The POLITICAL DYNAMICS of AMERICAN EDUCATION

FOURTH EDITION

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2009 CHAP 2

McCutchan Publishing Corporation
3220 Blume Drive #197
Richmond, California 94806

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Conflict, Politics, and Schools

Elementary and secondary education was a major national concern of voters as the twenty-first century opened. The political aspects of education have attained unprecedented visibility at all levels of government. Once there existed a "steady state" of education. Here, professionals controlled most aspects of schooling with only minor influence from citizens or elected politicians through school boards. In time, though, this professional, producer-oriented control faced a citizen, consumer-oriented conflict over what schools should do.

At the core of this book is an emphasis on politics and governance of the school system. Many education professionals believe politics should have no role in their work. For many citizens, though, their political action responds to dissatisfaction over their children's schooling.

THE THEMES OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

It is important that we start with an understanding of politics and governance before we discuss some of the challenges that now produce conflict in the schools. Two propositions about human behavior encompass these two terms. The first is that

politics is a form of social conflict rooted in group differences over values about using public resources to meet private needs. The second is that *governance is the process of publicly resolving that group conflict by means of creating and administering public policy.*

These broad concepts can be seen specifically in the issues presented in the profession's *Education Week.* In Table 2.1 we display the headlines for those stories that reflect concepts of politics and conflict. This listing tells us much about the currents of issues, parties, interest groups, and leadership that run through the political system of schools. From local to federal levels, from legislative to judicial arenas, from conflicting stands on current issues before the public–all these highlight the dominant political nature of educational politics. Moreover, the list also suggests the dynamic quality of politics that characterize a democratic nation. In addition, school politics is open to ideas that link leaders and the led, policymakers and citizens. Namely, all these attributes reflect a contest over public policy toward schooling.

To this competition there is added the weight of studies about the system's operations. In Table 2.2 we use information from *Education Week* to highlight a range of surveys or polls reaching across the nation. What Table 2.2 shows are several qualities of a diverse school system where we find

- variety in many problems among over fourteen thousand school districts,
- challenge to reforms of education, and
- success for some students and failure for others amid calls for change.

Moreover, these studies reflect broad-scope problems developed by states, districts, or professionals. It is amid this challenge and defense that the current tensions in educational policies take place.

Diversity and Conflict

As we saw in the first chapter, political activity occurs as a result of the inevitable clash between groups with different values about many aspects of life. American society is composed of a diversity of groups that can generate social conflict. Some of this

conflict is handled privately; if you don't like the new people in the neighborhood, or the prices of the local store, you can go elsewhere. In an historical example, American youth have left farms and small towns to seek in big cities new values and opportunities that were not found back home. Conflicts can also be resolved within existing social systems without recourse to violence. Thus, the church can help resolve class conflict among its members, the family can deal with generational differences, political parties can resolve ethnic conflict, and so on.

Table 2.1
Story Headlines of Political School Issues

Spellings to Listen But Not Retreat on NCLB
Runoff Election Thrusts D.C. Union Critic Into Top Job
New School Board in San Diego Eroding Bersin's Reform Plans
Georgia Lawsuit Seeks Vouchers as Remedy to School Aid Disparities
Bush's Plan May Face Skepticism From the Left and Right
Much at Stake for Schools in Local Elections
Scouts' Ban on Gays Is Prompting Schools to Reconsider Ties
Polls Dispute a "Backlash" to Standards
Districts Accused of Shortchanging Workers
High Court to Referee Football Dispute
Abstinence Education Growing in Popularity
Future of School Leadership Open to Debate
In State Campaigns, Schools Emerge as Topic A

From *Education Week*, February, 2005.

Table 2.2
Studies of School System Operations

Certification Found Valid for Teachers [in] NBPTS Tests
Report Tracks "Crisis" Conditions in Special Education
Vouchers and Class Size: Not in the Same League
As Studies Stress Link to Scores, Districts Get Tough on Attendance
Extra Benefits Tied to [the] Extracurricular
NSBA Report Casts Critical Eye on Charter Movement
Panel Targets Hispanic Lag in Attainment
Children's Early Needs Seen as Going Unmet
Free High Schools from Traditional Borders, Panel Urges
Governance Report Calls for Overhaul [of board power]
Ten States Seen as Topping Rural Education Priority List
USDA Standard for Beef Has Schools Scrambling

From *Education Week*, September–November, 2000.

It is the political system that governs such conflict. How? It does so in the classic statement of David Easton, by "authoritatively allocating the distribution of values and resources,"[1] as its central characteristic. Note that this definition does not distinguish between democratic or authoritarian systems of government, or between presidential or parliamentary systems of democracy. Rather, the political system is a generic concept that applies to a variety of governing formats.

Conflict and Governing

We can get a sharper focus on both politics and governing if we examine how social conflict is resolved. The conflict potential inherent in value differences arises when a diverse population impinges on the political system. Leaders representing diverse groups seek new values and resources drawn from the political system. In that system, resolution of conflict takes the form of considering programs designed to deal with conflict. In considering such policy alternatives, controversy arises over such matters as the identification of the problem, the possibilities for implementing programs, and the analysis of their likely outcomes.

Once decisions are made to create public policy, then they must be carried out through organization, staffing, and financing through a process of "implementation." In time, implementation can lead to yet another policy stage–evaluating policy outcomes. In turn, the results of these evaluations may precipitate even more demands, more program alternatives, and so on. Governing was once defined sarcastically as doing nothing until someone complains, then adjusting to that complaint, then waiting for the complaint about that adjustment, and then adjusting to the complaint to the earlier adjustment.

All kinds of public policy, including education, are surrounded by these twin concepts of politics and governing. In this book we discuss how groups have differed over a long period of time on the issue of "schooling for what." For much of that history answers were provided by school professionals. These professionals were rooted in colleges, government agencies, and school administrations and teaching staff. They created a consistent pattern of

operations we term "steady state." In recent decades, however, this condition has faced some challenges. These challenges may turn out to be more "tinkering," which has historically been the norm.[2] Both themes, persistence and challenge, appear throughout this book. In this first decade of the new millennium, it is still unclear how many of these challenges have fundamentally changed the system.

