School Reform and Equal Opportunity in America's Geography of Inequality

By Stephen Macedo

Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public. By Terry M. Moe. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001. 474 pages. $29.95 cloth. $22.95 paper.

City Schools and City Politics: Institutions and Leadership in Pittsburgh, Boston, and St. Louis. By John Portz, Lana Stein, and Robin R. Jones. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999. 224 pages. $16.95 paper.

Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools. By Clarence N. Stone, Jeffrey R. Henig, Bryan D. Jones, and Carol Pierannunzi. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001. 216 pages. $35.00 cloth. $16.95 paper.

On Equal Terms: The Constitutional Politics of Educational Opportunity. By Douglas S. Reed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. 264 pages. $47.50 cloth. $17.95 paper.

How can the American educational system be improved for all? What can and should be done about substandard inner-city schooling that leaves large numbers of poor and overwhelmingly minority children incapable of effective civic participation and ineligible for good jobs? These perennial issues of politics and public policy implicate fundamental principles of justice. Educational choices involve, among other things, choices about a future in which children's life chances will take shape either under the sway of inherited privilege or on the basis of equal citizenship and opportunity. In the midst of America's vast and growing inequalities of income and wealth, which continue to be associated with race, how can we clothe ourselves in comforting myths of equal opportunity if we fail to provide good schools for everyone?[1]

The four books under review cast a harsh light on the reality of educational inequality in America and the entrenched but self-imposed obstacles that impede educational reform. These books deal with the politics of reform and the barriers to funding equity across districts. Those who want to know which school reforms really work will have to look elsewhere, but these books raise important questions: What are the fundamental causes of unequal educational opportunities, and what (if anything) can be done about them? Do publicly funded parental choice programs—or vouchers—represent a turning away from public educational responsibilities or, more hopefully, a new strategy for pursuing public educational aims, including good schooling for all? Why has urban educational reform proved to be so difficult for so long? If reformers can figure out what needs to be done, is it possible to actually make reform happen?

Alexis de Tocqueville famously described administrative decentralization as one of the glories of the American political system: a way of placing governmental decisions within the reach of ordinary people, "so that the maximum possible number of people have some concern with public affairs."[2] Americans remain firmly committed to local control of education, and there may well be some good Tocquevillian reasons to support this (though it is not at all clear that these are the reasons that matter to Americans).[3] Our peculiar brand of educational localism has become a potent engine of unequal educational opportunity. Local control, when combined with local funding and district-based assignment of pupils to schools, has created a geography marked by stark inequalities centered on class and race: a new form of separate and unequal. The causes of educational failure are many and contested, but there is no doubt that schools and other social and political institutions are put under enormous strain in areas of concentrated urban poverty and disadvantage, while well-off suburbs not far from the city core enjoy far more ample resources and student populations with vastly superior academic skills and motivation. The fragmentation of metropolitan political jurisdictions, combined with a highly decentralized system of school governance and funding, allows better-off Americans to sort

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themselves in stratified suburban enclaves removed from the problems and poverty of urban life. American localism provides the basis for a great sorting machine powered by "the push of concentrated poverty and the pull of concentrated resources," as Myron Orfield puts it.[4] The opportunity for separation is built into underlying political structures, but because the mechanism of separation is private residential choice, the roles of public policy and political choice are hidden. Collective responsibility is diffused. Americans thus profess overwhelming support for abstract ideals like integration and equal opportunity while pursuing personal advantages that depend upon residential segregation and that reinforce what Douglas S. Reed calls the "geography of inequality" (128).

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School Finance Reform

The hard realities of this new geography of separateness and inequality are at the core of Reed's wide-ranging and important book *On Equal Terms*. No doubt, as Reed argues, African American youngsters today are much better off than they were under Jim Crow, when the races were segregated by law. Substantial progress toward racial integration was made in the 1960s and 1970s. But those gains were partly reversed in recent decades as we gave up on integration and allowed the creation of racially and economically isolated inner-city schools.

The Deep South is far less segregated than it was in the early 1960s. The proportion of black children attending majority-white schools in the South was only 2.3 percent in 1964; it rose to 43.5 percent by 1988 but has since declined to 35 percent.[5] The Northeast and Midwest, formerly the least segregated parts of the country, are now by some measures the most segregated: "[I]n 1970 the typical black student in Connecticut attended a school that was 44 percent white," as Reed points out, but by 1996 that typical black student attended a school that was only 34 percent white. In New Jersey, that percentage dropped from 32.4 percent to 25.2 percent. Similar patterns occurred elsewhere in the Northeast.[6]

Heavy-handed, government-imposed (or de jure) segregation is a thing of the past, and the percentage of whites voicing support for integration increased in national surveys from around half at the time of *Brown v. Board of Education* to 93 percent in the early 1980s, where it holds steady (see Reed 2001). But if Americans really do want integration, there are apparently other things they want more, for the pursuit of racial integration in education has been abandoned. Millions of urban, disproportionately minority children receive a grossly inadequate education, and the principal culprits are metropolitan fragmentation, housing segregation, and local funding of education: "most of the nation's segregation today 'is due to racial disparities between districts rather than segregative patterns within districts'" (Reed 2001, 38).[7] This did not come about simply as a result of private decisions: crucial facilitating policy decisions were made by courts and other public actors. Federal courts played an important role in dismantling the system of public schooling segregated by law, but the increasingly conservative, post-Nixon Supreme Court was never willing to go beyond the elimination of government-sponsored segregation and make a positive constitutional principle of integration. A decisive turning point came 20 years after *Brown* in a case involving desegregation in metropolitan Detroit. Between 1960 and 1990, as part of the great migration of blacks out of the South, 300,000 blacks moved into Detroit. During the same period, 900,000 whites moved out of Detroit.[8] In the middle of these astonishing population shifts, and in order to reincorporate white students whose families had fled the Detroit City School District in the face of integration, a federal judge required that 53 of Detroit's 85 surrounding suburban school districts be included within a metropolitan desegregation plan. Writing for a 5–4 majority in *Milliken v. Bradley*, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger insisted that such a remedy could not be imposed on suburban districts that had not actively segregated their own students by race. "No single tradition in public education is more deeply rooted than local control over the operation of schools," Burger said.[9]

By insisting that local control has a constitutional standing that trumps the pursuit of racial equality, the Supreme Court in *Milliken* facilitated the creation of what Reed aptly calls "islands of immunity" from racial integration. Separation by race could no longer be explicitly mandated by government policy, but the jurisdictional and financial independence of suburbs allowed the better-off to remove themselves to privileged and overwhelmingly white communities protected by exclusionary zoning laws and the high cost of suburban real estate.[10]

Other state and federal agencies are not mere bystanders to this process: transportation policies emphasizing highway construction rather than urban mass transit have literally paved the way for white flight, which is further encouraged by metropolitan development policies. The Federal Housing Administration's home mortgage guarantee programs have given preference to single-family rather than multi-family dwellings, spacious rather than crowded neighborhoods, and homebuilding in new locations over the refurbishment of older neighborhoods, all because it was thought that these choices would keep housing prices stable and guarantee the repayment of mortgages. Federal housing agencies long "redlined" inner-city, minority neighborhoods, preferring to guarantee mortgages in homogeneous suburban communities that were deemed more economically secure. The new "separate and unequal" is a political artifact—like the old version, only more subtle.[11]

