

# POLICY REPORT

Number 3

REPORTING ON POLICY ISSUES IN K-12 EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Summer 2002

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## Corporate Involvement in School Reform

**American business is playing an increasingly active role in transforming American schools.**

*“The business community will be looking over education’s shoulder as the State Department moves toward revising New Jersey’s core curriculum content standards,” declared New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce President Joan Verplanck at a hearing before the Committee on Education and the Workforce in 1999 (U.S. Committee on Education and the Workforce 1999).*

**Some education leaders view the business community’s involvement as interference and interpret some of the goals of the nation’s leading business advocates of school reform as self-serving.**

Indeed, as Verplanck promised, at local, state, and national levels, the business community has been “looking over education’s shoulder” in recent years and has become more of a presence in the meeting rooms of boards of education and in the classrooms of schools across the country. (See “Business Partnerships with Schools,” a companion *Policy Brief* published by the Clearinghouse in fall 2001.)

This report focuses on business involvement in school reform, an increasingly significant trend that is welcomed by some educators and policymakers and discouraged by others.

First, the history of business’s role in attempting to improve schools is briefly mentioned. Then the goals of both education and of business are outlined. A section on reform program implemented around the country assesses some of the positive

### Topics Addressed

- A recent history of business involvement in school reform in the United States
- The goals and strategies of business in school reform
- The methods through which business initiates and fosters school reform
- School-reform programs in action
- Participants in reform efforts from the business community
- The goals of education in school reform
- Ethical and financial concerns about business’s role in school reform
- Partnership building

## Policy Report

Number 3, Summer 2002

Reporting on Policy Issues in K-12  
Educational Management

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results that business-sponsored initiatives can produce.

Another section examines some of the problems, intrinsic and inferred, that come with business participation in education. And a number of examples are cited and questions raised to help educators and policymakers decide what level of business involvement is right for their districts.

## Professional Educators' Perspective

School reform has been a constant issue in this country since the days of Horace Mann (1796-1859). The participation of corporate America, however, is a recent development.

Some education leaders view the business community's involvement as interference and interpret some of the goals of the nation's leading business advocates of school reform as self-serving. Critics have objected to goals such as the following:

- Transform public schools into efficient "pipelines" that produce skilled, technologically adept workers. "Workplace skills should be infused into every lesson plan and every curriculum unit" (Verplanck, in U.S. CEW 1999).
- Tie federal funding to educational outcomes rather than to inputs. "Focus federal funds on getting results, not on sustaining programs" (Rust, in U.S. CEW 1999).
- Expand the use of private-sector technology in public schools while decreasing the federal government's role as regulator and developer of educational content. "The federal government should not establish content standards, or fund the development of digital content applications that compete with the private sector" (Collins, in U.S. CEW 1999).
- Increase the business community's involvement in day-to-day school operations by, for example, recruiting principals from the business sector rather than the teaching ranks; allowing business leaders to teach through "alternative certification programs"; providing teachers with industry-related experience and evaluations; and increasing the num-

ber of school-business partnerships (U.S. CEW 1999).

The present wave of reforms centers more on the needs of business than did earlier school-reform efforts by the business community, according to BellSouth Foundation president Patricia Willis:

The first ten years of our involvement was not really connecting our workforce interest. It was a very social concern that was appropriate, but it didn't engage us in our gut, which is our workforce. I think it is now, more in the last five to seven years, especially with the labor market as tight as it is, that we have seen a new challenge. That is, to create the system between education and the workplace that brings us into the operations on a day-to-day basis. Not just giving away attendance awards, but really figuring out not just our role, but what our responsibility is. What can't they do without us that is going to get us what we need? (Willis, in U.S. CEW 1999)

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**Generally, business advocates of school reform seek to improve American society, including American business, by improving American education.**

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Some educators worry that the next wave of reforms initiated by the business community may call for schools to shed their bricks and mortar and relocate, for example, to cyberspace, to virtual learning environments in workplaces and shopping malls.

Contemplating the emergence of online schools and other technological breakthroughs, Ford Motor Company's work-force development director Renee Lerche envisioned "a new kind of schooling process" at the 1999 hearing:

What will education look like? Will our focus on schools shift to a focus on learning environments and communities that are fluid and more virtual than bricks and mortar? Is it wise, therefore, to invest billions of dollars in building

or rehabbing schools and classrooms as we know them? Or should we be looking at creating a variety of learning not necessarily in school-building environment [but] in workplaces, cultural institutions, and even shopping malls, that offer [sic] the potential of more direct involvement of the community in shaping a new kind of schooling process? (Lerche, in U.S. CEW 1999)