Exploring Some Current Challenges

Later in this book there will be more details of persistence and challenge, but some current examples will highlight this conflict in the politics of school reform. Among the fourteen thousand school districts of the nation, it seems as if everyone is trying something new in the way of curriculum, organization, finances, and so on. However, the impression left to the observer is that of disorganized problems and hasty remedies. As Ernest Boyer, a veteran reformer, noted, "You could draw a 'Keystone Cops' image here of people charging off in different directions and bumping into one another. There's no overall sense of where the problem is and how we should work together to get there."[3] After completing a series of national opinion polls, the Public Agenda Foundation concluded, rightly or wrongly, that the public feels that the schools are no longer theirs, that they have been captured by teachers, by reformers, by unions–in short, by someone else. They see leaders and experts as being unresponsive to their concerns. As long as these concerns go unaddressed, public resistance will continue to stiffen, possibly leading them to abandon public education.[4] At the very least, the past forty years of continuous reforms signals a long-term loss of confidence by some in their local school officials.

A DIVERSE POPULATION

One of the underlying challenges facing education today results from the impact of a diverse population. One measure of the diversity is the ethnic differences of our population.

New Migrants to America

The United States is a nation of immigrants. A chronicler of educational change once noted that 20 percent of U.S. senators in his time were grandchildren of immigrants, a claim that can be made by "no other nation . . . about its leading legislative body."[5] As the poet Walt Whitman wrote well over a century ago, the United States is truly a "nation of nations."

By the end of the twentieth century American society had transformed from one in which descendants of white Europeans were an overwhelming majority into another in which many more citizens are members of "minority" groups. This change in demographics is largely rooted in the history of U.S. immigration. In a first wave of immigration in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Europeans accounted for 85 percent of all immigrants. Since World War II, however, European immigration has been eclipsed by a "second wave" of immigration from Latin America and Asia, so that today European immigrants constitute only 10 percent of the total.

One political question raised by descendents of the early wave is the degree to which new immigrants can be absorbed into American society. Some indicators of that question are optimistic. For example, rates of home ownership among immigrants are equal to those of the general population, about 59 percent. Many Asians and Hispanics are moving to suburban area, another indicator of their entry into the middle class.

Because reproduction rates among white Americans are lower than those of other ethnic groups, the Census Bureau estimates that

- by 2010, blacks and Hispanics will be equal in numbers to whites.
- by 2025, half of American youth will be white and half "minority."
- by 2050, no one group will be a majority among adults, producing in the nation "a minority majority."

In the dilution of the traditional white majority, the potential for conflict also increases among an increasingly diverse people.

This could be a national crisis. Moreover, federal agencies estimate that for every legal immigrant to that state there was one who was illegal. These immigrants are also seen as a threat by many citizens of the earlier waves who as taxpayers provide schooling and welfare for illegal immigrants. As a measure of this apprehension, in 2007 two-thirds of Arizona's voters supported a referendum limiting public resources for illegal immigrants. Support for the measure was not restricted to whites–almost 60 percent of black and Hispanic Americans also supported the limitation.

There is an enormous impact on schools in this latest wave of immigration. Languages other than English (mostly Spanish) are the dominant languages spoken in 31.5 percent of homes in California, and in 14 percent of homes in Illinois. Moreover, today's immigrants speak a broader variety of languages, thereby posing problems for school authorities. The proportion of "minority" teachers to students will decrease in states such as California, where the immigrant school population increased to 38 percent. Moreover, school graduates from the second wave of immigrant groups are applying for colleges, thereby placing pressure on the resources of higher education. There are already complaints that Asian-American students are "overrepresented" at the most prestigious campuses within the University of California system.

The school problems suggested here will affect all levels of educational governance, for questions will necessarily arise in the school district. Where can teachers be found for non-English-speaking students? Who should represent immigrants on local boards? Where will the local resources for expanding schools be found? There are other questions arising at the state level. Where will funds come from to supplement local resources, especially when white voters dislike paying for education of the children of immigrants? At the national level, how can the limited federal funds for education keep pace with the large number of immigrants? What changes in curriculum and instructional methods are appropriate? All these questions set off conflict and political decisions.

School Libraries and Censorship

Other sources beside ethnic diversity can generate school politics. For example, there has always been a surprisingly wide variety of groups that did not like some particular book in the school library. Any hint of profanity or irreligious attitudes was anathema to some, as witnessed by the decades-long criticism of Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye.* Business groups disliked books that were critical of free enterprise. Some in the South objected to being criticized for slavery in earlier times and for segregation in the modern era. Jews objected to anti-Semitic references in literature, as personified by the character of Fagin in Dickens' *Oliver Twist.* Blacks criticized racist terms, like "Nigger Jim" in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn.*[6]

Library protests of this type have grown in recent years. More groups have become critical of books that, in their view, derogated women, Indians, Hispanics, and so on. The American Library Association has documented a growing number of cases of censorship in the nation's schools.[7] Those who argue for banning school books always claim that their purpose is to protect the young. The supporters of free speech, however, believe that such measures reflect a lack of confidence in youth and thus charge that this is indeed censorship, pure and simple. Many of these attempts to ban books are instigated by conservative groups, often from the "religious right," who see some books as a challenge to the established order. Tennyson's theme of "the old order changeth" underlies this fear.

Both sides of this debate believe that families should have the right to decide what is best for their children. However, librarians want parents to exercise this right at home, while liberals and conservatives want the school board itself to intervene on the ground that no parent can read everything before determining what is acceptable for his or her child. Local actions find evangelical Christian clergy and families objecting to one or more books that they perceive as advocating such practices as homosexuality or Satanism (e.g., stories about witches or devils). Occasionally these efforts are made at the state level. In 1994 an Idaho referendum to ban materials that were represented as promoting homosexuality was narrowly defeated.

Church efforts against teaching evolutionary concepts of the earth's origins found support in a Kansas state board that left it up to the local district to eliminate evolution in texts. However, that effort was overturned when voters removed Kansas State board members who had supported that view. Critics of censorship claim that this effort of certain religious groups is only the beginning of a movement to assert citizen control over *other* kinds of books. Some school systems are bending to these new pressures by dropping "objectionable" materials from libraries. Teachers or librarians may come to doubt whether the inclusion of such books in their classes or reading hours is worth the parental resistance. That doubt leads to success by the challengers.