The sorting by race and class continues: white public school enrollments typically hold steady until nonwhite enrollment rates reach about 25 percent, and then white flight is triggered by the

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proximity of whiter districts.[12] The cycle has proved to be self-confirming and self-perpetuating. When whites and middle-class blacks abandoned urban schools, their places were taken by poorer immigrants in need of English language training. Urban schools, deprived of students and families with middle-class wallets and habits, declined precipitously in quality, and this further encouraged and rationalized the retreat to the suburbs.[13]

No doubt the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War protests, and the cultural changes of the late 1960s and early 1970s all conspired to create a sense of chaos around urban schooling.[14] In addition, collective bargaining agreements, corruption, bureaucratic lethargy, misguided reform initiatives, and petty politics have contributed to the woes of urban education.[15] The upshot is that while the vast majority of Americans *profess* a belief in integration, their actions tell a different story: better-off Americans use this stratified system to pursue advantages that defy the promise of equal educational opportunity.

On the face of it, *Milliken* looks like a disaster for equal citizenship in America, but it is possible that the alternative would have been worse. Historian Kevin Kruse argues that in the face of irresistible demands for the integration of public institutions, many whites simply abandoned those institutions rather than accept integration. Such was the experience in Atlanta, for instance, not only with schools but with public golf courses, swimming pools, parks, and other facilities. The suburbanization that has so deeply altered American society is another face of this process of abandonment, but at least it has left public education and the public responsibility for schooling intact.[16] If *Milliken* had gone the other way, and suburban school districts had been drawn far more broadly into the project of desegregation, perhaps the result would have been a broader abandonment of public education in favor of private schooling.[17]

We should keep in mind the law of unintended consequences. Nevertheless, such speculation is at odds with some of what we know. The South is by some measures the most integrated part of the country. Mandatory desegregation largely succeeded there because Southern school districts tend to encompass urban, suburban, and rural communities. Moreover, as Jennifer L. Hochschild argued long ago, sweeping and speedily implemented metropolitan desegregation plans often caused fewer disruptions, involved less busing, and were more effective than piecemeal integration plans.[18]

While the facts of separation by race cannot be denied, some point out that per-pupil spending levels in urban schools often equal or surpass the national average. This is a change; in the era of Jim Crow, the constitutional principle of "separate but equal" was deemed consistent with public spending on the education of black children, which could be less than one-seventh of what was spent on white children.[19] The inequalities in today's system are less extreme, but when we compare schools in the same area, typical urban and suburban school districts have distinctive profiles. New York City's funding levels, at $9,000 per pupil, are well below those of wealthy Westchester County, which spends $13,000 per pupil. Money is only part of the problem. Inequities are greatly exacerbated by the fact that fully 60 percent of New York State's poor children reside in New York City, whose schools must provide expensive bilingual and remedial education to disproportionately large numbers of students. In the 1998–1999 school year, 40 percent of the children attending New York City schools—442,000 out of 1.1 million—came from families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Eighty-one percent of the city's students are eligible to participate in the free-lunch program, and 17 percent are English language learners.[20] Meanwhile, the Croton-Harmon Union Free School District in Westchester County, for instance, is 93 percent white. It contains 1.2 percent English language learners, and not one among its 1,248 K–12 students qualifies for free or reduced-cost lunch—but it spends more per student than does New York City.[21]

Of course, one might observe that some of the spending in well-off suburban districts goes to "frills" like football and bands. However, typical cities and suburbs differ markedly with respect to basics like school facilities and teaching. A legislative finding in New York State in 1988 found that "the elementary and secondary schools of the City of New York are in deplorable physical condition."[22] Pay and work conditions are much better in suburbs, so they cream off the best teachers. As Judge Leland G. DeGrasse pointed out in an opinion striking down New York State's school funding formula, the average New York City teacher attended a less competitive college than did teachers elsewhere in the state, and neighboring suburbs lure the best teachers by paying them 20 percent to 36 percent more than the city. In the 1997–1998 school year, 31 percent of the city's teachers failed the Liberal Arts and Science Test on their first try, compared with just 4.7 percent statewide. More than 40 percent of the city's math teachers failed the content-specialty test in math. In that same year, 13.7 percent of the city's teachers were not qualified to teach in any of the subjects they taught, compared with just 3.3 percent statewide. Nearly a quarter of the city's teachers are classified as "novices" (meaning that they are uncertified or have fewer than three years' experience), and that figure is higher in the city's neediest schools. Collective bargaining agreements protect senior teachers' right to decide where they want to teach within the city system, and of course experienced teachers often transfer to suburban districts. Citing all of these factors, Judge DeGrasse charged the state with failing to fulfill its constitution's guarantee of a "sound basic education" for all children. The state must, he ruled, "align funding with need." On June 26, 2003, his decision with respect to New York City schools was upheld by the state's highest court, which ordered the state to fund New York City schools at a level reflecting the cost of a "sound basic education," including the opportunity for a "meaningful high school education."[23]

Differences in per-pupil expenditures hardly begin to calibrate real inequalities in educational opportunities. Inner-city schools have disproportionate numbers of children with serious academic, emotional, and disciplinary problems, and these children need, in the words of Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, "more reading specialists, more psychologists, and more security guards. That leaves less money for regular teachers. . . . [C]hildren with serious problems consume a disproportionate share of the teachers' time when they are in regular classes, leaving less time for other students." Predominantly black schools spend about as

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much per pupil as white schools, but because disadvantaged students are disproportionately black, "ordinary black children without special problems are likely to be in large classes, get less attention, and have less academically skilled teachers than similar white children."[24] Furthermore, in innumerable ways, children's educational opportunities depend on the qualities of peers and classmates—their habits and interests, life experiences, and connections to social and economic networks.[25] The advantages associated with these parent and peer influences are, like wealth, distributed very unequally across districts.

The realities of residential and educational separation belie Americans' professed commitment to integration. Tackling these geography-based inequalities across metropolitan areas will be difficult. Wealthy and middle-class suburban voters—now a majority of the U.S. population—are aware of the superiority of their schools and of the dependence of their property values on that superiority. They have every incentive to maximize their share of tax revenues by supporting local funding and pupil assignment. Even childless suburban homeowners have an interest in keeping suburban schools separate because of the link between local school quality and housing prices. There is also the primordial fact that even parents who genuinely care about integration and equal opportunity for all nevertheless want the best education they can secure for their own children. If public principles and parental concerns come into conflict, how many parents will think first of the public good? Meanwhile, most Americans are in denial: as Terry Moe notes in *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public*, only 34 percent of nationwide respondents to a recent poll allowed that blacks get lower-quality education. The geography of inequality represents a breakdown of democratic governance: an engine of systematic division and inequality that the democratic process itself may be unable to fix.

