Nationalize The Schools (...A Little)!

Matt Miller
March 2008
Though it’s taboo to say so, America’s unique obsession with “local control” of education is sinking us morally and economically. To save our schools we must change our outlook and our system.
Executive Summary

"Local control” is the most sacred principle in American education—a tradition so deeply ingrained in history and practice that its shortcomings are almost never articulated. Yet a look at the history of local control as the organizing principle of schooling suggests that an approach that made perfect sense in the 1700s is crippling American education today.

In the 25 years since “A Nation At Risk” sounded the alarm about the rising tide of mediocrity in our schools, America’s strategy in response, if it can be called that, has been dictated by some 15,000 school districts, with help more recently from the 50 states. It’s as if FDR had said we could put the U.S. economy on a war footing after Pearl Harbor by relying on the uncoordinated efforts of thousands of small factories. They’d know what kind of planes and tanks were needed, right? The results have been predictable. Despite good intentions and pockets of improvement, we have made little progress in raising most students’ achievement to the levels now required to compete in an increasingly global world and to maintain Americans’ living standards in the coming era of competition with workers in places like China and India. We spend more than nearly every other advanced nation on schools, yet we rank in the middle to bottom on international achievement comparisons.

Whatever its successes in the past, local control today assures four major problems:

Financial Inequality: Thanks to localized sources of school funding, the gap between what is spent in wealthy states and districts and poorer ones routinely tops $5,000 and sometimes reaches $10,000 per pupil. This helps to explain why America systematically assigns the worst teachers and most run-down facilities in the country to the poor children who need great schools the most.

Inconsistent Standards and Inadequate Data: Local control assures that we have no overall way to know how children are doing. By leaving the definition of standards and proficiency requirements to the states, No Child Left Behind—like earlier efforts in the educational standards movement—makes it impossible for us to know where kids stand. Instead it has produced a well-documented “race to the bottom” in which many states lower the achievement bar to foster the illusion of progress.

No Research and Development: Local control has prevented education from attracting the research and development that accelerates progress in almost every other human endeavor because the benefits from scale that drive such activities elsewhere are absent.
Union Dominance: Local control, particularly in big cities, often leaves schools in the hands of political school boards who are themselves under the thumb of powerful teachers’ unions that dominate their elections and block sensible reforms. As a result of these and related failings, most schools, far from relishing the supposed freedom granted by local control, feel trapped in red tape; principals say they spend their days on unproductive paperwork to comply with endless mandates, when they’re not busy navigating Byzantine district bureaucracies to keep the heat on and the supply room stocked.

The only way to demand more from schools while freeing educators and parents to find diverse ways for schools to perform better is to take a cue from other advanced countries and nationalize the system a little, especially when it comes to the standards we expect students to meet and the resources we allocate to help them do so.

Specifically, we should:

Establish National Standards: The usual explanation for why national standards won’t fly politically in the United States is that the right hates “national” and the left hates “standards.” But that’s changing. Leading figures in both parties now say that in today’s “flat” world we can’t have the rigor of a child’s education, and thus chances for success, depend on the accident of where they happen to be born. Polls show a majority of Americans agree. Most proponents suggest we establish national standards and tests in grades three through 12 in core subjects—reading, math, and science, for starters—perhaps leaving more controversial subjects, such as history, until we get our feet wet with a new regime.

Increase the Federal Role in School Finance: Nowhere is it written in the Constitution that the federal government must contribute only 9 percent of K-12 spending, and if we’re serious about fixing today’s resource gaps, that must change. Raising the federal role to 25 to 30 percent of national K-12 spending could help bring all states up to a certain guaranteed baseline of funding per pupil. The federal government could also fund conditional grants to states enabling new “grand bargains” that boost school performance. For example, federal cash could be offered to lift teacher salaries substantially for high-poverty schools, provided that states or districts (1) allow big pay differentials for high-performing teachers or those in shortage specialties like math and science; and (2) defer or eliminate tenure, or condition it on proven student achievement gains.

Boost Research and Development: The federal government should use a portion of its higher investment to pursue an R&D agenda equal to the education sector’s needs. Today the feds spend $28 billion on research yearly at the National Institutes of Health, but only $260 million—1 percent of that—on R&D for schooling. Raising R&D to at least $4 billion could promote innovation in teaching and learning techniques that benefit all children.

In the effort to reform our education system, it is vital that one seeming paradox is understood: It is only by transcending traditional local control, and by getting serious about a new national role in standards and finance, that we can at last create genuine autonomy for local schools. This autonomy should become the new definition of what we mean when we say “local
control.” We need to give schools one clear, national set of expectations, free educators and parents to collaborate locally in whatever ways work to get results, and get everything else out of the way.

Nationalizing our schools a little is antithetical to every cultural tradition in the United States save the one that matters most: our capacity to renew ourselves to meet the challenges of a new day.

Once upon a time, a national role in retirement security was anathema. Then suddenly, after the Depression, there was Social Security. Once a federal role in health care would have been damned as socialism, yet federal spending now accounts for one of every two dollars devoted to health care in the United States, with more money certain to come in the years ahead. When it comes to schools, there has likewise always been a tension between the desire to improve the life chances of more children by involving higher levels of authority, and the primordial American distrust of central government. But the truth is we started down this road even on schooling a long time ago. It’s time now to finish the job.

### Average Reading Literacy Scores of 15 Year-Old Students by Country

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### Average Combined Mathematics Literacy Scores of 15 Year-Old Students by Country

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What Horace Saw

It wasn’t just the slate and pencil on every desk, or the absence of daily beatings. As Horace Mann sat in a Berlin classroom in the summer of 1843, it was his impression of the entire Prussian system of schools that overwhelmed him. Mann, six years into the work as Massachusetts Secretary of Education that would earn him lasting fame as the “father of public education,” had sailed from Boston to England several weeks earlier. He was combining a European honeymoon with educational fact-finding. In England, the couple had been startled by the luxury and refinement of the upper classes; it exceeded anything one saw in America, and Mann was convinced it had been built upon the poverty and ignorance of the masses. If the United States was to avoid this awful chasm, Mann thought, and the social upheaval it seemed sure to spawn, education was the answer. Now he was seeing first-hand the Prussian schools that were the talk of education reformers on both sides of the Atlantic. What Mann saw shook his longtime faith in America’s destined leadership in human affairs.

