doing the wrong things. If you insist on driving that train right over the cliff, you will never reach your hoped-for destination of excellence for all. Instead, you will inflict harm on millions of children and reduce the quality of their educations. You will squander billions of dollars on failed schemes that should have been spent on realistic, evidence-based ways of improving our public schools, our society, and the lives of children.

Stop doing the wrong things. Stop promoting competition and choice as answers to the very inequality that was created by competi-

tion and choice. Stop the mindless attacks on the education profession. A good society requires both a vibrant private sector and a responsible public sector. We must not permit the public sector to be privatized and eviscerated. In a democracy, important social goals require social collaboration. We must work to establish programs that improve the lives of children and families. To build a strong educational system, we need to build a strong and respected education profession. The federal government and states must develop policies to recruit, support, and retain career educators, both in the classroom and in positions of leadership. If we mean to conquer educational inequity, we must recognize that the root causes of poor academic performance are segregation and poverty, along with inequitably resourced schools. We must act decisively to reduce the causes of inequity. We know what good schools look like, we know what great education consists of. We must bring good schools to every district and neighborhood in our nation. Public education is a basic public responsibility: we must not be persuaded by a false crisis narrative to privatize it. It is time for parents, educators, and other concerned citizens to join together to strengthen our public schools and preserve them for future generations. The future of our democracy depends on it.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Context for Corporate Reform

Federal law and policy turned the education reform movement of the twenty-first century into a powerful force that no school or district dared to ignore.

Since the publication in 1983 of a report called *A Nation at Risk*, federal and state policy makers have searched for policy levers with which to raise academic performance. That report was the product of a commission—called the National Commission on Excellence in Education—appointed by Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell, during the administration of President Ronald Reagan. The commission warned that the nation was endangered by “a rising tide of mediocrity” in the schools; it pointed to the poor standing of American students on international tests, a recurring phenomenon since the first international test was offered in the mid-1960s. Its basic claim was that the American standard of living was threatened by the loss of major manufacturing industries—such as automobiles, machine tools, and steel mills—to other nations, which the commission attributed to the mediocre quality of our public educational system; this claim shifted the blame from shortsighted corporate leadership to the public schools. The commission called for better curriculum standards, higher graduation requirements, better teacher training, higher teacher pay, and other customary improvements. The commission said very little about testing, accountability, and choice.

The first Bush administration, in which I served, had little appetite for an expanded federal role in education. It announced a program called America 2000, which relied mainly on voluntarism since a Democratic Congress would not consider any education bills sponsored by President George H. W. Bush. Congressional Democrats in the early

1990s wanted greater resources and greater equity in public schools, not standards and tests. The Clinton administration liked the idea of national standards and national testing, but when Republicans took control of Congress in 1995, that idea died. The administration settled for a program called Goals 2000, which offered money to states to set their own standards and tests.

Along came the George W. Bush administration in 2001, which proposed sweeping federal legislation called No Child Left Behind (NCLB). On the campaign trail, Bush spoke of "the Texas miracle," claiming that testing and accountability had led to startling improvements in student performance. He said that test scores and graduation rates were up, and the achievement gap was narrowing, thanks to the Texas reforms. We now know that there was no such miracle; Texas made some increases on federal tests, like many other states, but its students register at the national average, nowhere near the top. In 2001, no one listened to those who warned that the "Texas miracle" was an illusion.<sup>1</sup> Congress swiftly passed the law, which dramatically changed the federal role in education.

The law declared that all states must test every child annually in grades 3 through 8 in reading and mathematics and report test scores by race, ethnicity, low-income status, disability status, and limited-English proficiency. By the year 2014, all students were supposed to achieve proficiency on state tests. The states were required to monitor every school to see if every group was on track to reach proficiency. Any school that persistently failed to meet its annual target would be labeled a school in need of improvement (in the eyes of the media and thus the public, that means a "failing" school). With each year that the school failed to meet its target, the sanctions became increasingly more punitive. Eventually, if the school kept failing, it was at risk of having its staff fired or having the school closed, handed over to state control or private management, or turned into a charter school or "any other major restructuring." Many schools "failed" year after year, and as 2014 approached, the majority of public schools in the nation had been declared failures, including some excellent, highly regarded schools (typically, the group that was not making sufficient progress toward 100 percent proficiency was students with disabilities, and the schools that were likeliest to be labeled as failing enrolled high proportions of poor and minority students). In Massachusetts, for example, the state

with the nation's highest-performing students as judged by federal tests, 80 percent of the state's public schools were "failing" by NCLB standards in 2012.