In times past, in the face of entrenched political inequalities and resistant to political correction, liberal egalitarians might have looked to the courts. But the days of Supreme Court Justices Earl Warren, Thurgood Marshall, and William J. Brennan are long gone; federal judicial efforts to desegregate schools and equalize school funding are dead. Even progressive academics now mainly scorn the idea that courts should address pressing social problems.[26] Ours is an era of judicial modesty; it seems that we are all strict constructionists now.

Not quite. Thirty years ago, in the bright afterglow of Warren Court activism, state courts entered the fray of fiscal equity in education, and some remain there, in spite of tremendous political opposition.[27] Whereas the U.S. Constitution has no clause specifically referring to education, 49 of 50 state constitutions contain cryptic but substantive and positive education provisions, such as the New Jersey constitution's mandate of a "thorough and efficient" education. In the quarter century from 1972 through 1997, there were 32 challenges to state systems of school finance, and 16 of these succeeded. Some judges who overturned state funding formulas based their rulings on educational equity, considering disparities across wealthier and poorer districts. Others looked to educational adequacy, Reed asserts, questioning whether states provided for the "basic needs of students in the worst off districts" (20). Still others deployed a mixed standard.[28]

Reed sets out to investigate whether these state court interventions mattered and, if so, whether some mattered more than others. His data compare changes in per-pupil school revenues after litigation in eight states: in five of these, challenges to school finance laws were successful, and in three, they were not.[29] Even where court challenges worked, revenue gaps between the wealthiest and the poorest districts generally increased. Nevertheless, in these states real education revenues rose substantially at all levels, and revenues in the lowest-spending districts increased significantly in four out of the five states. Following court action in Connecticut, "real median per pupil combined state and local revenues more than quadrupled over a ten-year period, increasing from $833 to $4,095; in Texas and Kentucky, the real median figures more than doubled in eight years"; and median spending in New Jersey nearly tripled within nine years (Reed 2001, 25).[30] Reed also measures revenue transfers from richer to poorer districts. In all five states where courts overturned funding schemes, there were, by this measure, "persistent and meaningful decreases in inequality over time," with substantial improvements in three of the five states. Legislatures raised expenditures in the lowest-spending districts by boosting outlays overall. In sum, state spending was "more equal after the courts became involved than it was before" (29).[31]

Among the three states where challenges to state funding schemes did not succeed, levels of equality worsened in two cases and remained flat in the third. Reed argues that overall, and in the face of deep political opposition, state court judges who tackled education finance were "rather successful" in promoting greater spending equity: "We see that improvements in equality typically follow state supreme court decisions that order improvements in equality, and that little change or worsening equality follows from decisions upholding the existing school finance systems" (16, 34). By Reed's account, attempts to address class disparities in state courts are making a difference.

Reed's analysis is, among other things, an attempt to counter the much discussed argument of Gerald N. Rosenberg's book *The Hollow Hope:* that landmark cases involving such matters as school desegregation and abortion rights have little or no real-world impact on the number of black children attending school with white children or on established trends with respect to numbers of legal abortions.[32] Reed wants to show that courts can materially change the course of public policy and the flow of education dollars. How well his empirical claims succeed is debatable. His findings are suggestive and plausible, but not unambiguous. It appears that the five states in which litigation succeeded in changing funding fared better than the three in which it failed, but this is a small sample of the 32 states in which litigation occurred. In addition, Reed's comparisons of revenue trends in the eight states under study examine different spans of time in different decades (1977–1986 for Connecticut, beginning the year of the court decision; 1988–1995 for Texas, beginning two years after the court decision). Economic conditions and state budgetary constraints differed markedly in the 1970s and 1990s, and these conditions varied across states as well. Reed's argument has opened rather than closed a debate over the consequences of this important litigation.[33]

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If school funding equalization should be understood as part of *Brown*'s constitutional legacy, it may seem sadly anomalous to rely on state courts to fulfill this national obligation. But Reed argues that state courts have some real advantages over their federal cousins when it comes to intervening in complex policy areas such as education, and this is one of his most interesting contributions. State judges are less remote than federal ones (many state judges are elected or can be recalled by the voters), and they are less easily portrayed as outsiders with respect to local political controversies. In fact, they often have close ties to local politics, and this may help them see problems from the legislators' point of view. State courts can enter into ongoing principled but flexible dialogues and negotiations with state legislatures, governors, and voters. These go best, Reed advises, when courts articulate principles and goals to frame legislative options, and leave specific solutions to the legislatures. (See chapter 5 in particular.) Statewide education funding reform is clearly within the power of state governments, and where state judges are prepared to pursue equity or adequacy through multiple rounds of litigation and legislation, they can obtain results. On grounds of institutional capacity, state courts may have an important and underappreciated role in enforcing some substantive federal constitutional aspirations.[34]

Reading *On Equal Terms* made me want to go out and hug a state court judge. This book's hopefulness is sorely tempered, however, by its recognition that the tendency toward educational inequality is rooted deeply in state and local political structures, and in residential segregation. Success in court cannot change "the fundamental assumptions of the regime of public education: the primacy of local control of local resources." Reed nicely underlines the basic structural causes of educational inequality: "The interlocking ties of property wealth, home rule, and government fragmentation are the simple, but robust, organizational rules that courts have not been able to alter, let alone erase." These basic structures are "virtually designed to generate unequal and inadequate educational resources for some districts" (161, xvi).

Polls show that Americans believe in educational equity and racial integration, but they care more about maintaining local control and funding of schools. Views vary somewhat depending on race, class, and ideology: Americans who are poor, black, or self-described liberals express greater support for equality in educational opportunity. Nevertheless, when reforms designed to promote educational equity are understood to threaten local control, support for these reforms declines precipitously, even among the most disadvantaged. (While Reed appears to credit the power of Tocquevillian reasons for decentralization, other evidence suggests that the desire to maintain control over local tax dollars is paramount.)[35] As Reed rightly concludes, "Localism is paramount in American attitudes toward public education," and it is localism that provides individual parents and taxpayers with powerful and effective incentives to behave in ways that deny many citizens, disproportionately minorities, an adequate education (121). We thereby fail to live up to the ideal of a common or public educational system.

Local control is, of course, not all bad. Decentralized administration brings government closer to the people and engages their civic activity and trust, as many have argued.[36] The public is sometimes more willing to support public services if they are funded locally, so attempts to overcome the inequalities generated by localism may have perverse consequences. In the wake of the 1971 *Serrano* decision ordering funding equalization in California, that state's per-pupil expenditures on education "plunged from 6 percent above the national average in 1970 . . . to 17 percent below the national average . . . in 1992." California now spends only $5,600 per pupil, compared with $9,360 in New Jersey. The dilemma is well stated by Tom Loveless: "School finances can only be equalized by divorcing educational funding from local wealth," but centralizing school funding may cut "schools off from local political support, further fraying the schools' weakened ties to local communities."[37] It is far from clear, however, that the California experience has been typical.