In Massachusetts, Mann had to coax and cajole local districts of wildly varying quality. His vision of “common schools,” publicly funded and attended by all, was an inspiring democratic advance over the state’s existing hodgepodge of privately funded and charity schools. But beyond using the bully pulpit and “riding the circuit” to spread his message, Mann had little power to make his vision a reality.

Prussia, by contrast, had designed its system from the center. School attendance was compulsory. Teachers were trained at national institutes with the same care that went into training Prussian military officers. The teachers were “the finest collection of men I have ever seen,” Mann wrote. Their enthusiasm for their subjects was contagious, and their devotion to students evoked reciprocal affection and respect, making Boston’s routine resort to classroom whippings seem barbaric. Prussia’s innovative ways of teaching reading struck Mann as far more effective than the methods used back home.

Mann also admired Prussia’s rigorous national curriculum for each grade, tied to a system of national testing for all students. The results spoke for themselves; in Prussia, illiteracy had been vanquished, and a sense of national unity instilled. In Massachusetts, where teachers, textbooks, curriculum, and time in school were subject to the whims—and variable talents—of fickle town committees, some students prospered, while many languished.

To be sure, Prussian schools sought to create obedient subjects who revered the Kaiser—hardly Mann’s educational aim. Yet the lessons were undeniable. Mann returned home, determined to share what he had seen, even if it hurt feelings and inflamed
educators. In the seventh of his legendary “Annual Reports” on education to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which still read remarkably well today, Mann touted the benefits of a “national system ... in which the whole people can participate,” and warned against the “calamities which result ... from leaving this most important of all the functions of a government to chance.” Mann’s message, according to his biographer, Jonathan Messerli, was clear:

[T]he United States had fallen behind the Prussians in education, and in order to catch up and move ahead, it was now mandatory to create a truly professional corps of teachers, produce a systematic curriculum, and develop a more centralized and efficient supervision of the schools. The Prussians offered a model in practicality and efficiency which his own countrymen would be well advised to follow. This was his prescription and he desperately hoped it would be accepted while there was still time.3

Mann’s epiphany that summer—that higher levels of government must have a strong role if America was to accelerate “the agenda of the Almighty”4 and use the power of education to lift all children—put him on the wrong side of America’s tradition of radical localism when it came to schools. And while Mann’s importunings in the years that followed made Massachusetts a model of taxpayer-funded schools and state-sponsored teacher training, this obsession with “local control” of education—so unlike the approach that most wealthy nations take for granted—pervades U.S. schooling to this day. Of all the hackneyed applause lines on the campaign trail, few are more foolproof than to rail against “Washington bureaucrats” out to meddle with what communities and parents know best. “So deeply ingrained in our consciousness is the idea of ‘local control of education’ that few Americans even think about it anymore,” says Chester E. Finn, Jr., a former Reagan administration education official who now runs the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. “Like ‘separation of church and state,’ ‘civilian control of the military,’ and ‘equality of opportunity,’ the phrase rolls off the tongue without ever engaging the mind.”5

Yet what, really, has “local control” given us today? The United States spends more than nearly every other wealthy nation on schools, yet out of 29 countries participating in a 2003 assessment, America ranked 24th in math, 24th in problem-solving, 18th in science, and 15th in reading—bested by such countries as Singapore and South Korea, which were considered hopelessly backward just a few decades ago. One in two minority students in America don’t graduate high school on time (or ever); 70 percent of eighth graders are not proficient in reading; and by the end of eighth grade, what passes for a U.S. math curriculum is two years behind the math being studied by peers in other countries.6

A 2003 test called “Problem Solving for Tomorrow’s World” gave 15-year-olds real-life problems that involved decision-making and troubleshooting—things like using a map to plan a trip and coordinating schedules to see a movie with friends. Among 29 developed countries, the United States had the fourth-highest percentage of weak problem-solvers and the
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sixth-lowest percentage of strong ones, placing us behind Latvia, Hungary, and the Slovak Republic.7

Meanwhile, thanks to localized sources of school funding, the gap between what is spent in wealthy states and districts and poorer ones can top $5,000 per pupil, meaning that America systematically assigns the worst teachers and most rundown facilities in the country to the poor children who need great schools the most.

What’s more, most schools, far from relishing the supposed freedom granted by local control, feel trapped in red tape. Principals say they spend their days on unproductive paperwork to comply with endless mandates, when they’re not busy navigating byzantine district bureaucracies to keep the heat on and the supply room stocked.

If you thought President Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” legislation, enacted with bipartisan fanfare in 2002, meant that Uncle Sam stepped in to fix these woes, you’re mistaken. NCLB requires states to establish standards in core subjects and test children annually to measure improvement in grades three to eight with the aim of making all students “proficient” by 2014. Yet by leaving standards and “proficiency” definitions entirely up to state discretion, NCLB has sparked a race to dumb down requirements to create the illusion of progress. The result is a phony accountability regime built on quicksand. Mississippi, for example, claims 89 percent of its fourth grade students are “proficient” in reading, while the respected National Assessment of Educational Progress says it’s only 18 percent.8 Nor does NCLB do anything to remedy the shocking financial inequities that plague U.S. education.

In the 25 years since “A Nation At Risk” sounded the alarm about educational mediocrity, America’s strategy in response, if it can be called that, has been dictated by nearly 15,000 school districts with help more recently from the 50 states. It’s as if after Pearl Harbor, FDR had suggested we prepare for war by relying on the uncoordinated efforts of thousands of small factories. They’d know what kind of planes and tanks were needed, right? The results have been predictable. Despite pockets of improvement, we have made virtually no progress in raising most students’ achievement to the levels now required in order to maintain American living standards in the coming era of competition with workers in places like China and India.

There has to be a better way—and there is, if we open our minds.

A look at the history of local control as the organizing principle of schooling suggests that an approach that made perfect sense in the 1700s is crippling American education today. The paradox is that the only way to demand more from schools, while freeing educators and parents to find diverse ways for schools to perform better, is to take a cue from other advanced countries and nationalize the system a little—especially when it comes to the standards that we expect students to meet and the resources that we allocate to help them do so.

Embracing this new national role will mean finally jettisoning in our time the idea that Horace Mann was wise enough to look beyond in his own: the anachronistic, damaging, and uniquely American notion that schools are simply a local matter.
Local control began as the common sense and even progressive way to organize and fund schools in the United States. It was so organic and straightforward an arrangement that there really wasn’t need for much debate. The story begins in colonial New England where education was a casual affair left to parents, churches, and employers to arrange. Many children attended so-called “dame schools” run by single women who set out a shingle and offered their services teaching basic literacy and grammar.