## Business Leaders' Position

Individual business leaders, corporations, and industry groups such as the National Alliance of Business, Business Roundtables, and the Business Coalition for Education Reform see the role of business in education differently than educators do. Generally, business advocates of school reform seek to improve American society, including American business, by improving American education. "Education is everyone's business" is one of the key concepts, for example, of the Business Coalition for Education Reform:

To ensure that students are prepared to face the challenges they will meet in the

workplace and in life, it is critical that all students have the following:

1. Rigorous curricula that enable them to meet achievement expectations outlined by local, state, and national standards in math and science.
2. Qualified teachers that are competent in subject matter and teaching practices.
3. Opportunities to understand why business cares about improving math and science achievement for a more qualified workforce and a more informed citizenry. (Business Coalition for Education Reform 2002)

The Business Roundtable has recently become more involved in shaping education policy through legislation.

The business community has joined with educators, parents, and concerned citizens to support a bill that focuses on:

- High standards for all students, teachers, and schools.
- Annual statewide testing in reading and math in grades 3-8 and state par-

ticipation in the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a cross-state comparison of educational progress.

- Investments in teacher recruitment, training, and professional development.
- Help for low-performing students and schools to give every child the tools to succeed.
- Accountability provisions that reward schools for success and improvement, provide consequences for schools that persistently fail to educate, and offer states flexibility in the use of federal funds in return for demonstrating improvements in student achievement.
- Investments in math and science, with an emphasis on the effective use of technology. (Business Roundtable 2002)

Whether seen as a magnanimous partner or a selfish interloper, America's business community seems destined to play a role in school reform. This report provides an overview and guidelines for business-education cooperation in the effort to help the nation's youth reach their potential.

# A Brief History of Business Involvement in School Reform

**A weak economy initially aroused corporate America's latest interest in education.**

*“The business community has been working to play a more active and long-term role in education since the early 1980s, when the United States faced a crisis in productivity and international competition” (Mickelson 1999).*

## The Slumping 1980s

The U.S. Department of Education's seminal 1983 report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* helped to tie the fate of business to the cause of school reform. The report "was born in the deep economic recession of the early 1980s, at a time

when U.S. business leaders were seeing their global market share disappear into the hands of foreign competitors," observed John Bonstingl (2001), president of the Center for Schools of Quality and chair of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's Quality Education Network. The

report pointed to mediocre educational performance as the root cause of the nation's economic crisis:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competi-

tors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. (U.S. Department of Education 1983)

## The Booming 1990s

The focus of the business critique shifted, however, when the economy showed signs of improving. “In the early 1990s, the business press began to report that the U.S. economy had regained its position as the most productive in the world” (Mickelson 1999). Business leaders then began to emphasize the need to prepare students for high-tech jobs. “Critics claim that public schools are failing to prepare students for future information-age jobs that will require advanced knowledge of technology” (Mickelson 1999).

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**Throughout the booming 1990s, businesses began to make increasing demands on schools to prepare students for the high-tech, information-based workplace of the future.**

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Throughout the 1990s, business leaders had to deal with a “corporate environment that has been likened to turbulent, white-water rapids” (Mickelson 1999). Mickelson identified three critical features of this “fierce environment”:

1. Intense globalization that demands both national and international competitiveness.
2. The growing, changing diversity of the modern work force.
3. The technological revolution that sets the stage for an information- and communication-driven economy.

These three factors continue to affect the economic stability of the United States and the rest of the world and to further American business’s interest in education.

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**“In a recent survey of 196 U.S. businesses conducted by the Conference Board, it was reported that the corporate contributions from these companies amounted to \$1.8 billion each year for improving education. This is only a partial account of the contributions made and does not include contributions of time and volunteers, and partnerships.”**

**—Thomas Petri, vice chair of the Committee on Education and the Workforce (U.S. CEW 1999)**

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This perception was echoed by former Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos, “who observed in 1989 that the U.S. faced three deficits—the budget, trade, and education deficits—and that the first two would only be remedied after the last one was resolved” (Mickelson 1999).

The business critique of education was intensified and strengthened during the Reagan and senior Bush Administrations, which “embraced both market principles and the precept that privatization is the antidote to flawed, inefficient governmental bureaucracies” (Mickelson 1999).

In 1989, “business leaders indirectly shaped the course and direction of school reform through their pivotal role in the first National Education Summit” (Mickelson 1999).