Greater federal and state aid for poorer districts would be desirable, but also hard to sustain. If we are to preserve the benefits of localism and undercut the foundations of segregation and inequality, then segregated residential patterns need to be tackled head-on. So long as local communities and school districts are deeply differentiated by class and race, invidious inequalities are built into the very structure of democratic governance, and courts and other actors promoting equality must work constantly against deep currents of political interest. Reed recognizes the root problem and deserves credit for offering creative solutions: he calls for the creation of urban "magnet neighborhoods" in which tax credits and abatements might be used, along with magnet and charter schools, to lure middle-class parents back to inner-city neighborhoods.

Some advocate another way of tempering the link between schooling and place of residence: expanding opportunities for parents to choose schools across district lines. Reed offers some relatively hopeful remarks about school choice and even school vouchers. It is far from clear, however, that Americans are prepared to use school choice as a way of mixing children from cities and suburbs. In Ohio a federal judge blocked the state's voucher program for Cleveland's failing schools precisely because the plan did not require suburban public school districts with empty desks to open their doors to inner-city kids with vouchers (so it was improperly tilted toward encouraging students with vouchers to enroll in private religious schools). This decision gave the Ohio legislature the opportunity to fix the Cleveland voucher plan by requiring the participation of suburban public schools. But the legislature never acted, and no suburbs volunteered to participate; so once again, preserving privileges based on local control took political priority over improving urban schools. The U.S. Supreme Court gave vouchers the go-ahead without endorsing any precondition of suburban public school participation.[38]

Well-off suburbanites are doing very well in our stratified system. They have little incentive to upset the status quo, and they are more apt to vote than inner-city residents. The social, economic, and political forces that reinforce the geography of inequality will not be easy to overcome.

School Choice

In spite of the intense controversy around voucher programs, choice in public education is not altogether new. Magnet and

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charter schools allow parents to choose among public schools—and as we have seen, those who can afford it have a choice among public school districts when they decide where to live. But the public funding of nonpublic schools, including religious institutions, is new; and substantial voucher programs, such as those under way in Milwaukee and Cleveland, seem likely to multiply.[39]

One great question about voucher programs is whether they will be designed and administered so as to better deliver on our public educational obligation to all children or, by transferring responsibility to parents, diminish our public commitment to education for all. In much of Europe, Canada, and elsewhere, public monies have long flowed to public as well as nonpublic schools, both secular and religious, but with public dollars have come extensive regulations concerning admissions, curriculum, testing, and teacher qualifications. In many instances, funded schools are quasipublic institutions.[40] America has its own political culture, and it remains to be seen whether we follow this route. Religious communities are vastly more powerful in the United States than in most European countries, and many religious groups are extremely leery of government regulation. This seems especially true of evangelical and fundamentalist religious communities that want public dollars with no strings attached. Some conservative religious communities (in Milwaukee and Cleveland, for example) want schools receiving children with publicly funded vouchers to be able to pick and choose among these children based on religious criteria. Some also want religious schools to be able to require children attending with vouchers to pray as a condition of attendance.[41]

Vouchers were put on the intellectual map in the 1960s thanks to the libertarian advocacy of Milton Friedman. Since then, they have been subject to a great deal of discussion and not much action. Friedman's narrow conception of the public's interest in education appealed to few. The association with libertarianism, Moe points out, has long been an albatross for voucher advocates. Vouchers could—but need not—narrow the public interest in education. They may be framed, designed, and administered with an eye toward public values such as the equitable access of all the children in the community to any school that wishes to open its doors to children with vouchers. Or they may be framed, designed, and administered so as to give private communities access to public educational dollars without any strings attached. The details matter a great deal here.

An especially strong public case can be made for voucher programs that are means-tested and that target disadvantaged children in failing schools. Broader voucher systems also might serve the interests of less well-off children if the vouchers are generously funded and parents are not allowed to add on, or "top up," the amount of the voucher by paying extra tuition. (When top-ups are not allowed, all parents have an incentive to maintain an adequate level of funding.) Many other choices must also be made: schools receiving children with vouchers could be required to accept a certain percentage of children from families who qualify for federal school lunch programs, or they could be required to admit a mix of children based on race.[42] (Such regulations may, of course, discourage the participation of schools in choice programs and deter the establishment of new schools, thereby dampening some commentators' hopes for a more competitive educational environment.)[43] Likewise, voucher amounts could be adjusted upward for children with learning disabilities or other special needs. Highly egalitarian vouchers have been proposed by academics for decades; generously funded vouchers with no parental top-ups, and accompanied by regulations on school admissions criteria and curricula, could help overcome the inequities associated with geography while also ensuring that publicly funded education is publicly oriented in its content. But how much public support is there likely to be in the United States for vouchers geared toward inclusive values?

Moe's book *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* is a notable effort to take vouchers away from libertarians. Based on extensive telephone interviews with 4,700 adults in the summer of 1995, the book is a long and searching account of how the American public views the voucher issue.[44] Moe argues fervently that the "new voucher movement" will be supported by Americans as a way of making public education work better for all, especially the disadvantaged. The point of this book is to allay the fear that the movement toward vouchers—if and when it comes—will leave our most important public educational aims behind.

Of course, few Americans know much about complex social policies. Sixty-five percent of Moe's sample said they had never heard of vouchers. So what good is a poll?

Moe's book invites methodological self-consciousness. His national poll attempted to deal with the problem of ignorance by first asking respondents a variety of general questions about public and private schools and educational reforms. Next, the poll went into much greater detail, with questions worded so as to supply enough information to form an opinion. No fewer than 40 follow-up questions were asked, and the poll itself constituted an educative experience. (See Moe, Appendix A.)[45] In the end, the survey returned to the general questions about schools and vouchers to see whether respondents' views changed based on additional information and reflection.

The picture of latent American public opinion toward vouchers that emerges from this book is complex but apparently hopeful. When presented with thoughtful questions and balanced information, Americans take public values seriously and have reasonable, coherent, and sympathetic attitudes about school choice. Americans generally have positive attitudes toward their own public schools if not the public school system as a whole: only about 25 percent of parents are unhappy with their own children's public schools. Academic performance tends to matter most to parents in assessing their public schools; concerns about moral values and discipline seem to matter less. These high levels of support are a puzzle for Moe. Even parents in the worst-performing districts tend to support their public schools, albeit not as highly as parents in better-performing districts. Seventy-three percent of parents of children in poorly performing schools say that their child's school provides an "exciting learning environment." Moe explains this finding based on differential expectations: highly educated parents have high expectations for their children's schools, and they tend to be in good school districts. Poorly educated parents have low expectations for their children's schooling, and this inflates satisfaction levels in poorly

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performing school districts. In addition, many of the most disaffected parents have already left the public schools.[46]

Moe is nonetheless cautiously optimistic that support for vouchers will grow. While Americans are not deeply dissatisfied with their public schools, most regard private schools as superior. A majority of parents would like to send their children to private schools if they could, and two-thirds of inner-city parents would like to do so.