Sex Education and "Abstinence Only"

Diversity of thought is also reflected in controversies over curricula. A curriculum is based on an underlying philosophy of certain values and assumptions against which others may contend. Due to this, citizen groups, often religious in orientation, have challenged the content of specific curricular material or courses. For decades, challenges have been argued in the U.S. Supreme Court by those opposed to banning school prayers or Bible reading in public schools. The Court has held steady on this challenge. However, such protests have in the last decade become more overtly political, as local groups won seats on school boards and insisted that their values should or must be incorporated in the curriculum.

One example is sex education. Many of these challenges argue that in such courses sexual abstinence is the only acceptable method of birth control. A report found over two hundred cases of this issue.[8] More significantly, over twenty thousand schools subscribe to a three-volume guide advocating only abstinence. These critics argue that existing courses ignore abstinence and instead emphasize the use of condoms, thus implying that premarital sexual intercourse is acceptable. Supporters of the existing curriculum argue that promoting sexual abstinence is not enough. They point to statistics that most American youth are sexually active years before marriage. Supporters of existing sex

education also refer to increasing rates of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS. Against such a real danger among sexually active youth, supporters believe that education in the use of condoms is appropriate. By 2007, research showed little difference in sexual behavior by those exposed to abstinence courses compared to students without it.

The tactics of both sides are extremely political in their efforts to match private values to public decisions. The strategy of each side precludes accepting anything on the other side totally–a-winner-take-all policy. As a result, both sides seek to influence the media by meeting with editors, by writing articles, or by seeking coalitions with churches, health organizations, and local businesses. Candidates from both sides run for school boards, hoping to influence local decisions. Losers at the local level can also take their cases to the courts, or they can challenge state laws. A recent Louisiana court case overturned the prohibition of curricula that were deemed medically inaccurate or religiously based. In this case, supporters of an "abstinence only" curriculum had won.

Although censorship and sex education are relatively low-visibility issues, they reflect the conflict of values among groups who see schools as a forum for promoting a certain way of thinking. Such conflict has consequences for governance, primarily at the local level. Some school professionals see these parental pressures as a challenge to their own definition of what constitutes good education. From these clashes, the politics of value differences follows.

VALUE DIFFERENCES

As noted, core questions over value differences are relevant to educational policies. Two questions of critical and enduring interest always underlie such value conflict. What should be taught? Who should do it?

Enduring School Questions

What should children be taught? For much of our early history, the answer to this question was family and church. They provided the teachers who shared many of the same values. Instruction in both moral and practical lessons guided such teaching. The slow emergence of professional education late in the nineteenth century added new points of view, but teachers still focused primarily on moral and practical subjects. By the twentieth century, new ideas emerged about what should be taught. Later, state law and regulations were promulgated to achieve curricular change. These changes originated from the judgments of professionals (e.g., the Carnegie requirements) and later from the judgments of interest groups (e.g., the celebration of the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., Lief Ericson Day, or Cinco de Mayo). Today, the centers of decision-making power on such issues are still relatively remote from most parents.

Challenges to established values in curricula have generated yet another conflict over schools. When an effort was made in the 1990s to create national standards for history, public complaints followed. Whether conservative (criticizing absence of traditional subjects or emphases) or ethnic (reaction against not enough emphasis on "diversity" in history), few wanted it, so it was dropped.

Another continuing question of education lies in who should teach. For much of our earlier history, teachers were those–often women–with an interest in teaching and a certain level of education who were hired by family and church. In general, these teachers shared the values of those who hired them. Yet with the rise of "free public education" after 1840, formal instruction of teachers became the norm. Teachers were trained in "normal" schools, and over time, more education and training were required to teach. In the last of the twentieth century, teachers began to experience the pressures of two sets of values, one from the community and another from the profession, and often they were conflicting. Recently, national organizations like Teach for America contend that year-long teacher training is not needed for effective teaching.

The Politics of Curriculum Content Standards

As the curriculum standards debate demonstrates, curriculum policymaking is essentially a political as well as a technical process.[9] What decision rules will state and local standards bodies use to choose among competing standards alternatives? As noted, politics is the authoritative allocation of competing values. Proposals to increase curricular scope have reached their logical (and absurd) conclusion when elementary teachers are expected to teach reading, writing, several varieties of arithmetic, geography, spelling, science, economics, music, art, foreign languages, and history.

Some political dilemmas confronting curricular standards policymakers are presented below. The list is written from the vantage point of the decisions that will be faced by a state or local standards group when they consider standards for each subject in grades K-12.

1. Who must be involved in the process to feel it is inclusive? Students? Business? If you exclude groups, this will lead to charges of bias. If you include every group that is suggested, this will lead to a cumbersome and slow process.
2. If you chose standards that achieve a broad consensus in the field, then the "leading edge thinkers" will object. You will be accused of certifying "what is" rather than "what ought."
3. If you chose a standard that achieves consensus in a field you will *not* be able to satisfy demands for "less is more" because consensus expands topics rather than cutting them.
4. If you chose a standard that reflects current content consensus, this will lead to criticism that you have not sufficiently stressed interdisciplinary content. There is limited interdisciplinary content in any of teacher-led subject matter organizations for math, science, reading, and so on.
5. If you approve standards that are too general, or do not contain pedagogy, you will be criticized that there is insufficient instructional guidance for teachers, and the content gaps will be filled by tests or assessment. If you do approve pedagogy or detailed standards, you will be criticized because standards are too long and complex and overly control local practice.

6. If you do not hear appeals from the public for specific content changes (e.g., inclusion of creation science), then you will be criticized for not having public participation *at the highest level*, and for leaving crucial decisions to a technical panel of nonelected officials.
7. If you approve similar structure or dimensions for all subjects, you will be criticized for ignoring the big (structural) differences between such fields as math, science, and social studies.
8. If you hear appeals from subject matter subspecialties (too much physics, not enough biology), you will end up arbitrating balance among technical fields within a subject matter area. If you do not hear these issues, you will be accused of approving unbalanced standards within a subject area.

In short, subject matter content standards require complex political trade-offs, and there is no way to avoid a sense of winners and losers. Difficult choices must be made concerning content standards and the procedures by which these standards are set. Merely following the "right" procedural steps will not be sufficient.