As towns grew in size, it became clear that voluntary arrangements wouldn’t suffice to teach all children, as many parents neglected their duties. The Massachusetts Bay Colony established the right of the government to promote universal literacy in 1642, and followed with another measure in 1647, under which the state, as servant of the church, required local townships with more than 50 families to school the young. The idea, embodied in law, was to combat “that Old Deluder, Satan,” who was apparently out to keep people ignorant of scripture. This link between religion and education explains much about the early shape of American schools. Many of the groups that came to the United States, particularly in New England, were dissenters from centralized religious authority. What the Pilgrims, Puritans, and Quakers were rebelling against was the idea of having some ecclesiastical boss, whether he be in Canterbury or Rome. “Schooling in the 17th and 18th century was essentially literacy, which is a deeply Protestant enterprise,” says Jeff Mirel, an education historian at the University of Michigan. “To be able to read the Bible in the vernacular, to be able to make your own decisions without a pope or some other authority telling you what you have to believe, is ingrained in the Protestant tradition.”

The way religion and schooling moved in tandem across New England and into the mid-Atlantic colonies, Mirel explains, typically involved a group of people gathering in the community and setting up a church. If people didn’t like the way the minister in that church was preaching, they moved on to another community and founded their own. “The education that was going on,” Mirel says, “was almost always attached to the church. You get from this a passion for local control because people were concerned about how their religious doctrines are going to be passed on to their children.”

In the political realm, the American Revolution supplied a similar animating impulse: distrust of distant, centralized power. This doesn’t mean a national role in education wasn’t discussed. John Adams spoke eloquently about the need for a national system of some kind; George Washington flirted with the idea of a national university that would be like the Ecole in France, training leaders and diplomats. For the founders, the po-
potential lure of a national system was as a vehicle, in Benjamin Rush’s phrase, to “unlearn” old ways of thinking associated with the imperial British. But in the end, the deeper consensus on the virtues of decentralized power carried the day. When it came time to draft the Constitution, education was left out. It is one of the unnamed powers reserved for the states in the 10th Amendment, which in turn devolved this power to local communities.

America’s rural geography and frontier mentality made such localism seem natural. As people moved west they got together and said, “Let’s build a school.” Even in eastern states, once you settled over the hill or across the river, the idea that folks on the other side would have a say in how you taught your kids felt wrong. Eventually the United States would have 130,000 one-room schools. These little red schoolhouses, literally districts unto themselves, became the iconic symbols of democratic American learning.

Yet local control set America apart from other nations. When the French rebels seized power just two years after the Constitution was drafted, they felt they had to revamp schooling because it had been ecclesiastically controlled. If the French were to become good republican citizens, the thinking went, they needed to have a national system of education, which in one form or another the French have run from Paris ever since.

The schemes in France were intrusive, to say the least. In 1793, for example, the French passed a law requiring that every child attend a boarding school from age 5 until age 15, in which they would be dressed alike in clothes provided by the state, fed the same food, and taught to be loyal only to the Republic. (The law was only sporadically implemented.) Then, in the 1830s, Francois Guizot, a senior minister under Louis Philippe, wrote that every French village would be governed by a gendarme and a school teacher—the cop to control their bodies, the teacher to control their minds.

“The United States didn’t have a revolution like the French or the Russians did,” says Brown University historian Carl Kaestle, “where it was such a social upheaval that governments took seriously the idea that you’d really have to retrain the population and run the schools.” Nor did the United States face at this point the same pressures to define exactly who was an American.

Across Europe, France, Spain, Italy, and Prussia were wrestling to define themselves in the face of external enemies and internal divisions. Leaders feared that regions within their borders, which often spoke different languages and
had little day-to-day awareness of the king, were going their own way. “They all felt they had to define their borders and define who was a citizen to create a common loyalty,” says Charles Glenn of Boston University, author of several books on the period. A national school system was a way to control the population through the minds of its children. In the United States, this sentiment appeared only late in the 19th century, when immigration became heavy, giving rise, at least in big cities where immigrants gathered, to the idea that public schools were the place to “Americanize” the mob.

In the southern United States, slavery also meant the evolution of public education would be a longer and more complicated matter. But by the time the Civil War had ended and Reconstruction was in gear, the basic contours of local control were in place across the country. During this time, it was the “big government” Whigs and later the Republicans in the early and middle 1800s who wanted more centralized authority over schools—part of a broader agenda that included government support for such infrastructure as canals and railroads. Post-Civil War Democrats resisted this idea mightily, partly out of fears, especially in the South, that it would ultimately target slavery, and partly out of Democrats’ general conviction (like that of many Republicans today) that limited government served democracy best. This explains why Mann and others who sought an expanded state role took care to pitch their reforms in ways that respected the primacy of local control.

Between 1825 and 1860, as the “common school” movement gained ground, two critical features of local control appeared that shape education today. The first was the emergence of independently elected school boards to administer schools apart from the rest of local government. The local school boards were bestowed with the power to raise taxes, hire and fire teachers and principals, and choose textbooks, among other duties. The second was the use of local property taxes as the primary funding mechanism for schools.

School control was initially vested in towns, but as people moved farther from town centers, they wanted their own independent schools, and rather than stay subject to town authority, they formed small new school governing boards. A Massachusetts law ratifying this pragmatic decentralization became a model for other states as people moved west.

Common school promoters also feared that linking schools to city or town governments could open the door to partisan efforts to “educate” kids into a specific ideology. In such a situation, support for the schools might erode as parents from the other party would remove their children or oppose funding the institution. Mann was adamant about keeping schools out of partisan politics for precisely these reasons. This concern blossomed into a more sweeping progressive drive early in the 20th century to remove urban school districts from the corrupting influence of “politics,” leaving them led by more “neutral” professional experts with non-partisan school boards picked in elections held at different times than regular elections.

Meanwhile, the property tax, now a chief source of inequity, was then considered the fairest way to pay for education. Property was the main form of wealth; rich and poor people did not live in separate communities. “Thus the wealthy paid more than the middle class and the poor paid nothing,” says historian Mirel, “yet all got access to the same public service—public schools.”
The Seeds of Challenge

Once the system of local control with a thin layer of state supervision above it became rooted in taxation and governance from the bottom up, it became sacrosanct. Local control faced only a few significant challenges in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While these challenges didn’t prevail, the clash of ideas they elicited foreshadows a debate that will no doubt be rejoined in the next few years.