What moves parents to want to "go private"? The answer to this question should tell us something about the sorts of schools that are liable to expand as vouchers spread. If highly educated and wealthy parents are most interested in vouchers, we may have cause to worry that vouchers will "cream off" the best public school students. If extreme ideological and religious views motivate parents in school choice, the schools that cater to these views could damage social cohesion.

Moe argues that the biases currently associated with families in private schooling—high education and income, racial and religious selectivity, and the rejection of public school values—are all likely to be moderated by the expansion of publicly funded school choice. Only about 10 percent of American school-age children now attend private schools, but 52 percent of parents surveyed by Moe say they would like to take advantage of choice. These private-inclined public parents—the "swing" public, as Moe styles them—tend to be low in income, from minority groups, and from less-advantaged districts. As one might expect, given the class advantages that accrue to today's suburban schools, low-income inner-city parents favor vouchers overwhelmingly (77 percent to 14 percent), while well-off parents from suburbs tend to be more satisfied with their children's schools and are more inclined to stick with them. The most important motives behind wanting to "go private" are the judgments that public schools perform poorly and that the public system is inequitable. Ideological biases associated with opposition to public schooling do play a role: Catholics, born-again Christians, Republicans, and the better educated are more likely to want to "go private." Moe asserts that an expanded private educational sector would be less disproportionately high-income, and much less disproportionately white—it might even be majority minority—but it would still be disproportionately high in education and it would be just as religious.

Among the most controversial questions surrounding vouchers are, should religious schools be included and, if so, should they be subject to the same regulations as other schools? Americans overwhelmingly want to include religious schools in a voucher plan—by 79 percent to 11 percent, according to Moe. They also overwhelmingly favor regulation to hold all schools accountable: 88 percent support teacher certification requirements, 86 percent support student testing, and 80 percent or more support curriculum requirements, financial reporting, and auditing of nonpublic schools receiving public dollars. This is true even of Republican respondents, an astonishing 82 percent of whom agree that "[p]arochial schools should be required to admit children of all religions on an equal basis" (303).

The idea of prohibiting parental top-ups for the sake of promoting adequate public spending for all fares less well. When asked whether "[p]arents should be allowed to add their own money onto the voucher, because this would give them access to more schools," or "[p]arents should not be allowed to add onto the voucher, because this would give wealthier families an unfair advantage," respondents favored the former, more permissive option by 50 percent to 38 percent (306–7). Even the inner-city poor express low levels of support (35 percent) for prohibiting add-ons. Nevertheless, by 66 percent to 25 percent, respondents agree that families earning more than $100,000 should not be eligible for vouchers.[47]

Moe concludes with a cautiously optimistic prognosis for the future of vouchers: there is substantial latent support for vouchers, and the public is prepared to support them based on sensible and reasonably public-spirited grounds, including concerns about school quality and the inequity of the current system. The public, Moe argues, is prepared to line up behind the modern politically centrist version of regulated school choice, which starts with disadvantaged kids in lousy schools, and which regulates all publicly funded schools in the name of equal access and accountability. This general picture of latent public opinion is consistent with the fact that free-market voucher plans have been defeated twice by 2–1 margins in referenda in California, whereas targeted and regulated voucher programs have been enacted in Milwaukee and Cleveland (though they have been defeated in Michigan and elsewhere). And it is consistent with the experience of other nations: public funding brings public regulation in its wake. Moe's advice to voucher supporters is to stick to the middle, avoid sweeping libertarian proposals, and offer regulated and fair voucher plans targeted at poor kids. He predicts that at some point civil rights leaders will abandon teachers' unions and then political momentum will swing in favor of vouchers.

Moe's study addresses some but not all of the reasonable anxieties about vouchers. Worries about creaming are real because among disadvantaged parents, it is those with more education who tend to prefer private schools. Furthermore, as I have argued, if parents are allowed to add to the amount of a voucher, better-off parents will have less of an incentive to support generous funding for all. Religion remains an important motivator for choosing private schools, with Catholics, born-again Christians, and those who support school prayer being more likely to want to go private. As Moe notes, race generally does not seem to matter, but among poor inner-city whites (the whites most likely to be in majority-black schools), those who oppose diversity tend to want to go private—a factor that could worsen racial separation.

While Moe's findings seem reassuring, a huge and unaddressed public action problem lurks in the background. It is costless and therefore easy to support principles like racial integration in a poll. Moe's poll gets at latent public opinion by supplying voters with some of the information they lack, but also by abstracting away from the local political structures that reflect and support class division and race exclusion. It would be extremely hazardous to predict the future development of public policy based on opinion sampled outside the structures of separation and inequality that, as we have seen, defy professed commitments to integration and equal opportunity.[48] The question is whether Americans will put their principles into practice—not what Americans will say

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they believe in, but which candidates and policy arrangements they will support in real political contexts structured by the geography of inequality. Poll respondents were never invited to consider how their views might change if their tax rates and housing values were effected. Whatever Moe's poll results might suggest, it remains to be seen whether vouchers will have much appeal for suburbanites who do well under today's system, and whether they will help those most in need or further erode our already inadequate commitment to educating the less-advantaged.

School Reform

Political reforms designed to overcome the divisions between cities and suburbs will be difficult to enact, and an extensive and egalitarian system of vouchers is unlikely any time soon. So what are the prospects for politically enacted urban educational reform? Suppose we could figure out which reforms would help improve education (likely candidates include better teacher qualifications, more equitable funding, and smaller class sizes especially in the early grades). Is it possible for urban reformers to get their political act together and effect broad policy changes?

The considerable obstacles that face urban school reform are the subject of *Building Civic Capacity* (by Clarence Stone, Jeffrey Henig, Bryan Jones, and Carol Pierannunzi) and *City Schools and City Politics* (by John Portz, Lana Stein, and Robin Jones). Both books grow out of the Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project, an attempt to study why some cities display relatively high levels of capacity to engage in systematic and sustained educational reform while others do not. The argument of both books is that the politics of urban education reform is far from hopeless. Cities vary in "civic capacity"—that is, in the capacity to mobilize many sectors of the community on behalf of a common vision of educational reform. Education reform depends on mobilizing broad local constituencies: political and business leaders, educators, and others. Cities vary in this civic capacity, and these variations do not correspond in any direct way with economic development. (For example, both St. Louis and San Francisco rank low in civic capacity.) The differences seem to depend upon a complex set of factors, including the historically developed political culture of cities, past patterns of cooperation or conflict, and leadership, which is unlikely to come from school boards. The special importance of engaging local business leaders is emphasized. The message of these books is that if broad political coalitions are carefully constructed, systematic educational reforms can be enacted.

Building Civic Capacity, the more systematic of the two books, attempts to assess the relationship between levels of civic capacity and education reform in 11 major cities. *City Schools and City Politics,* in contrast, goes into greater detail regarding the politics of education reform in Boston, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh, since its authors were the local interviewers in these three cities.