For instance, one constraint is school time, because not everything that all content advocates want can be taught in 180 days from 8:00 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. The history of curriculum politics has been one of jockeying for priority in an overcrowded school schedule. Some curricular priorities are politically organized into the curriculum while others are neglected. Historically, organized interests like AP and vocational education have been more effective politically than have advocates for music education. Curricular priorities compete for scarce school time, and proposed national content standards will be no exception.

The Issue of Multiculturalism

The response to the challenge of multiculturalism has taken several forms. Schools had traditionally smoothed over ethnic or religious differences in order to produce "Americans" who constitute a nation. Public schools are among the most common shared experience for most Americans, and the public school system has been crucial to the Americanization process. It was also argued

that the role of minorities in creating and building a new and developing nation was adequately treated in the current curriculum. By the late 1980s a state like Mississippi, with its earlier repressive treatment of blacks, had already required textbooks that reflect the contribution of blacks and other ethnic groups. In another example, a world history text, widely used elsewhere, had separate chapters on Islamic, African, Latin American, and Asian histories. A high school civics text had a chapter explaining equality under law, the earlier inferior conditions of blacks and women, and their movements that changed the law. Similar references to these groups appeared in other chapters.[10] Criticism of the multiculturalists, on the other hand, insisted that the commonality of the heritage taught through the schools is what holds Americans together, not the innumerable divisions of the society. Emphasis on difference, it was argued, will drive groups apart, while a stress on commonality must underlie the concept of a nation.

THE AGENCIES OF GOVERNANCE

Yet at the heart of conflict lie persons having legitimate authority who must make policy decisions at different levels. How do these agencies affect this conflict? Two recent incidents–school prayer and institutional change in Congress–highlight how conflict resolution by such public agencies is a primary function of governance in education.

School Prayer

The U.S. Supreme Court, in a series of decisions spanning several decades, has decided against the official requirement of school prayers in public schools.[11] The national context is important here. Much of the nation is rooted in a traditional religious culture, particularly in small-town and rural areas, where these judicial actions had sharply violated a basic proposition of community life. Public opinion polls showed that a majority of respondents believed that the schools should emphasize religious values, especially the right to pray. The Court has recently written that schools cannot forbid the use of school property for meetings of religious groups, if secular groups have similar access.

While the Court's stance has softened somewhat, its decisions to prevent prayer and Bible reading have generated political pressure from citizens' groups for passage of a constitutional amendment permitting such practices. However, despite the growing strength of conservatives in Washington since 1981, noted later, there have not been enough congressional votes to support the necessary two-thirds majority for passage of such an amendment. The best hope for religious conservatives was a change in the Court's membership, which could bring about a change in constitutional standards. However, some districts are still trying new arrangements for prayers that could bypass the Court, for example, when the Court overturned prayers before football games if part of official school policy. Clearly, some of those in small-town and rural America ignored the First Amendment requirements from the Court. Support for the Court's views is rooted in civil liberties groups and major religious organizations–mainline Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Jews.

The politics over prayer arises from differences in values. Conservative religious groups argued that education and prayer were linked through historical and traditional school practices. Defenders of religion in schools argued that religious values were being ignored in textbooks and in curriculum. Their frustration with the rejection of a traditional set of values led first to the movement to change state laws, and later to demands for constitutional change. Were a constitutional amendment to pass, it would be a useful illustration that political questions involving schools are rarely settled definitively. There are always other political arguments and other arenas in which these political fights can be carried out.

Elections

Elections represent a crucial means of influencing policy about school. They are the key to creating legitimacy in the agencies of democracy, and electoral victors assume the authority to implement a political agenda. Elections thus provide one of the most important means of translating public opinion into public policy. When there is considerable conflict over policy, elections

can act to maintain or to challenge established practices. Schools directly experience effects of electoral politics in the form of school board elections and referenda. Superintendents and board members, who on an election night see a referendum that they supported has lost, know the authority of voters. Politics aside, however, such change has direct policy consequences. In 2001 George Bush, and majorities in both houses, passed new laws on federal policy toward schools. The No Child Left Behind law was 1,100 pages long, and as we will note later, expanded the federal role dramatically.[12]

SCHOOL POLICIES

Policies produced by schools are similar in two respects to those of any governance agency. They involve allocation of values and resources, and they all reflect a common process of policymaking. Almost all of the services provided in schools are regulated by a complex set of policies generated by constitutions, legislation, court decisions, bureaucracies, and elections. This book will later deal with many of these policies in a systematic way, but it would be useful at this point to indicate a few new currents within the realm of public policy that involve schools. This will serve to highlight various elements of politics and governance in the policymaking process that involves stages of initiation, implementation, and evaluation.

Criticisms and Reform "Waves"

Among the many national policy initiations within American education have been large-scale programs created in the 1980s to improve the quality (or "excellence") of schools. In the 1990s, however, these reforms centered around issues of providing "choice" through vouchers or accountability for parents. Such reform was directed against the steady state of education in all states with its pattern of routine activities by school professionals.

This steady state was controlled by a hierarchy of power within each school system. Superintendents, sometimes termed "benevolent autocrats," and their agents in management–the

principals–occupied the top of this hierarchy. Until about 1960 teachers, lacking any collective bargaining power, had very little authority in the schools. In big-city schools a central-office bureaucracy dominated decisions, including resource allocation. A seemingly democratic channel of popular views–the school board–was limited by its tendency to accept the definitions of problems and solutions offered by professionals. Parents had little interest in these matters, except to support the school's authority and discipline and to vote for school taxes. When they turned up at school, usually as members of an acquiescent PTA, parents focused only on side issues, like a cookie sale to provide a projector for the third grade. And as for another constituency–the students–their closest contact in this organization came only from teachers, and that interaction was similarly controlled.

Beginning in the 1960s, however, public dissatisfaction over declining student achievement grew, reflected in opinion polls critical of schools.[13] Federal laws in the 1950s sought to improve science quality and teaching, and in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to improve the education of poor children. In the early 1980s most states sought laws involving a host of mandates to provide services for all school districts.

Yet these laws did not satisfy opinion, so even more change was debated about providing "choice" for parents by moving children within or between districts. Decentralizing authority to the school site was much discussed, but again, relatively few districts took such measures, despite the publicity given to the issue. Still, decentralization did appear in Dade County, Florida, and in Los Angeles. In 1989 in Chicago, over four hundred decentralized sites were created with local councils of parents, teachers, and the principal. There was little indication by 2009 that these changes had any major impact on student achievement.