The first flurry of activity came around the period of Radical Reconstruction, when some in Congress, emboldened by the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, sought to put educational flesh on these new constitutional guarantees of citizenship. A federal department of education was established in 1867, which, though downgraded to a mere data-collecting “office” in the Department of the Interior soon afterwards, signaled a new sense that the federal government had a role to play.

Then, in 1870, George Hoar, a Massachusetts congressman, Harvard Law graduate, and grandson of Roger Sherman, who had been a fierce foe of slavery, offered an unprecedented bill “to establish a system of national education.” It required each state to provide instruction to children between the ages of 6 and 18 in reading, writing, math, geography, and U.S. history. The president would be authorized to determine whether each state had set up “a system of common schools that provides reasonably” in this regard; if not, the bill called for “national schools” run by the commissioner of education to fill the gap; the feds would select textbooks, use land acquired by eminent domain, and pay for it all with a new federal tax of 50 cents per person.15

According to Goodwin Liu, a law professor at Berkeley who has written the best modern account of these postbellum debates, Hoar’s bill was attacked as “a system of functionaryism” sure to bring “reckless expenditure” and “patronage.”16 Letting the feds pick textbooks was a means by which “the very foundations of knowledge might be poisoned,” critics roared. Yet Hoar made his case with equal passion. “Now, if to every man in every State is secured by national authority his equal share in the Government,” he said, “surely there is implied the corresponding power and duty of securing the capacity of the exercise of that share in the Government (emphasis added).”

Hoar emphasized that his measure was not aimed merely at newly freed blacks; whites accounted for half of America’s illiterates, after all, and twice as many school-aged children who did not attend school were white than were black. “What then, is the function of the national Legislature?” he asked. “It is twofold. It is to compel to be done what the States will not do, and to do for them what they cannot do ... either through indif-
ference, hostility to education, or pecuniary inability.” The bill died without a vote, sunk finally by suspicions that the federal government would also seek to compel racial integration in schools.

Hoar lost, but he made an impression. In 1872, Rep. Legrand Perce, a Mississippi Republican, offered a less heavy-handed plan that would help address the nation’s emerging education gaps. He proposed to allocate money to states on the basis of their illiteracy levels (offering some aid to all regions, therefore, but targeting the South), with the proviso that the states spend the money on teachers. The proposal specified that states would not lose funding if its schools were not racially mixed.

Perce’s more pragmatic bill passed the House with bipartisan support before being quashed in the Senate. Still, the effort suggested that crafting a politically acceptable federal role to offset the shortcomings of local control was not automatically a pipe dream. In 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant even proposed a constitutional amendment under which “the States shall be required to afford the opportunity of a good common school education to every child within their limits.”

The culmination of these postwar federal challenges to local control came in the 1880s when Senator Henry Blair of New Hampshire proposed that new federal school aid to the states be made through general appropriations and not from public lands. The Blair bill actually passed the Senate in 1884, 1886, and 1888 before failing, thanks to the machinations of determined minorities, in 1890.

As Liu notes, the debates over the Blair measure spanned hundreds of pages in the Congressional Record and for the first time saw the introduction of detailed statistics showcasing gross inequities across the states. The per capita value of real and personal property in New England, for example, where student enrollment was high and illiteracy rates low, was 40 percent greater than in the mid-Atlantic states, two times more than in the Midwest and West, and fully four times greater than in the South, where enrollment rates were low and illiteracy rates high. Reflecting these differences in fiscal capacity, New England spent three or four times more per pupil than Southern states.

Blair argued that the federal government had “the duty of educating the people of the United States whenever for any cause these people are deficient in the degree of education which is essential to the discharge of their duties as citizens.” By allocating aid based on illiteracy rates in each state, he envisioned a role for the federal government in offsetting interstate inequities in both finance and educational outcomes. Though Blair and his allies ultimately failed—succumbing to the usual fears of a school takeover by the wasteful feds—they anticipated by 80 years the approach to augmenting local control that would be enacted by Lyndon Johnson.

Similar seeds were planted in 1894 when “the Committee of Ten,” chaired by Charles Eliot, President of Harvard, issued a report on “Secondary School Subjects” that educators viewed as the most important educational document ever issued in the United States. Besides Eliot, the committee included the presidents of the universities of Michigan, Missouri, and Colorado, along with W. T. Harris, U.S. Commissioner of Education and former schools chief in St. Louis. The group’s charge was to review high school
curriculum and propose requirements for admission to college. Their recommendations set off a fierce 20-year debate whose shadow can still be seen today.

The Committee of Ten’s radical argument was that every high school student, regardless of their background and “probable destiny,” should have a rigorous liberal arts college preparatory education. “They were the first to essentially call for some kind of nationalization of the high school curriculum,” says historian Mirel.21

Progressive era educators viewed this idea as elitist, ignoring the lower aptitudes and abilities of immigrant children flooding the schools. Preparation for college, progressives argued, was not for everyone, and not the same thing as preparation for “life.” Why should a child be studying calculus when he’s going to be a factory worker? Why does he have to read Hamlet when he’s going to be a carpenter?

The Committee’s critics believed that if you pushed college prep, kids who were unwilling or unable to do the work would get frustrated and drop out. Kids needed constructive options suited to their station in life. The result was a furious backlash against Eliot and his colleagues, and the successful push to create the “comprehensive” high school, with a college prep track as well as major tracks for vocational, general, and commercial education, which to some extent are with us still.

What made the debate fascinating was that both sides believed they were the true apostles of equal educational opportunity. To the Committee of Ten, equality was about the abolition of tracking and the achievement of higher standards for all. To the progressives, it was about a chance to excel in different ways particular to the kind of person you were. The progressives also stressed a practical challenge: how do you keep less academic kids in school? School needs to have more entertainment value, they thought. It’s not the content of what they learn so much as the credential they’ll have that will enable them to move up in society.