In the larger civic capacity study, a team of 19 conducted 516 interviews during 1993–1994 with elite actors in various sectors: leaders in business, politics, civic groups, and education. These elites included "general influentials" (mainly local leaders in politics and business), "community-based representatives" (leaders of civic groups like the PTA and the League of Women Voters), and "education specialists" (25). The interviews were coded and tabulated to try to determine variations in civic capacity across the cities—including differences in the level of motivation to enact education reform, in leaders' ability to bring resources to bear, in the breadth of their contacts and interactions with actors in other sectors, and in the degree of agreement on the nature of educational problems and solutions.

Neither book tells a particularly surprising story, but both effectively warn reformers not to forget the importance of politics. The argument that broad coalitions must be assembled to enable systemic reform is largely convincing, but the attempt to put this argument into a systematic form buttressed by empirical evidence is less so. The core idea of civic capacity remains diffuse, so measuring and comparing its levels cannot be a matter of precision. Members of both research teams were already familiar with school reform politics in each of the cities they studied, and Stone and his coauthors admit that "the assessment of civic mobilization was essentially a qualitative call" (77; see also chapter 4 generally). In fact, the more detailed and descriptive "case studies" of educational politics by Portz et al. seem to me more revealing.

Stone and his coauthors describe urban education as a "high reverberation subsystem." To enact broad reforms, many interested and attentive constituencies must be engaged. Parents may care deeply about their children's education, but in all 11 cities studied here, the schools are one of the top four employers in the city; teachers and other education professionals are both powerful and highly attentive to school policy. Measures to protect teacher professionalism can thus be used to insulate education bureaucracies and impede reform.[49]

As we have seen, city schools face special challenges in the form of high proportions of students from disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds. Meanwhile, suburban voters dominate state legislatures and statewide elections. Successful teachers and parents with sufficient resources will often move to suburbs with good schools rather than fight uphill battles to reform city schools. As Stone and his coauthors observe, the loss of wealthier parents further depresses the capacity of city residents to mobilize for reform. Moreover, insofar as suburban flight is driven by concerns regarding urban schools (including desegregation), a high percentage of inner-city residents are childless or send their children to private schools, further limiting the natural local constituency for urban school reform. Astonishingly, in Boston only 20 percent of voters have children in public schools, as Portz et al. point out. And whereas 90 percent of minority kids in Boston attend public schools, only 50 percent of white kids do so. A "failure syndrome" surrounds urban education (Portz et al. 1999, 94).

In spite of the daunting hurdles, however, failure is not inevitable. Cities challenged by similar problems vary significantly in their capacities to mobilize on behalf of educational improvement. Stone and his colleagues rank Pittsburgh, Boston, and Los Angeles at the upper end of civic mobilization for school reform; Atlanta, Denver, St. Louis, and San Francisco are at the lower end; and Baltimore, Houston, Detroit, and Washington, D.C., fall in a middle tier.

Stone and his coauthors regard "cross-sector collaboration" on behalf of education reform as crucial to civic capacity. Although

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it bears some striking resemblances to Robert Putnam's widely discussed account of "social capital," [50] civic capacity is a matter of mobilizing energies for political reform specifically. A crucial feature of both civic capacity and social capital seems to be the importance of overcoming narrow forms of interaction and communication. Like Putnam, Stone and his coauthors claim that civic capacity is an important independent variable, the level of which is not determined by wealth or education levels, racial composition, or variations in formal structures of governance. Cities high in civic capacity can draw on the resources of preexisting patterns (or examples) of broad cooperation among powerful groups in different sectors. Educational leadership will benefit from preexisting networks of "open collaboration and collective engagement" (76). Nevertheless, a disproportionate loss of white children to the suburbs seems to correspond with low levels of civic mobilization, and the great diversity and fluidity of populations in the Sunbelt cities seem inhospitable to civic capacity. The formation of broad coalitions for reform is impeded by professional insularity, lack of business sector involvement, and the sheer complexity of the public school system.

It is difficult to generalize across a relatively small number of disparate urban settings. Portz and his coauthors make this clear by going into greater detail about two out of the three cities ranked high in civic capacity: Pittsburgh and Boston. In Boston, Mayor Thomas Menino came into office committed to education reform in 1993, just one year after the city had scrapped the elected school board in favor of one appointed by the previous mayor. Menino built a broad coalition for reform and worked for a new teachers' contract and curriculum review, as well as school-based management, charter schools, and new accountability standards for teachers and students. The results of all these reforms were unclear several years later: as of 1998, some test scores were up a bit, and others were unchanged. But at least Menino took advantage of the "new institutional environment" to build a broad and effective political coalition that successfully enacted systematic reforms.

Boston's model of school reform was built on the *"interdependence"* of politics and education: Boston "integrated the schools into city politics in a fashion consistent with Boston's political orientation." In Pittsburgh, on the other hand, the school superintendent played the key leadership role, "by maintaining a *separation* between educational and governmental arenas." Pittsburgh's "corporatist" path to education reform, in which political leaders deferred to educational experts, was in some respects the opposite of Boston's strategy. "The lesson for cities that engage in school reform," according to Portz et al., "is to look closely at their own constellation of leaders, institutions, and culture. . . . The task is to build a civic support structure for the schools that is consistent with and draws the best from that city's own style of leadership, institutional matrix, and political culture" (154, 159, 161, italics in original). This good advice defies easy generalizations.

The core claim of both books is that in pluralist political systems, leaders who want to enact "systemic" and "sustained" reforms need to build broad coalitions that include political and business leaders, parents, civic groups, and teachers' unions, based on common understandings and aims. Civic capacity is the dynamic element in these studies, and "systemic reform effort" is the dependent variable. Cities high in civic capacity are more able to enact "systemic reform." In other words, cities that tend to be good at assembling broad coalitions for reform also tend to be good at enacting broad sets of reforms. This seems right, but almost tautological. Nonetheless, it is worth saying.

Some confusion slips into the sensible argument of *Building Civic Capacity*. The book's declared subject is the capacity to enact and sustain systemic reforms, irrespective of the merits or the effectiveness of the reforms. Assessments of civic mobilization, for example, "were based solely on the nature of the relationships among coalition partners and did not involve any consideration of the wisdom or effectiveness of the specific policy initiatives the coalition favored" (28).[51]

In the book's final two chapters, however, the authors stray beyond their self-imposed limits and ask "whether and how civic mobilization can lead to better education for inner-city youths" (133). The authors present no evidence showing that academic outcomes actually improved in the wake of "systemic reform." Indeed, they assert that there is no "consensual measure of an effective educational system" and that the cities under study use a variety of standardized tests (123). But the tests may be similar enough to compare upward or downward trends in scores, and there are other rough-and-ready indices of school performance, such as dropout or graduation rates.[52] Leaving aside independent measures of school performance, Stone et al. assert that education will be improved if reformers avoid "piecemeal efforts" and mere "policy churn" in favor of "systemic" reform (133). Of course, calling a set of reforms "systemic" does not endow them with the capacity to really improve education.