Other large reforms were publicized, but little action had been taken as of 2008. Voucher plans, using public funds to enable students to attend schools of their choice, had been much discussed for several decades. Yet, little reform of this kind appeared; indeed, voucher referenda failed in California, Michigan, and Colorado in state referenda in 2000, and in Utah in 2007. However the Republican party's success brought new GOP

governors who were committed to vouchers, reviving hopes for this reform. When elected president in 2000, George W. Bush claimed support for vouchers, and even created a Department of Education subunit to further them. As seen later, the number of voucher and charter schools increased but still represent a small minority of school sites or students. Choice policy was weakened due to opposition from Democrats and teachers. Another reform that found some supporters was "privatization" of public schools, which contracted school operations to private firms. A large-scale effort in Baltimore was later withdrawn. However, critics of these reforms, primarily teachers' groups, were numerous, although some elements of privatization, for example, contracting for outside technical services, appeared to have benefits.

Private foundations also funded the search for small-scale reform successes that might be translated into large-scale public reform. Those foundations that entered the field to improve schools included Ford, Carnegie, Pew, Annenberg, Gates, Walton, Broad, and Mott. However, success in a few local cases ran into major problems when transformed into wider use, namely, the scaling-up problem. Much of this is the result of "partial implementation" in which political considerations, rather than professional criteria, operate.[14]

These challenges to the steady state of public schools were paralleled by assertions that schools had failed to teach students to meet even basic standards. A larger perspective would show, however, that such criticisms reach way back in history. In earlier periods there were complaints that students did not learn much, teachers were incompetent, and schooling cost too much. But by the early 1990s some analysis was questioning this charge of school failure as a "myth," claiming that the reforms were directed against a system that had not been broken, as critics claimed. For example, there were national reports of schools with fewer dropouts, higher test scores for both whites and minorities, and greater rates of college attendance by minorities. In 2007 the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reported math gains, not losses, on standardized test scores over the decades between 1980 and 2008. Those gains occurred despite such offsetting increases in percentages of teenage mothers, children in

poverty, working mothers, or single-parent families.[15]

Reforms, often labeled as "waves" in recent decades, were more likely an artillery attack coming from many guns. But did they hit the target? Many reform ideas were never adopted, or if so, never implemented on a wide scale. Yet school policy, which had once been the province of the professional, had now entered a different political arena. More groups were involved, more effort was made across a wider front of governments, and more new practices were undertaken. However, it is still unclear whether any of these efforts have been successful in the first and primary goal–improving student achievement compared to those in public schools. Moreover, if recent analysis suggests that schools have not been doing as badly as the reformers had insisted, there may not be a need for a complete overhaul of the system.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL POLICY

Programs approved within the political system are never self-executing and so must be implemented. To meet program objectives, an organization must be created, staff employed, managers appointed, funds provided and disbursed, services dispensed, and results evaluated. There is much controversy surrounding each of these topics. A few of these problems, related to politics and governance, are highlighted below.

Examples of the Politics of Implementation

Federal and state mandates have been increasingly used to compel local compliance. This approach has generated a local challenge because state governments have failed to provide funds to carry out state mandates. All schools, localities, or municipalities are constitutionally dependent on the state for their own authority, but that dependency has been politically challenged by the local revolt. Not only do localities want to escape federal mandates, but they also resist mandates from the state capitol.

The result has been increasing political pressures on the superintendency, as a later chapter shows, thereby leading to greater

turnover in office. The average term in several big cities is down from six years a few years ago to three years. Working in a world where laypersons are empowered has altered the superintendent's old role of "benevolent autocrat" to one of "politician." To undergo a role change in life generates much stress, leading to more change in administrative activity in which sharing, not dominating, prevails. More superintendents spend more of their time involved in public relations designed to generate public support for school programs, as well as preserving their own tenure. By 2008 a shortage of principals emerged in the United States.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Implementation is not the end of the dynamic process of politics and governance. At some point there is evaluation, that is, the effort to deal with the pragmatic question, Did it work? This effort is often linked to "hard" quantitative measures of changing effects. But it is clear that evaluation has a "softer" and highly political quality. Group conflict arises over such matters in evaluation as the nature of research questions, the data needed to test them, the measurement methods employed, and their interpretation. For example, students may have much higher scores on state tests than on the National Assessment of Education Progress. Evaluators, scholars, and public officials regularly differ over such questions. We can briefly view such matters in the cases of school desegregation and of teaching science.

The "Effects" of Desegregation

For example, how would we measure the "effects" of desegregation? Many may ask whether the central evaluation question is: Do desegregated schools improve education for blacks? However, that evaluation is confounded by the realization that the Supreme Court in the basic case of Topeka and related cities in the 1950s did not judge that question to be the constitutional measure of desegregation. Rather, the judges unanimously agreed that the mere fact of segregation of resources was itself

the central question, and that such segregation violated constitutional values. If segregation is the constitutional question, and not whether blacks learn more under desegregated conditions, other evidence must be used than just test scores.

What if the central research question were this: With resources now integrated, are more black students now obtaining more years of schooling than before? The question does not address the results of learning, but focuses rather on whether there has been an increase in school years for a specific minority group. By comparing only contemporary data—a method often used in testing desegregation effects—the researcher fails to ignore other improvements found in more schooling and the larger allocation of school resources for blacks. Clearly, the data that are sought can influence which questions are asked.

Knowing Science and Teaching Science

In policy evaluation there are always major questions that must be addressed, but at the core of evaluation is the highly pragmatic American question: Did it work? In this case, were high-quality materials for curriculum developed? The answer is a definite yes. Scientists from the best universities and from different fields created solid instructional materials. However, if the question is, Did more teachers use these materials? the results are disappointing. The most widely used curriculum (Introductory Physical Science) was adopted by no more than 25 percent of secondary schools (for at least one class), and other types of curricula had only a 15 percent adoption rate. One judgment made by the evaluators was that "other than content, length, and difficulty of class, little had changed."[16]

What are the causes of these failures in implementation? First, these curriculum projects were developed by scientists who rarely consulted with teachers. The curriculum developers, then, had little understanding of how teachers might adapt the content of these curricula to suit their own pedagogical styles. Second, few teachers had been trained in the "new" science. Not surprisingly, many found the new material too difficult to understand themselves, let alone to teach to their students.