To make a long story short, the progressives basically won this pedagogical fight for the 20th century until “A Nation At Risk” shattered our complacency in 1983 and sparked the standards-based reform movement that represents the latest—if still ineffectively meek—challenge to local control. Meanwhile, the challenge sidestepped a century ago—how can we raise all students, not just a few, to higher levels of achievement—is newly urgent in an era of global competition where, as Bill Clinton’s refrain puts it, “what you can earn depends on what you can learn.”
No Charade Left Behind

It’s short work to bring the saga of local control up to the present. After World War II, liberals in Congress tried again to aid poorer states and localities, but couldn’t make headway thanks to the three R’s: “race, religion, and reds.” The South didn’t want Congress forcing integration down its throat. Increasingly powerful Catholic constituencies resisted the idea that aid would go to public schools, but not theirs. Then there were suspicions that the federal bureaucracy harbored Communists. Only after Brown v. Board, Sputnik, and the civil rights movement was there sufficient momentum for President Lyndon Johnson to pass legislation offering federal aid to poor districts in 1965, followed by similar initiatives for children with disabilities and other special needs.

At the same time, the post-World War II era saw the appearance of new and dramatic funding differences between school districts in the same state. The culprit was the commuter suburb. The suburban building boom made it possible for people to self-select communities based on wealth. The dirty little secret of local control became the enormous tax advantage it conferred on better-off Americans; communities with high property wealth could tax themselves at lower rates and generate far more dollars per pupil than could poorer communities taxing themselves at higher rates.

As advocates for the poor came to appreciate this situation, a legal movement emerged to challenge school finance systems, which left dozens of states facing court orders to help poorer communities do better. Over time this improved things, but only marginally. Today local taxes still represent 44 percent of school funding nationally, with states contributing 47 percent and the federal government contributing 9 percent.

Meanwhile, the standards movement spawned by “A Nation At Risk” produced well-meaning commitments, but glacial change. A Charlottesville summit of governors in 1989, which was keynoted by President Bush and saw then-Arkansas governor Bill Clinton in a leading role, committed to ambitious education goals for the year 2000. Yet Bush, torn between his view that the federal government needed to take a stronger role and his conservative base’s loathing of the idea, offered little beyond gestures to advance the cause. As president, Clinton repackaged Bush’s toothless efforts and for a time put serious political capital into expanding Uncle Sam’s reach. But his attempts to promote even voluntary versions of national standards went nowhere.

This brings us to No Child Left Behind. Seen in the light of history, the major accomplishment of the law, which liberal critics don’t appreciate, is the way it has commit-
ted the modern Republican party to an expanded federal role in schooling—a return, as it were, to the party’s roots in the 19th century. This is no mean feat when you recall that it wasn’t so long ago that Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich’s revolutionaries were pledging to abolish the Department of Education altogether. Moreover, by requiring schools to “dis-aggregate” their reporting of test scores so that local districts can no longer hide the dismally lagging performance of minority children, NCLB has shined a sharper light on the “achievement gap.”

President Bush deserves credit for these steps, but they’re modest compared with education’s problems. “It has the veneer of a toothy federal intervention,” says Chris Cerf, deputy schools chancellor in New York City, of NCLB, “but there’s not a whole lot behind it.”24 Andrew Rotherham, a former Clinton education official who now serves on the school board of the state of Virginia, adds that “NCLB is the beginning of a long national conversation about aggregating some of this decision-making at a national level.”25

The question is where the conversation should go from here. Answering this question intelligently requires an honest accounting of the problems caused by local control.
How Local Control Is Killing American Education

Defenders of local control have inertia and political power on their side; public officials who know how harmful local control is fear speaking out because it can be a career-ender. Foundations and advocacy groups who judge it prudent to be able to work with school boards also pull their punches. But we’ll never get past make-believe fixes without speaking the truth.

How does local control damage American education? Let us catalogue the ways:

Financial Inequity

“Some of the worst places in the country are in Chicago, or Michigan, or Pennsylvania, where you can go to an inner city and see a facility that’s just horribly run down, where they’re spending $6,000 a kid,” says Tom Vander Ark, a former superintendent who from 1999 to 2006 ran the education program at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.26 “You can drive 20 minutes down the street and see a spectacular facility where they’re spending two-and-a-half times as much per student. We should be spending more on low-income kids to improve their educational experience and outcomes, and we do the opposite, and that’s entirely a product of local control.”

As it turns out, spending gaps between states (as opposed to within states) actually account for the lion’s share of financial inequity across the nation. Even after adjusting for regional cost differences and varying student needs, one study shows that the top 10 states ranked by per-pupil spending invest nearly 50 percent more per student than the lowest ranking 10, a difference of more than $2,500 per pupil.27

As was the case after the Civil War, the lower spending southern and western states also tend, generally speaking, to have the lowest achievement rankings. And Title I, the federal aid program meant to boost poor schools, actually makes these gaps worse because it distributes money largely based on how much states are already spending. The result, says Berkeley’s Liu, is that Uncle Sam perversely makes rich states richer.28

“In the developed countries, there’s no school system funded as inequitably as the U.S.,” says Sir Michael Barber, a former education adviser to Tony Blair who now consults to school officials around the world.29 Marc Tucker, who led the New Commission on the Skills of The American Workforce, a bipartisan blue-ribbon panel that called for a bold overhaul of the education system, puts it this way:
The commission could not figure out how we would ever have a high performing education system as long as we permit the wealthiest people among us to congregate in their own taxing districts, thereby producing very high budgets per student... at very low tax rates for themselves, and gaining the very best resources, including the best teachers available to any students in the state. When you put it to people that way, it makes them scratch their heads.  

Inconsistent Standards and Inadequate Data

“We’re 15 years into the standards movement in this country,” says Vander Ark, who also notes that he feels freer to speak out now that he is no longer the nation’s leading education grantmaker, “and standards are still different by classroom, by school, by district, and by state.”

That’s unquestionably a residual of local control. It’s not just that every district sets their own standards, but the fact that every district has had to structure their own employment agreements, which has basically kept administrators out of the classrooms [as observers] in a lot of places. Teachers in America still pretty much teach whatever they want. And even with the movement towards state standards, every state has a different set of standards, and then districts within a state have a different set of standards. It’s just such a mess.

“The Proficiency Illusion,” a report released in October by the conservative
Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, makes clear what a charade the standards regime has become under NCLB. “‘Proficiency’ varies wildly from state to state,” the report finds, “with ‘passing scores’ ranging from the 6th percentile to the 77th.... It’s not just that results vary, but that they vary almost randomly, erratically, from place to place and grade to grade and year to year in ways that have little or nothing to do with student achievement.” The report continues:

Congress erred bigtime when NCLB assigned each state to set its own standards and devise and score its own tests; no matter what one thinks of America’s history of state primacy in K-12 education, this study underscores the folly of a big modern nation, worried about its global competitiveness, nodding with approval as Wisconsin sets its eighth grade reading passing level at the 14th percentile while South Carolina sets it at the 71st percentile. As a result, the report notes, “Susie may be ‘proficient’ in math in the eyes of Michigan education bureaucrats but she still could have scored worse than five-sixths of the other fourth graders in the country.” In Massachusetts, a fourth grader demonstrates proficiency in reading by answering questions about a challenging passage from a short story by Tolstoy; in Colorado a proficient fourth grader tackles material that reads like “See Jane Run.”