The value of "systemic" reform is at the heart of the book's argument—"[i]f educational reform is to transcend the disjointed and piecemeal approach . . . civic mobilization is critical" (86)—but the authors never quite distinguish systemic from piecemeal reform. They refer to an index of systemic reform, which seems to have been based on "ten distinct strategies that were," in 1993–1994, "core elements being promoted by national proponents of systemic education reform" (130).[53] What makes these "ten distinct strategies" *systematic* as opposed to a grab bag of fads current in 1993–1994—the fads of "policy churn"? Do these policies share some underlying rationale, or is it enough that they are "core elements being promoted by national proponents of systemic education reform"? These proponents are unnamed, so we cannot even tell whether they agree with one another.

The distinction between systemic and piecemeal reform is not treated with a precision commensurate with its rhetorical weight. By the end, the book tends to equate big, systemic reform with effective reform: "the key to bringing about broad change in urban education lies in politics, not the pursuit of particular pedagogies or programs" (123–4). The authors add: "The primary obstacles to systemic school reform are not a lack of clever ideas. . . . The primary obstacles are political in nature" (126).[54] Is it really so easy to discern which reforms are worth enacting? Why do experts spend so much time arguing about the merits of competing reform proposals?

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Building Civic Capacity and *City Schools and City Politics* show that despite the difficulties faced by urban reformers, some cities succeed in enacting broad reform agendas. Whether particular reforms will really make us better off is another matter.[55] Along with civic capacity, we need the wisdom to discern which reforms are worthwhile. Maybe there are some things most reformers can agree upon: if so, these books argue that there are ways of getting the necessary political work done.

Will We Improve Our Schools?

In his dissenting opinion in *Milliken v. Bradley,* Justice Marshall warned, "In the short run it may seem the easier course to allow our great metropolitan areas to be divided up each into two cities—one white, the other black—but it is a course, I predict, our people will ultimately regret."[56] Was Justice Marshall too optimistic? Better-off Americans seem prepared to take advantage of the separate and unequal condition of poor, dark-skinned inner cities and wealthier, lighter-skinned suburbs. A divided polity is one way to think about our future.

We can glimpse alternative futures in the school funding litigation in New York State, discussed above. One future has been articulated by Judge DeGrasse and by the state's highest court, in opinions that insisted on the state's obligation to supply every child with a "sound basic education" amounting to a "meaningful high school education" that would allow a child eventually to perform as a capable citizen and compete for good jobs. This means, according to DeGrasse, "more than just being qualified to vote or serve as a juror, but to do so capably and knowledgeably."[57] These minimal educational standards support an ideal of equal citizenship.

Another possible future, however, is prefigured by an intermediate appellate court that, for a time, overturned DeGrasse's decision. That court, in a remarkably frank opinion by Judge Alfred D. Lerner, insisted that the state need not equip all children for "competitive employment"; it would be enough to furnish the equivalent of an eighth- or ninth-grade education and "the ability to get a job, and support oneself, and thereby not be a charge on the public fisc." The appropriate standard is not the opportunity for a good life and the capacity for active citizenship, but a life that does not burden others and the capacity to fill a low-level job: "Society needs workers in all levels of jobs, the majority of which may very well be low level." The educational system should not be expected to counteract the effects of "demographic factors, such as poverty, high crime neighborhoods, single parent or dysfunctional homes, homes where English is not spoken, or homes where parents offer little help with homework and motivation."[58]

Judge Lerner has a point when he challenges the notion that we can or should expect the school to fully counteract all of the effects of family background and poverty. Other public interventions must also play crucial roles. Likewise, reasonable people can differ with respect to the appropriate role for judges in bringing about changes in complex social and fiscal policies. Lerner's opinion is nevertheless chilling. In America, birth is not supposed to be fate. Yet if we follow Judge Lerner's path, we might in principle simply accept and affirm that our society is divided between the high and the low—the free citizens and the helots—and say that it is enough if education prepares *some* to contribute to society as well-educated, capable citizens and members of the competitive labor force, and others as marginally competent citizens and menial workers. This is an accurate description of the philosophy underlying the educational system that we now have in the United States. It owes more to Plato's "myth of the metals" than to democratic ideals of equal citizenship and equal opportunity for all.

Americans, it is frequently said, put far too much emphasis on the capacity of schools to solve every social problem. There is some truth in this: we need to learn from Plato at least in broadening our sense of the educative impact of many public choices about policy, law, and political structures.[59] But a wider perspective should not be an excuse for neglecting or downplaying the role of schools, nor should it lull us into complacency about the unequal life chances of children in America today.

The situation is not hopeless; there have been marginal improvements. Between 1970 and 1990, census tracts in the 15 metropolitan areas with the largest black populations became somewhat less segregated, though the level of segregation remains high.[60] Moreover, Myron Orfield, a reform-minded Minnesota state legislator and scholar, argues that both inner cities and some inner suburbs are suffering the consequences of metropolitan inequalities that favor certain high-growth and high-income suburbs at the expense of everyone else. It is therefore possible to build effective metropolitan political coalitions across urban and inner-suburban interests, both of which are threatened by continuing migration of jobs and people to outer suburbs or exurbs. Ultimately, Orfield says, these metropolitan problems call for metropolitan solutions in the form of regional councils.

In spite of its vast wealth and power, America is failing to deliver on an urgent demand of basic justice: to give every child a decent start in life. We may disagree about whether poor adults are or are not deserving of relief, but we know that children cannot be held responsible for the privileged or disadvantaged conditions into which they are born. Among the difficulties of reforming schools, no doubt, is that we disagree about particular reforms. Does the expansion of school vouchers represent a movement toward or away from a collective commitment to the education of all the young, including the inner-city poor? While debating the merits of certain reform proposals, we must nevertheless directly address the fragmented and stratified political geography that determines whether particular groups of Americans have access to adequate public services on which their fundamental interests depend. The geography of disadvantage is the greatest challenge facing domestic policy in the United States.

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Zelman v. Simmons-Harris, 234 F. 3d 945 (2002).

Notes

1 On economic inequality in America, see Phillips 2002. In Macedo 2000b, I discuss the political arguments and conflicts surrounding the emergence of public schooling.