Finally, the scientists who developed these curricula had little understanding of limitations within the school structure or their ability to adapt to the implementation of new curricula. These new science reforms required longer classes and more teacher preparation time. Moreover, many of the changes required by the new curricula were too complex to be handled within traditional teaching formats or in outmoded labs. Because of this, physical changes in the classroom and the school were needed, and these often entailed the construction of new laboratories. So teachers were often stuck with old textbooks and older facilities, and whatever new courses were offered focused on college-bound students. In 2007, Congress passed another bill to improve science teaching utilizing some of the failed strategies of the past.

A POLITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL TURBULENCE

Given the turbulence and complexity described in this chapter, it would seem hard to find patterns in what Henry James called the "buzzing, booming confusion of reality." These currents operate in over fourteen thousand school districts, erecting a truly indecipherable mosaic without some guide for explaining what transpires. What political framework of thought enables us to understand the nature of school turbulence? In short, is there a "theory" to describe and explain all this?

METHODS OF ANALYZING STEADY AND CHALLENGE QUALITIES

Theory involves suppositions and supporting evidence about the causes, consequences, and interrelationships of objects in reality. Causal theory of this kind is frequently found in the psychology of education and in the sociology of education, but seldom in educational administration before the 1970s. The most significant reason for the meager analysis of educational politics is probably the lack of theory and methodology. As political scientists pointed out thirty years ago, no single theory, simple or complex, guided it nor was there agreement on the methodology. Despite the flood of "politics of education" work done since the 1970s, no overarching general theory generated any hypotheses that could be tested by acceptable methods in the crucible of political experiences. The politics of education is certainly not orderly for those who prefer scholarship that explicates established truths, but it is exciting for those who prefer to innovate in the development of theory and hypothesis.[17]

Because scholarship, like life, is always some compromise with ideal requirements, we turn instead to one form of theory–heuristic. *Heuristic theory is not so much a predictive scheme as a method of analytically separating and categorizing items in experience.* It is a heuristic scheme or "framework for political analysis" that we employ in organizing the concepts and data of this book. This framework is termed *systems analysis*, from the ideas of David Easton who emphasizes a "conceptual framework" or "categories for the systems analysis of politics."[18] The utility of systems theory is that, like all other heuristic schemes, it enables us at least to order our information or hunches about reality. The use of systems analysis has limits, noted later, but explaining the current state of knowledge in the politics of education is our major purpose. For this, systems analysis provides an organizing principle to deal with the current turbulence in school politics.

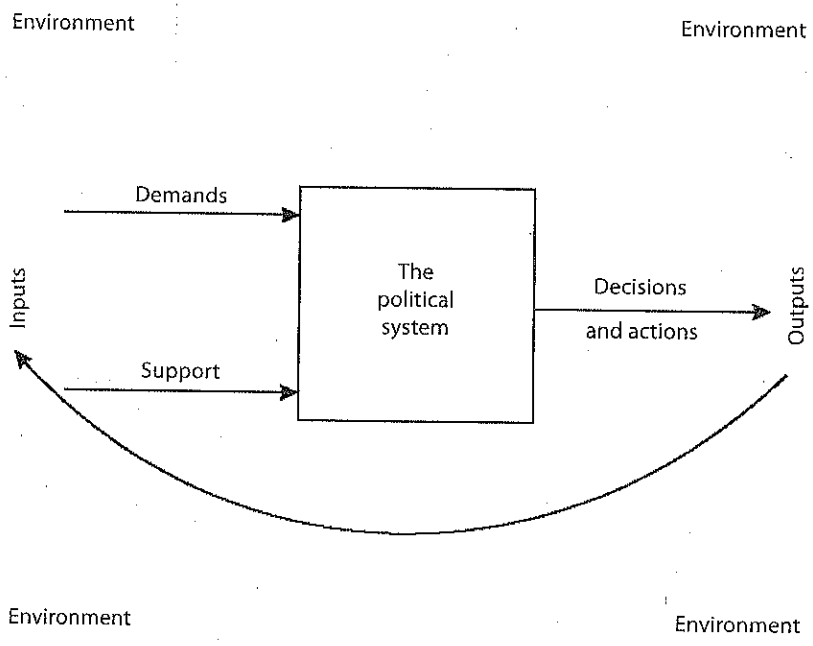
THE SYSTEMS ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Easton's framework construes a society composed of major institutions or "subsystems"–the economy, the school, the church, and so on. Individuals interact with one another and these institutions in regular ways that constitute a distinctive culture. One of these institutions is the *political system.* It differs from the others because it alone is the source, in Easton's classic statements, of "authoritative allocation of values, [i.e.,] those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for society." This is the subsystem whose decisions are generally accepted as authoritative, that is, *legitimate.* The values this system allocates may be *material*–a textbook, defense contract,

free land for constructing railroads, or dropout schools. Values allocated may also be *symbolic*, conferring status and deference on favored groups–for example, making Christmas or Martin Luther King's birthday a school holiday. Such an allocative system exists in every society, although its exact forms, inherent values, and public politics differ with place and time.

The link between the political system and other subsystems is a key element. This interrelationship is one in which *stress* in other subsystems generates *inputs* of *demands* on and *supports* of the *political system.* Actors in the political system then reduce or *convert* these inputs into public decisions or *outputs.* These in turn *feed back* allocated values and resources into the society where the process began. Figure 2.1 is a sketch of this set of

Figure 2.1
A Simplified Model of a Political System



Source: Reprinted from *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* by David Easton by permission of the University of Chicago Press. © 1965 by the University of Chicago Press.

interactions. These concepts seek to describe components of a dynamic, interactive, political system that may *persist* in the society.

The Model Illustrated for Schools

What does all this have to do with schools? The rest of this book will answer this question, but we can briefly illustrate our theme now. Schools allocate *resources*–revenues, programs, professionals–and they also allocate *values*–teaching Americanism. The interaction between schools and other subsystems can take two forms. The most obvious are *demands* whose characteristics increase today's political turbulence. For example, a group wants a special curriculum, more parental authority, or more teacher power, and these wants are directed as demands toward school authorities. A second form of interaction with the schools is *support*; that is, certain groups provide the school with taxes or with intangibles, such as a favorable attitude toward education.