Let's be clear: 100 percent proficiency is an impossible goal; no nation in the world has ever achieved this, nor has any other nation ever passed legislation to punish its schools for not reaching an unattainable goal. It was as though Congress had passed a law saying that every city in America should be crime-free. Who could disapprove of such a laudable goal? What city would not want to be crime-free? But imagine if the law set a deadline twelve years off and said that any city that did not meet the goal would be punished; its police stations would be closed and privatized; its police officers would lose their badges. The first to close would be the police stations in the poorest neighborhoods, where crime rates were highest. Eventually, the scythe would swing even in affluent neighborhoods, because no city is completely crime-free. Wishing that it might be so, or passing laws to require that it be so, does not make it so.

NCLB opened the door to huge entrepreneurial opportunities. Federal funds were set aside for after-school tutoring, and thousands of tutoring companies sprang up overnight to claim a share. Many new ventures opened to advise schools on how to meet NCLB testing targets, how to analyze NCLB data, how to "turn around" failing schools, and how to meet other goals embedded in the legislation.

NCLB encouraged the growth of the charter sector by proposing that charter schools were a remedy for failing public schools. When NCLB was passed, charters were a new and untested idea. The original idea for charters was first suggested in 1988, not to promote competition, but to allow teachers to try out new ideas. One of its originators, Ray Budde, was a professor at the University of Massachusetts who envisioned charters run by teachers, free to teach without interference by the local district bureaucracy. The other originator was Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, who envisioned charters where teachers sought out the lowest-performing students, the dropouts, and the disengaged, then figured out innovative ways to ignite their interest in education. Both these men, unknown to each other, saw charters as schools empowered to devise innovative practices and ready to collaborate and share what they had learned with their colleagues and existing schools. Certainly, neither imagined a charter sector that was nearly

90 percent non-union or one that in some states presented profit-making opportunities for entrepreneurs.

Minnesota passed the first charter law in 1991, and the first charter school opened in 1992. Only nine years later, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind law, recommending conversion of a low-performing school to a charter as a remedy. At the time, there was no evidence that charters would succeed where the local public school had failed. Nonetheless, the congressional endorsement was valuable publicity for charters, which gained public recognition and new opportunities to expand and compete with neighborhood public schools for higher test scores. In addition, it paved the way for federal appropriations and federal tax breaks for charter school construction.

As 2014 neared, states were spending hundreds of millions of dollars each year on testing and on test preparation materials; the schools in some districts and states were allocating 20 percent of the school year to preparing for state tests. This misallocation of scarce resources was hardly surprising, because schools lived or died depending on their test scores. Educators and parents raised their voices against the incessant testing, but no one seemed to know how to stop it. Some states not only tested children in grades 3 through 8, as NCLB required, but started testing children in the early grades and in prekindergarten to ready them for the testing that began in the third grade. And the number of tests administered to high school students increased as well, both as a measure of progress and as a condition for graduation. Texas, the epicenter of the testing fetish, insisted that students needed to pass fifteen different tests to get a high school diploma.

The thirst for data became unquenchable. Policy makers in Washington and the state capitals apparently assumed that more testing would produce more learning. They were certain that they needed accountability and could not imagine any way to hold schools "accountable" without test scores. This unnatural focus on testing produced perverse but predictable results: it narrowed the curriculum; many districts scaled back time for the arts, history, civics, physical education, science, foreign language, and whatever was not tested. Cheating scandals occurred in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and other districts. States like New York manipulated the passing score on state tests to inflate the results and bring them closer to Washington's unrealistic goal. Teaching to the test, once considered unprofessional and unethical, became

common practice in the age of NCLB. Districts invested many millions of dollars in test preparation materials to help teachers do it better. Under pressure to get higher scores to save their jobs and their schools, teachers drilled students in how to take tests and taught them the types of questions that had been used on previous tests and were likely to appear again.