“The lack of a simple national way to evaluate how all children are progressing is enormously anachronistic,” say New York’s Cerf. “It is a reflection of this allegiance to localism. It allows this tremendous sense of delusion around how well children are doing.”

### OPINIONS OF TESTING STANDARDS

Under No Child Left Behind, should there be a single national standard and a single national test for all students in the United States? Or do you think there should be different standards and tests in different states?

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<th>General Population</th>
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<td>One test and standard for all students</td>
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<td>Different tests and standards in different states</td>
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ment that accelerates progress in almost every other human endeavor. Why? Because the benefits from scale that drive such activities elsewhere are absent. There are 15,000 curriculum departments in the country, for example—one for every district. None of them can afford to invest in understanding at a deep level what works and doesn’t work in, say, teaching reading to English language learners.

Consider also the shabby state of learning technology. Outside the classroom, kids are constantly online or playing sophisticated video games; at the doctor’s office they’re diagnosed with cutting edge-equipment. In school, by contrast, the core learning technology—a teacher and 25 or 30 kids in a room—looks exactly like it did 50 years ago.

Why hasn’t there been a massive R&D effort to understand, for example, how to use computers to develop customized reading-learning strategies for kids with different learning styles? 15,000 school districts obviously can’t take this on. The federal government would be damned for trying by the local control fetishists. And perhaps most importantly, the private sector won’t pursue it either. Why? Because curriculum and education technology purchasing decisions are made at a complex mixture of the classroom, school, and school board level in 15,000 fragmented little arenas.

Ask anyone who tries to do business in school systems: When you have a long-term, highly decentralized, complicated, and difficult sale to try to make, it reduces the amount of product development and research in which private companies are willing to invest. A vendor in the United States can’t produce a sophisticated learning platform and go to a school administrator and say, “I have a powerful new learning tool that can transform the experience of 100,000 or a million or 5 million young people.” There’s no one to have that conversation with in the United States. In South Korea and Singapore there is.

Union Dominance

Local control essentially surrenders power over the way schools work to the teachers’ unions, with whom local school boards can’t compete. Why? For starters, the board may not try to compete since unions are typically responsible for electing board members in low turnout races in which union money and mobilization dominate. The unions also bring the intellectual and political horsepower of their state and national affiliates, who monitor contracts around the state and country, and develop and spread successful negotiating strategies. Even when they’re not in the unions’ pockets, in other words, school boards are outmatched.

Unions have become adept at enacting improvements to local contracts, spreading them to other districts around a state, then getting them embodied in state policy—and to some extent in federal law as well. The result is an impenetrable three-tier set of policy mandates that are interlocked with employment agreements in ways that leave new superintendents operating with both hands tied behind their backs. It is extraordinarily difficult to make changes to staffing, compensation, employment policy, curriculum, or the time and schedule of the school day. Superintendents develop a kind of “learned helplessness” in the face of these obstacles, a sense that they have to live within a shrinking box. Meanwhile, common sense reforms like higher pay to
attract teachers to high-needs schools or to shortage specialties like math, science, or special education, can’t get traction because the unions say no.

**Political and Dysfunctional School Boards**

“In the first place, God made idiots,” said Mark Twain. “That was for practice. Then he made school boards.” Times haven’t changed much, though few educators will say so on the record.

“The job has become more difficult, more complicated, and more political, and as a result, it’s driven out many of the good candidates that no longer want to put in the time or suffer the sort of brain damage, the personal insult that comes with the job,” says Vander Ark, the former Gates education chief. “So while teachers’ unions have become more sophisticated and have smarter people who are better equipped and prepared at the table, the quality of school board members, particularly in urban areas, has decreased.”

A senior urban school official is blunter. Apart from health care, he notes, education is the second largest sector in the United States, with upwards of half a trillion dollars spent annually. “The more distributed the authority over that money is, the more people can play,” he says. “The kind of people who have been elected to run our school systems would never in any other world have the opportunity to control that big a piece of this huge pie.”

Chester E. Finn, Jr., the former Reagan official, says that school boards today “resemble a dysfunctional family comprised of three unlovable types: aspiring politicians for whom this is a stepping-stone to higher office, former school system employees with a score to settle, and single-minded advocates of diverse dubious causes who yearn to use the public schools to impose their particular hang-ups on all the kids in town.”

Once installed, these folks routinely spend their time on minor matters, from meddling in mid-level personnel decisions to tweaking bus routes. “The tradition goes back to the rural era that we started with,” says Michael Kirst, emeritus professor of education at Stanford, “where the school board hired the schoolmarm and oversaw the repair of the roof, looked into the stove in the room, and deliberated on every detail of operating the schools. The L.A. School Board still does that.”

Thanks to the unintended consequence of Progressive-era reforms meant to get school boards out of “politics,” most urban school districts became independent entities beyond the reach of mayors and city councils. Elected in off-year races few people notice or vote in, school boards are, in effect, not accountable to anyone.

It may be, as the historian David Tyack has noted, that in the heyday of the common school movement in the 19th century, local school boards served as authentic, even romantic seats of small “d” democracy in action. But that was then. Today, in the districts in which most American children go to school, school boards stand as classic cases of interest group capture with employee groups, contractors, and other adults who do business with the district exercising vast influence.

The degree to which thoughtful reformers from across the political spectrum agree that local control as now prac-
ticed is bad for the country is stunning. Support for it lingers in opinion polls because of the natural default preference for having things done nearby, and because the case against local control is almost never articulated. Few people with political ambitions will take on the powerful school board associations and teachers unions and tell people the truth—including the truth that real autonomy and equity can be created for schools only by scrapping what we traditionally think of as “local control.” For now, an idea that should have lost its grip on us long ago goes unchallenged, and millions of children pay the price.
“What Would Horace Do?”

When I asked Marc Tucker how he explains to people that America’s fetish for local control is hurting our education system, he said he asks a simple question: If it is true (as it is) that we have the second-highest-cost K-12 education system among all those measured by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, but that our performance consistently places us between the middle and the bottom of the pack, would it not make sense, in looking for solutions to that problem, to examine the experiences of those countries which spend less and get more from their schools?