The political system of the school that receives such demands must deal with them carefully because it lacks resources to meet them all. In short, a gap exists between what all groups want and the resources to meet those demands. In all times and places this gap is a powerful generator of social and political conflict. *So school systems must act politically because they must choose which demands to favor and which to reject.* The result of this decision is an *output*, for example, a state or federal law, a school board resolution, or a superintendent's program. Whatever form an output takes, all are alike in that they authoritatively allocate values and resources.

After this policy decision, as the arrow at the bottom of Figure 2.1 implies, the output must be implemented in order to cope with the inputs that originally gave rise to it. For example, a demand for driver education generates a district program, which is implemented by the resources of personnel and material that organize the program. In short, schools can be viewed as miniature political systems because they share certain qualities with large-scale political systems.[19] And, as discussed later, the school professional must operate within this system in a way that shares much with the classical position of the politician. That is, he or she mediates among competing demands from school constitu-

encies that have been organized to seek their share of valued resources from the school system. All that occurs because allocations are always limited so that not all get what they demand.

The Concepts Defined

A fuller statement of elements of systems analysis is appropriate here, beginning with the inputs, whether *demands* or *supports*. *Demands* are pressures on the government for justice or help, for reward or recognition. Behind these demands lies the human condition of longing for something that is in short supply. Resources are never plentiful enough to satisfy all claims–a condition of tremendous importance to all aspects of our society, particularly for the political system. *Supports* on the other hand, are a willingness of citizens to accept the decisions of the system or the system itself. A steady flow of supports is necessary if any political system is to sustain its *legitimacy* (i. e., the psychological sense that the system has the right to do what it is doing). So vital is this input that all societies indoctrinate their young to support their particular system, a task that is part of the school's work but is also shared with family and peers. One point about today's school turbulence is that some parents withdraw support from the public school system in seeking many types of reform.

The whole process of demands and supports can be illustrated in the issue of Southern school desegregation. Demands for desegregation arose from a racially based stress, long endured–but later unendurable–by blacks. Moving from private rancor across the political boundary to create a public challenge, blacks mobilized their resources, first in demands upon courts and later upon Congress but continually upon local school boards. The segregationists' counterdemands mobilized other resources to block and delay this challenge. The move to "deseg" private academies also withdrew support from the public school system.

The political system *converts* such inputs: sometimes combining or reducing them, sometimes absorbing them without any reaction. However, at other times demands convert them into public policies or outputs. Clearly not all demands are converted into policy, for the political system is more responsive

to certain values, those that are dominant in the larger society. What inputs get through depends upon which values the conversion process reinforces and which it frustrates. They are also influenced by the values of the political authorities operating within this flow of inputs. For example, some educators insist that maintaining discipline is a prime value of classwork, while others prefer to achieve intellectual excitement that often looks undisciplined.

The authorities responsible for running the political system constantly interact in the conversion process with those either outside or inside the political system. Their interactions often stem in part from role definitions imposed by the political system itself. Such interactions generate certain pressures inside the political system–or *withinputs*–which in turn shape the conversion process and products. The result is the actors' commitment to a standard way of acting and believing that constitute a systematic way of life. That is a force contributing to its stability. It is also a force that generates challenge by those not benefiting from the outputs, as this book shows.

The outputs of the political subsystem once achieved require policy implementation that enhances the safety, income, and status of some while it also detracts from those of others. A resulting profile of public policy will mirror the structure of power and privilege and tells us much about what values currently dominate the political system. Moreover, the authorized purpose of the output will find meaning in reality only through the process of *feedback*. This is the interaction of an output with its environment, which becomes in time an established behavior–an *outcome*. Clearly, the gap between output and outcome becomes a major stimulus to future policymaking. That is, the action of the political system may not result in desired outcomes.

Among the most cherished concepts of schooling is that it will later increase students' chances for a better life. Generation after generation, whatever the ethnic group, this was a dream that schooling brought for most young Americans. Certainly that has been the case, and one grand example is the veterans of World War II using educational grants to improve their later income. The rise from poverty through schooling to higher income is well chronicled in every generation.

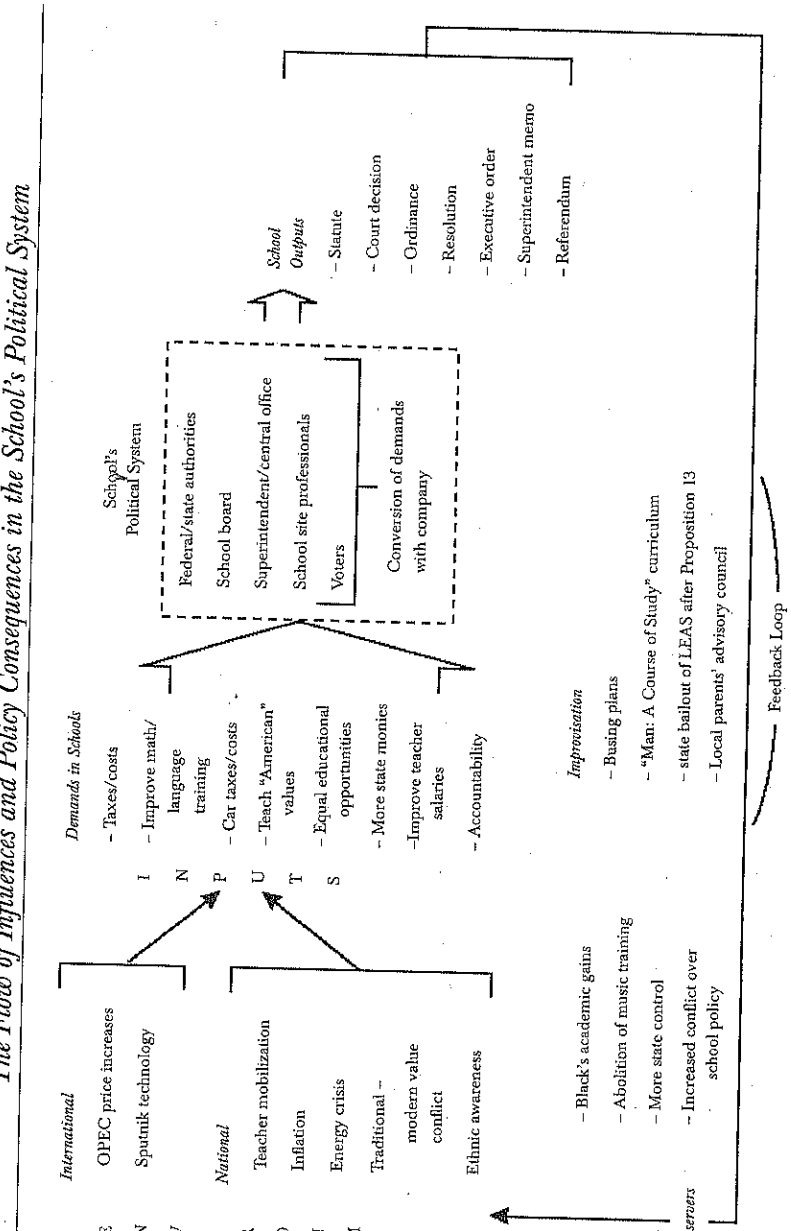
Yet recent studies in the last ten to fifteen years by the Brookings Institute have raised a question about the "rags to riches" theme of more schooling. Comparing poor children of the United States with children of other nations, the U.S. children rise less economically than those in most other countries; the U.S. is about middling on that measure. For example, among the poorest American children (45 percent of the sample), only 9 percent ended up among the most wealthy later in life. Compare that with the richest children (6 percent of the sample) who ended up constituting 55 percent of the richest adults.[20] That finding is striking when compared with the recent finding of an American income gap that has widened among adults since the 1980s.