NCLB remained on the books year after year, long after it was due to be revised, reauthorized, or scrapped in 2007. Congress was deadlocked and unable to escape a trap of its own devising. No one seemed able to imagine a federal education policy that did not rely on testing, that did not demand measures to hold schools "accountable" for failure to produce quantifiable results. No one seemed to remember that this had not been the federal role before 2002, when NCLB was signed into law. Even though the "Texas miracle" was long ago forgotten, the federal law that mimicked the Texas model remained in force.

With the election of Barack Obama in 2008, many educators expected a change in federal education policy. Their hopes were dashed, however, by Obama's education policies, specifically his Race to the Top competition. At the beginning of the new president's term, Congress passed economic stimulus funding in response to the financial collapse of 2008. Congress set aside \$100 billion for education. Of the total, \$95 billion was allocated to keep teachers employed, to offset the shrinkage of state and local budgets. The remaining \$5 billion was used to fund a competition among the states, called Race to the Top. Secretary Arne Duncan set the conditions. To be eligible, states had to agree to adopt new common standards and tests (the Common Core State Standards); expand the number of charter schools; evaluate the effectiveness of teachers in significant part by the test scores of their students (and remove any statutory barriers to doing so); and agree to "turn around" their lowest-performing schools by taking such dramatic steps as firing staff and closing the schools.

Eleven states and the District of Columbia won Race to the Top funding. Dozens of states competed for the funds, all of them accepting the premises of the competition so they could be eligible to win the millions of federal dollars at a time of deep fiscal distress. By dangling the chance to win millions of dollars before hard-pressed states, the Obama administration leveraged changes across the nation, aligning state education policies with the requirements of Race to the Top.

Among the premises of Race to the Top was that charter schools and school choice were necessary reforms; that standardized testing was the best way to measure the progress of students and the quality of their teachers, principals, and schools; and that competition among schools would improve them. It also gave a bipartisan stamp of approval to the idea that a low-performing school could be improved by firing the staff, closing the school, and starting over with a new name and a new staff.

All of these ideas were highly contested; not one has a strong body of evidence or research to support it or to justify the imposition of so many different and untested changes at the same time. But with the joint imprimatur of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, advocates of standardized testing, school choice, merit pay, and tough accountability measures like school closings heralded these measures as "reforms." Race to the Top was only marginally different from No Child Left Behind. In fact, it was worse, because it gave full-throated Democratic endorsement to the long-standing Republican agenda of testing, accountability, and choice.

Race to the Top abandoned equity as the driving principle of federal aid. From the initiation of federal aid to local school districts in 1965, Democratic administrations had insisted on formula grants, which distributed federal money to schools and districts based on the proportion of students who were poor, not on a competition among states. The Obama administration shifted gears and took the position that competition was a better way to award federal funding. This change worked in favor of advantaged states and districts that could hire professional grant writers to compete for federal funding. In many cases, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation gave grants to hire professionals to develop applications for specific states, which tilted the field toward the applicants favored by Gates. By picking a few winners, the Race to the Top competition abandoned the traditional idea of equality of educational opportunity, where federal aid favored districts and schools that enrolled students with the highest needs.

The new billions of federal funding encouraged entrepreneurs to enter the education market. Almost overnight, consultants and vendors offered their services to advise districts and states on how to design teacher evaluation systems, how to train teachers, how to train principals, how to turn around failing schools, how to use new technologies, how to engage in data-driven decision making, on and on. With the

adoption of the Common Core standards by almost every state, education publishers hurried to align their products with the new standards, entrepreneurs began developing technology to support the Common Core standards, and even more consultants hung out their shingles to sell their services to districts and states about how to implement the Common Core and how to engage in data collection, data management, and data analysis. *The Denver Post* determined that 35 percent of the federal funds allocated to that city in a School Improvement Grant was spent for consultants, not for students or teachers or schools.<sup>2</sup>