“Having asked that rhetorical question,” Tucker says, “I then point out that this system of local control that we have in the United States is almost unique compared to those countries that have high performance. Rather than making it the unquestioned assumption, one then has to defend holding onto a practice that is uncharacteristic of those countries that have the best performance.

“It’s an industrial benchmarking argument,” Tucker adds.

Horace Mann wouldn’t have used this jargon in 1843, but his determination to improve American educational practice by learning from the best in the world is needed again today.

In Mann’s time the challenge was to embrace a bigger role for the state; 165 years later, in an era of global competition, the challenge is to embrace a stronger national role that gives children a chance to thrive no matter where in America they happen to be born. That will only happen if the federal government takes on important new roles in standards and finance, as well as in promoting innovation and a cosmopolitan outlook.

Establishing National Standards

The usual explanation for why national standards won’t fly politically in the United States is because the right hates “national” and the left hates “standards.” But that’s changing.

On the right, former Republican secretaries of education Rod Paige and William Bennett now support national standards and tests, writing in the Washington Post that “in a world of fierce economic competition, we can’t afford to pretend that the current system is getting us where we need to go.”
On the left, a 2005 report from the progressive think tank Center for American Progress’s education task force (where I’m a Senior Fellow) included a call for “voluntary” national standards that states could opt to embrace. Yet when I spoke with CAP President and CEO John Podesta, former chief of staff to President Clinton, he said he’d become convinced since that report was issued that people were far ahead of the conventional wisdom in Washington, which holds that the only safe way to tiptoe around the standards question is to hedge defensively about their being “optional” or “voluntary” or otherwise not really “national” at all.

New polling suggests that Podesta is right. An August 2007 survey done for Strong American Schools, an education campaign funded by the Gates and Broad Foundations (which I advised in 2006), found that 63 percent of Americans think there should be “national academic expectations and standards for students in all states,” as opposed to 35 percent who believe “each state should be responsible for setting its own.”

Another survey for the campaign found that 81 percent of voters support the concept of instituting uniform, national standards in core subjects, including 53 percent who support this “strongly.” And a recent survey by the journal Education Next found not only overwhelming support for national standards and tests, but that conservatives liked the idea even more than progressives.

This might not necessarily represent a huge change since de facto national education standards already exist in some areas, set indirectly by a handful of publishing giants whose textbooks (shaped largely by the desires of mega-states California, Florida, and Texas) guide instruction in classrooms across the country. The question may therefore be not “should we,” but “how best to?”

Most gurus suggest we establish national standards and tests in grades three through 12 in core subjects—reading, math, and science, for starters—perhaps leaving more controversial subjects such as history until we get our feet wet with the new regime.

Reevaluating School Finance

Nowhere is it written in the Constitution that the federal government must contribute only 9 percent of K-12 spending, and if we’re serious about fixing today’s resource gaps, that must change.

The most recent important official to look hard at this question was none other than Richard Nixon. Nixon’s Commission on School Finance, headed by the chairman of Procter & Gamble, issued a report in 1972 that urged states to equalize funding disparities between districts and proposed some modest federal cash to help. But bolder ideas were also in play.

Nixon’s commissioner of education, for example, said publicly that the federal government should pay 25 to 30 percent of the cost of public education. John Ehrlichman, a domestic advisor for Nixon, weighed what one leak to the New York Times suggested could be Nixon’s “education masterstroke”: a new national value-added tax whose proceeds would be distributed to states that drastically reduced state and local property taxes while closing funding gaps among their districts.
Precise policy details are less important at this point than recognizing that something like Nixon’s never-proposed property tax-swap “masterstroke” offers the kind of fresh framework for school finance we need. The feds contributed $45 billion of the $488 billion total spent on K-12 schools in 2004-2005 (the most recent data available). Going to 25 to 30 percent of today’s overall tab via Nixonian revenue sharing would lift the federal contribution by roughly $80 billion to $100 billion a year; if new federal money was added and current state and local monies stayed the same, the feds would spend $100 billion to $150 billion a year more.

Berkeley’s Goodwin Liu has offered two other useful principles to inform a new federal role. The first is to bring all states up to a certain guaranteed baseline of funding per pupil. To be eligible for such support, states would have to tax themselves at a certain minimal rate, to show some appropriate level of effort given the resources they have. Then, in those cases where states still fell short (because they were poorer), the feds would, in essence, compensate them for the shortfall.

Another idea, applying above this minimum, would be for the federal government to help equalize the return a state gets on a given level of tax effort. Much of the variation in spending among states is not the result of differing tax effort. It’s because even with reasonably high levels of effort, states such as West Virginia get low returns because their wealth per child isn’t high (unlike such states as Tennessee and Florida, which spend less because they prefer low taxes). The idea would be for the feds to make sure that if a state taxes itself at X rate, it will get Y return. “The federal role should not be an insurance policy for the states that want to spend less and have low taxes,” says Liu. “It should be an insurance policy against low wealth.”

One scenario to raise the federal contribution to 25 to 30 percent would be to adopt a Liu-style plan, which he estimates would cost $30 billion a year. The additional money would be used for conditional grants to states enabling some new “grand bargains” that boost school performance. For example, federal cash could be offered to lift teacher salaries substantially for high-poverty schools, provided that states or districts (1) allow big pay differentials for high-performing teachers or those in shortage specialties like math and science; (2) defer or eliminate tenure, or condition it on proven student achievement gains, as New York’s Cerf has suggested; and (3) make it easier to fire low performers. Alternatively, hefty grants might be offered to states that adopt new national standards, making them “voluntary,” but perhaps via offers states couldn’t sensibly refuse. As you can see, once you move the feds from 9 percent toward 30 percent of the K-12 dollar, the possibilities are enormous.

Investing in Research and Development

The federal government should also use a portion of its higher investment to pursue an R&D agenda equal to the education sector’s needs. As Chris Whittle, the founder of Edison Schools, has argued, it doesn’t make sense that the feds spend $28 billion on basic research yearly at the National Institutes of Health, but only $260 million—one percent of that—on R&D for schooling. Whittle argues persuasively that $4 billion a year on such innovation could begin “to move our
schools—and our educational results—to another level, just as we moved from the candle to the light bulb, from the prop plane to the jet.”