Because outputs can influence society, they generate a subsequent set of inputs to the political system through a *feedback loop.* That is, dealing with challenge causes a response in the system that is communicated to the political authorities, and so a new round of challenge and response begins.

The contemporary political turbulence clearly reflects this model of system and challenge about schooling. These concepts are incorporated in Figure 2.2's educational example of Easton's system analysis. Stresses affect the schools from events as far away as Saudi Arabia or Japan, or as close as meetings of local ministers or teachers. These events emerge in the school's political system as group challenges, for example, to cut school costs or institute school prayers. Whatever their content, these challenges are seeking to reallocate school values or resources. Officials in the school political system can reject some of these demands or convert others into formal outputs, such as an act of Congress or a local referendum. The resulting educational policy is then implemented as an administrative decision. In time that process has outcomes for particular groups who generated the challenge in the first place.

Note that this framework presents the political system as something other than just an allocative process. The belief that schools are embedded in society and responsive to its demands is a truism, perhaps the oldest in the study of education. We believe systems analysis can help illuminate this relationship more clearly through such specific concepts as *wants, demands,* and

Figure 2.2
The Flow of Influences and Policy Consequences in the School's Political System



supports. Further, it seems to us that schools act out conversion processes like those in other subsystems that are more clearly recognized as political. That political authorities in schools do seek to maximize support through use of appropriate outputs also seems clear. Certainly a central question to be explored in this book is the degree to which the feedback loop operates between schools and society. Individual elected officials often favor symbolic actions, short-term fixes, and limited change when conflict heats up.

In this book we seek something more. We want to know how valid such a general concept is in explaining the structure and increased challenge to the school system. As the next chapter notes, old forms and ideas in education are everywhere challenged, and not only by new interest groups seeking a reallocation of resources. Widespread resistance to school tax referenda, as well as the waves of reform, suggest disappointment, frustration, or malaise about our schools. Stress, then, is not an abstract academic concern. Rather, it is a characteristic of contemporary education that affects school boards, classrooms, administrators' offices, and professionals' conventions, as well as the decision-making forums at state and national levels. And, as polls show, the public's disenchantment with schools creates a nationwide condition of challenge to support the entire system.

This framework of analysis thus offers a contour map to stimulate thinking and research. Nor do we stand mute on the value questions that lie at the heart of turbulent issues. To do this, however, we will use this framework of analysis to make sense out of new actors, issues, and resources that are swirling among the contemporary challenges.

NOTES

1. David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: Wiley, 1965). For a more recent theoretical overview see James March and Johan Olsen, *Democratic Governance* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

2. For major challenges see Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reform* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000); for the concept of "tinkering" see David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1995); and Tyack, *Seeking Common Ground* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

3. Ernest Boyer, quoted in *Education Week* (December 7, 1994): 13.

4. Deborah Wardsworth, Executive Director, Public Agenda Foundation, as quoted in *California and Their Schools* (Menlo Park, Calif.: Ed Source, 1996), p. 6. See also Joseph Murphy, "Governing America's Schools," *Teachers College Record* 102, no. 1 (2000): 57–84.

5. Observations below are from Harold Hodgkinson, "A True Nation of the World," *Education Week* (January 18, 1995): 32.

6. David Post, "Through Joshua Gap: Curricular Control and the Constructed Community," *Teachers College Record* 93, no. 4 (1992): 673–96.

7. *Education Week* (November 10, 1994): 10.

8. Kristin Laker, *When Sex Goes to School* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

9. Lorraine M. McDonnell, *Politics, Persuasion, and Educational Testing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

10. Frederick Wirt, *We Ain't What We Was: Civil Rights in the New South* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), chaps. 5–6.

11. David Kirp, *Education Policy and the Law* (Minneapolis: West Publishing, 2002).

12. Patrick J. McGuinn, No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy: 1965–2005 (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2006).

13. See the annual polls in the September issue of *Phi Delta Kappan.*

14. See Meredith Honig, *New Directions in Education Policy Implementation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

15. The Future of Children, *Opportunity in America* 16: 2 (Fall 2006).Princeton University Woodrow Wilson School.

16. Peter Dow, *Schoolhouse Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

17. See Lorraine M. McDonnell, "The Politics of Education: Influence and Beyond," in Susan Fuhrman, *David K Cohen, and Fritz Mosher* (eds.), *The State of Education Policy Research* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 19–40.

18. David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: Wiley, 1965), p. 40.

19. See Bruce Cooper et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Education Policy and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2008).

20. Isabel Sawhill (ed.), *Opportunity in America: The Role of Education* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2006), p. 27.