The U.S. Department of Education awarded \$350 million to two consortia to develop national assessments to measure the new national standards. States and districts will have to make large investments in technology, because the new national assessments will be delivered online. By some estimates, the states will be required to spend as much as \$16 billion to implement the Common Core standards. Unfortunately, neither the Obama administration nor the developers of the Common Core standards thought it necessary to field-test the new standards. They have no idea whether the adoption of the new standards and tests will improve education or how they will affect students who are now performing poorly. State education departments warned that the enhanced rigor of the Common Core would cause test scores to plummet by as much as 30 percent, even in successful districts. Should this occur, the sharp decline in passing rates will reinforce the reformers' claims about our nation's "broken" education system. This, in turn, will create a burgeoning market for new products and technologies. Some reformers hoped that the poor results of the new tests would persuade even suburban parents to lose faith in their community schools and demand not only new products but school closings, charters, and vouchers.<sup>3</sup>

This burst of entrepreneurial activity was planned. Joanne Weiss, Secretary Duncan's chief of staff, formerly the director of Duncan's Race to the Top competition, wrote an article in which she described the imperative to match entrepreneurs with school systems. Weiss had previously been the chief operating officer at the NewSchools Venture Fund, which invests in new charter schools and new technology ventures. Race to the Top, she wrote, was designed to scale up entrepreneurial activity, to encourage the creation of new markets for both for-profit and nonprofit investors. The new standards were a linchpin to match "smart capital" to educational innovation:

The development of common standards and shared assessments radically alters the market for innovation in curriculum development, professional development, and formative assessments. Previously, these markets operated on a state-by-state basis, and often on a district-by-district basis. But the adoption of common standards and shared assessments means that education entrepreneurs will enjoy national markets where the best products can be taken to scale.<sup>4</sup>

And indeed the investment opportunities seemed to grow by leaps and bounds after the Obama administration launched its Race to the Top. There were not only high-priced consultants and experts to assist in complying with new federal demands but additional ways to invest in new technologies and the growth industry of charter schools. Equity investors held conferences to discuss the expanded opportunities for making a profit in the public education sector.<sup>5</sup> The tennis star Andre Agassi formed a partnership with an equity investing firm to raise \$750 million in capital to build at least seventy-five charter schools for forty thousand or more students. This was not philanthropy; it was a profit-making venture.<sup>6</sup> Investors quickly figured out that there was money to be made in the purchase, leasing, and rental of space to charter schools, and an aggressive for-profit charter sector emerged wherever it was permitted by state law; in states where for-profit charters were not allowed, nonprofit charters hired for-profit operators to run their schools. Technology companies competed to develop new applications for the new Common Core State Standards, and there appeared to be many exciting opportunities to make money in the emerging education marketplace.<sup>7</sup> This was the first time in history that the U.S. Department of Education designed programs with the intent of stimulating private sector investors to create for-profit ventures in American education.

The combination of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top redefined the meaning of education reform. In this new environment, education reformers support testing, accountability, and choice. Education reformers rely on data derived from standardized testing. Education reformers insist that all children be proficient (NCLB) or increase their test scores every year (Race to the Top), or their schools and teachers are failures. Education reformers accept "no excuses." Education reformers believe that schools improve if they are forced to compete. Education reformers believe that teachers will produce higher test scores if they

are "incentivized" by merit pay. Education reformers use testing data to fire principals and teachers and to close schools. Education reformers applaud private management of public schools. Education reformers support the proliferation of for-profit organizations into school management. Education reformers don't care about teacher credentials or experience, because some economists say they don't raise test scores. Education reformers in the early twenty-first century believe that school quality and teacher quality may best be measured by test scores.

Once upon a time, education reformers thought deeply about the relationship between school and society. They thought about child development as the starting point for education. In those days, education reformers recognized the important role of the family in the education of children. Many years ago, education reformers demanded desegregation. They debated how to improve curriculum and instruction and what the content of the curriculum should be.

But that was long ago. Those concerns were no longer au courant. Now there was bipartisan consensus around the new definition of education reform. Those who held the levers of power at the U.S. Department of Education, in the big foundations, on Wall Street, and in the major corporations agreed on how to reform American education. The debates about the role of schooling in a democratic society, the lives of children and families, and the relationship between schools and society were relegated to the margins as no longer relevant to the business plan to reinvent American education.