2 Tocqueville 1969, 69.

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3 Americans' commitment to the local funding of education may have much less to do with "Tocquevillian reasons" than with keeping local control over tax revenues. See Shelly (forthcoming).
4 Orfield 1997, 74. See also the masterful and shocking account in Massey and Denton 1993.
5 Reed cites these statistics from Orfield and Yun 1999.
6 Reed asserts that "our nation's program of desegregated schools has failed" (38). He also notes that the proportion of white students in the educational system has declined somewhat on account of immigration and demographic changes, but part of this change is also no doubt due to the shift of white children to private schools as a consequence of desegregation. Reed does not supply statistics on Hispanic, Asian, or other minority enrollment.
7 Reed is quoting Clotfelter 1999, 502.
8 Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997.
9 *Milliken v. Bradley*, 741.
10 Jackson 1985; Massey and Denton 1993.
11 Jackson 1985; Massey and Denton 1993.
12 Reed provides these statistics, citing Clotfelter 2000.
13 Jackson 1985, chapter 11. See also Massey and Denton 1993; Hochschild and Scovronick 2003.
14 See Grant 1988.
15 For an especially severe indictment, see Lieberman 1993.
16 Kruse (in preparation).
17 Here, I appreciate the comments of Chris Eisgruber, Jennifer Hochschild, Bryan Shelly, and Keith Whittington.
18 Hochschild 1984, chapter 4. See also Hochschild and Scovronick 2003.
19 In 1940, admittedly the waning of Jim Crow, Mississippi spent 7.2 times more on the education of white children than it spent on black children. See Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997; see also Nieman 1991, which apparently understates the discrepancies.
20 Statistics, here and below, are from the opinion of Judge Leland G. DeGrasse in *Campaign for Fiscal Equity* 2001; see sections C.1, C.2, and F.1. See also Hartocollis 2001 and Rothstein 2001.
21 Information on Croton-Harmon—and links to other school districts, listed by county in New York State—can be found in Reports for Croton-Harmon 2001.
22 Ibid.
23 Opinion of Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye in the state supreme court decision *Campaign for Fiscal Equity* 2003, overturning an appellate court decision (*Campaign for Fiscal Equity* 2002) and upholding DeGrasse (*Campaign for Fiscal Equity* 2001). The statistics come from DeGrasse's opinion. See also Stone et al. 2001 (one of the books under review in this essay). Jencks and Phillips (1998) argue that there is comparatively good evidence that teacher qualifications matter to educational quality.
24 Jencks and Phillips 1998.
25 See Hanushek et al. (forthcoming), which argues that "peer achievement has a positive effect on achievement growth. Moreover, students throughout the school test score distribution appear to benefit from higher achieving schoolmates."
26 See, for example, Tushnet 2000.
27 The first foray was *Serrano v. Priest*.
28 Both sorts of inquiries are important insofar as states have an obligation to provide every child with a decent education and also to ensure equal opportunity.
29 The eight states examined are in the North, South, or Southwest. While allowing that measuring educational equity is bound to be complex and contestable, Reed compares districts within states based on per-pupil expenditures. Looking at dollars per pupil permits measurement and comparison, he argues, and funding adequacy is at least a necessary condition—if not a sufficient one—of educational quality. He clusters the states into three groups that represent different regions of the country and share roughly similar demographic and economic circumstances.
30 Only in Texas did revenues in the lowest-spending districts remain constant while revenues in the highest-spending districts declined.
31 Reed uses Gini coefficients here.
32 Rosenberg 1991.
33 Revenue disparities increased in all the states he counts as success stories; perhaps this is not surprising since there is no ceiling on what wealthier districts can spend. Real education spending overall increased tremendously in the states counted as "successes," so it makes sense that spending in districts at the bottom also rose. Reed describes in elaborate detail the epic struggle in New Jersey that followed the court's foray into funding equalization, and he provides briefer accounts of the political contests in seven other states.
34 See Brennan 1977.
35 See Shelly (forthcoming).
36 See Tocqueville 1969 and Putnam 2000.
37 Loveless 1998, 4; Loveless is discussing Fischel 1996. See also Hochschild and Scovronick 2003.
38 The Cleveland voucher plan is described in *Simmons-Harris v. Goff* and *Simmons-Harris v. Zelman*.
39 See *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*.
40 See Macedo et al. (in preparation).
41 The Milwaukee plan can be found in *Jackson v. Benson*. For a critical discussion of the regulations that accompany public dollars in these instances, see Loconte 1999 and my response, Macedo 2000a.
42 See the egalitarian voucher proposals in Brighouse 2000; see also Kemerer 1999.
43 These choices and trade-offs are exhaustively surveyed in Hill et al. 2003.
44 Moe's data include an oversample of public school parents generally and public school parents low in income and from the inner city. Zip codes were obtained for the interviewees, allowing subsequent analysts to compare responses with objective data on the quality of local schools and with local demographic statistics.

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45 Respondents were asked about their attitudes toward diversity, equity, school prayer, markets, moral values, and school performance; their support for the idea of public schooling; and their interest in sending their children to a private school.
46 Moe's questionnaire culled information on respondents' education and income levels, religion, race, age, party identification, and expectations (high or low) about schools. Zip codes allowed opinion data to be compared with the characteristics and quality of local schools. Much more detail can be found in Moe's book on this point. He considers seven background variables, two contextual variables, and eight attitudinal variables to probe the questions of who supports public schooling and why. See chapter 4.
47 Public opinion seems reasonably well connected to values and interests. High-income parents are less sympathetic to regulation while the socially disadvantaged support both vouchers and regulation.
48 See Hochschild and Scovronick 2003.
49 According to the survey evidence gathered here, professional educators seem relatively complacent about the quality of urban education. They report far fewer problems with the schools than others do, perhaps because they are emotionally invested in their own organizations.
50 See Putnam 2000.
51 During 1993–1994, civic mobilization was judged based on the "breadth, cohesion, and durability of the education reform coalition" (77).
52 Some evidence is presented to show that high-mobilization cities exert more effort to raise school revenues, but Stone and his coauthors downplay spending as an unreliable measure of educational success. High-mobilization cities spend more on schooling and exert more revenue "effort," meaning that these cities raise more revenue after correcting for per capita income.
53 The research teams were asked to rate each city based on whether the city was undertaking these reform strategies. There is real danger of circularity here. These "systemic" reform strategies are only vaguely described. Without details, it is not possible to assess this composite index of "systemic reform effort." *Building Civic Capacity* lacks extensive methodological discussions and a methodological appendix.
54 If the form of a policy—its "systemic" or "piecemeal" character—is confused with its substance, the result will be misplaced confidence in policies of a certain character. The authors do, in the final chapter, criticize "contemporary school reform panaceas"—namely *"programmatic reforms,"* such as new ideas about "curriculum, teaching methods, professional development," as well as *"institutional changes"* in the relationship between the school board and the mayor or an increased use of market forces (141–2, italics in original). But what chapter 7 calls "panaceas" look very much like what chapter 6 describes as the components of successful "systemic reform" (cf. 130, see above). Reforms enacted individually are mere "panaceas," whereas those amalgamated into a package are considered successful.
55 We need to be careful about language and normative assumptions. Calling something a "reform" may beg the question of whether it constitutes a genuine improvement. To equate *systemic reform* with *substantial educational improvement* is to allow words to work a sort of rhetorical alchemy. Likewise, to write off "piecemeal" reforms or small-scale experiments as mere "policy churn"—without any argument—begs all sorts of questions.
56 *Milliken v. Bradley*, 814–5.
57 *Campaign for Fiscal Equity* 2001, 187 Misc. 2d at 14.
58 *Campaign for Fiscal Equity* 2002, 14, 32.
59 This is the two-year goal of the new American Political Science Association Standing Committee on Civic Education and Engagement, which I chair.
60 Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997.

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