Promoting a Cosmopolitan Outlook

Finally, where but at the national level should we insist that in a global era all American children develop the cosmopolitan outlook needed to thrive in a “flat world”? This might mean requiring fluency in a second language for high school graduation, as well as courses that expose students to the planet’s myriad cultures and religions. In the 21st century, it should not be left to the whim of a rural district in Nebraska whether or not an American child has some minimal feel for the shrinking world she will share.

Eliminating School Boards

What of school boards? The best course would be to scrap them, especially in the big cities where most poor children are educated. That’s the impulse behind the growing drive for mayoral control of schools, though only a few major cities have thus far achieved it. While it’s too soon to render a verdict, New York and Boston have used mayoral authority to sustain what are among the most far-reaching reform agendas in the country.

This isn’t the first time the thought of overthrowing boards has occurred to Americans. In 1956, at the height of the Cold War, Adm. Hyman Rickover, “the Father of the Nuclear Navy,” argued that the nation could never compete educationally with the Soviets if “the control and financing of schools is in the hands of thousands of local school boards.” Chester E. Finn, Jr. has waged a lonely battle for their abolition for 15 years. Thanks to the consolidation of rural districts earlier this century, the number of school districts plummeted from 130,000 to 15,000. Perhaps we should be thankful for small favors.

Every education reformer I spoke with, from liberal to conservative, said there would be no loss whatsoever if we woke up one day and school boards had vanished—it’s hard to think of other institutions that inspire such consensus. They also say that with 95,000 school board members as an active lobbying force, the chances of that happening anytime soon are nil. Maybe. But that only means we need to find ways to neuter school boards or recast their role so they can do less damage.
Conclusion

In the effort to reform our education system, it is vital that one seeming paradox is understood: It is only by transcending traditional local control, and by getting serious about a new national role in standards and finance, that we can at last create genuine autonomy for local schools. This autonomy should become the new definition of what we mean when we say “local control.”

Schools operating under “local control” today are in reality controlled anywhere but locally. Spend time in them and you’ll fast learn that principals don’t “run” schools; they are compliance machines, making sure that federal, state, and district programs are legally administered. Their hands, and those of teachers, are tied by an intricate puzzle of laws, program regulations, policies, and employment contracts that cover every minute of the day; the number of hours per day; the number of days in the year; the number and type of credits needed to graduate; hiring and teacher assignment; curriculum, course offerings, and textbooks; testing, promotion, and retention; class size; student behavior; discipline; health, safety, and civil rights; sex ed, driver’s ed, meals, before- and after-school programs; and, of course, sports.

On top of these byzantine multi-tiered set of compliance policies, the standards movement has now appended local, state, and federal levels of accountability policy that are not aligned. “It’s left schools in this awkward situation,” says Tom Vander Ark, “where they may get an award from their state for high performance, and under federal guidelines they may be targeted for closure for low performance.”

This happens in California all the time, he told me.

“If you visit schools in many other parts of the world,” says Marc Tucker, “you’re struck almost immediately ... by a sense of autonomy on the part of the school staff and principal that you don’t find in the United States.”

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development studies have found the same thing: Public schools in the United States have less autonomy than nationally directed schools in France. Research across 46 countries by Ludger Woessmann of the University of Munich has shown that having a clear set of external standards to be judged by, combined with real discretion at the school level in how to achieve them, turns out to be the most effective way to run a school system, and the most satisfying for educators and parents.

If you have strong external standards and don’t have school autonomy, the results are mediocre. If you have strong autonomy, but no good external standards, you also have mediocre results. Charles Glenn of Boston University, who has also served as an educa-
tion official in Massachusetts, says, “Only by having good ways of measuring the results is it possible to leave educators free to really be professional and to operate schools that are really effective, and distinctive, which is the only way we can satisfy parents in a pluralistic society.” In other words: we need to give schools one clear, national set of expectations, free educators and parents to collaborate locally in whatever ways work to get results, and get everything else out of the way.

New York City under Michael Bloomberg has been trying to move in this direction. A new education reform commission set up by Arnold Schwarzenneger recently laid out a similar blueprint for California. Only the federal government can accelerate this agenda for the nation.

To his contemporaries, Horace Mann could be self-righteous and high-handed as he campaigned for public schools, acting as if America’s destiny—and superiority—was self-evident. But if he could be pigheaded in a good cause, Mann was also intellectually honest and curious. When he went to Prussia, he opened his mind.

Everyone who cares about schools in America needs to take a mental trip to Prussia today. Nationalizing our schools a little is antithetical to every cultural tradition in the United States save the one that matters most: our capacity to renew ourselves to meet the challenges of a new day.

Once upon a time, a national role in retirement security was anathema. Then suddenly, after the Depression, there was Social Security. Once a federal role in health care would have been damned as socialism, yet federal spending now accounts for one of every two dollars devoted to health care in the United States, with more certain to come in the years ahead. When it comes to schools, there has likewise always been a tension between the desire to improve the life chances of more children by involving higher levels of authority, and the primordial American distrust of central government. But the truth is we started down this road even on schooling a long time ago. It’s time now to finish the job.
Endnotes

3 Messerli, p. 407.
4 Ibid., p. xii.
5 Chester E. Finn, Jr., interview with Matt Miller, October 18, 2007.
6 The details on school performance in this paragraph come from fact sheets assembled by the organization Strong American Schools, drawn from OECD data and other government sources.
7 Ibid.
10 Jeff Mirel, interview with Matt Miller, July 10, 2007.
12 Kaestle, interview.
13 Glenn, interview.
14 Mirel, interview.
16 Ibid.
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23 National Center for Education Statistics.
24 Chris Cerf, interview with Matt Miller, September 27, 2007
28 Goodwyn Liu, interview with Matt Miller, October 5, 2007.
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41 John Podesta, interview with Matt Miller, November 17, 2007.
42 Polling information provided by Strong American Schools, fall 2007.
45 Liu, interview.
46 Ibid.
48 Vander Ark, interview.
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50 Glenn, interview.
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52 Ted Mitchell, interview with Matt Miller, October 9, 2007.
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Matt Miller is a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress and the host of “Left, Right and Center,” a political week-in-review program aired on public radio stations across the country. His work has appeared in Fortune, the Atlantic Monthly, the New York Times, and other national outlets. Miller’s first book, The Two Percent Solution: Fixing America’s Problems In Ways Liberals And Conservatives Can Love, was published in 2003, and was a Los Angeles Times bestseller. He is at work on a new book, The Tyranny Of Dead Ideas, which will be published in January 2009.

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