The business community’s response to the demands of the new economy included an effort to transform the schools that produce their domestic supply of workers. Thomas Petri, vice chair of the U.S. Committee on Education and the Workforce, observed at the 1999 hearing:

In recent years there has been increased interest on the part of the business community in the area of education reform. Because the quality of the U.S. educational system has a direct impact on the skills of American workers, and ultimately on the ability of American businesses to compete, both domestically and internationally, this has become an issue of economics, as well as of social concern. (U.S. CEW 1999)



# How Business Helps Shape Change in Education

**Business leaders, by teaming up with education leaders, are furthering the goals of business while helping to provide reform, research, and resources for schools.**

*Through national organizations such as the Business Roundtable groups, the National Alliance of Business, the Education Excellence Partnership, the Business Coalition for Education Reform, the Committee for Economic Development, and chambers of commerce throughout the country, business leaders have been reaching out to education officials, policymakers, and the media to help shape the movement to reform educational goals and standards at local, regional, and national levels.*

A report sponsored by the BellSouth Foundation stated:

Business involvement in education grew out of enlightened self-interest and, over the last two decades, has taken different forms. It has evolved from providing materials and volunteers to individual schools to concern about state education policy. Many businesses [have] invested in the creation of public policy organizations that could act on behalf of the business community and other private citizens to promote specific education reforms. (Kronley 2000)

## Two Models for Corporate Involvement

### *The Columbia Group*

One of the more active organizations involved in school reform is the Columbia Group, established in 1995 in Columbia, South Carolina. The Columbia Group is a network of regional nonprofit public-policy organizations in nine Southeastern states. The network receives funding from SERVE, a regional educational organization; private foundations such as BellSouth Foundation; and corporations throughout the Southeast.

According to the BellSouth report, "Columbia Group organizations... have taken a general business interest in improved education and out of it crafted

coherent and vital education reform programs" (Kronley 2000).

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**"Business involvement in education grew out of enlightened self-interest and, over the last two decades, has taken different forms."**

**—Kronley (2000)**

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To foster economic development, the Columbia Group advocates training to produce highly skilled employees. It hopes to improve schools and educational programs as a means of attracting new industry to the region, and cultivating sophisticated consumers of high-tech products:

New industries wishing to locate in the South, where costs were significantly less, needed to assure highly skilled employees that the schools awaiting their children were as good as the ones they were being asked to leave. Future employees would be graduates of these schools. Customers were being asked to purchase increasingly sophisticated and expensive products. (Kronley 2000)

### *The Committee for Economic Development*

Established in 1942, the Committee for Economic Development (CED),

## The Columbia Group Network

**The membership of the Columbia Group comprises the following nine organizations:**

- A+ Education Foundation ... Working for Educational Excellence in Alabama ([www.aplusala.org](http://www.aplusala.org))
- The Florida Chamber World Class Education Center ([www.worldclasscenter.org](http://www.worldclasscenter.org))
- Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education ([www.gpee.org](http://www.gpee.org))
- Kentucky's Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence ([www.prichardcommittee.com](http://www.prichardcommittee.com))
- Council For a Better Louisiana ([www.cabl.org](http://www.cabl.org))
- Public School Forum of North Carolina ([www.ncforum.org](http://www.ncforum.org))
- The Public Education Forum of Mississippi ([www.publiceducationforum.org](http://www.publiceducationforum.org))
- South Carolina Business Center for Excellence in Education (phone: (803) 799-4601)
- Tennessee Tomorrow, Inc. ([www.tntomorrow.org](http://www.tntomorrow.org))

a national research and advocacy organization composed of some 200 business leaders and university presidents, provides another model of business advocacy of school reform. The

## CED's Mission Statement

*The Committee for Economic Development (CED) is an independent, nonpartisan organization of business and education leaders dedicated to policy research on the major economic and social issues of our time and the implementation of its recommendations by the public and private sectors. CED is:*

- Common ground for some of the best minds in business and academia—from the United States and throughout the world.
- An organization to which government, policy, and media leaders turn for reliable, nonpartisan policy guidance.
- A catalyst for community action.
- A respected business voice on national and international issues.
- A resource for the business community's own policy-oriented activities.

SOURCE: [www.ced.org/about/mission.htm](http://www.ced.org/about/mission.htm)

CED promotes education reform at the national level to improve the quality of America's work force. "CED has long supported efforts to enhance the well being of young children as an essential element of a broad strategy for strengthening the nation's human resources" (CED 2001).

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**Corporate goals for education reform often incorporate ideals for citizenship along with academic accomplishment.**

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Building on its "previous path breaking work in education reform," the CED has embarked on a research project that will focus on early child-

hood education, K-12 education, and postsecondary education.

In February 2002, CED released the first results of its research. In its first policy statement, *Preschool for All: Investing in a Productive and Just Society*, CED asserted that all children whose parents want them to participate should have access to high-quality classes offered by a variety of providers before they enter kindergarten. In a report on K-12 education, *Measuring What Matters*, CED praised testing and accountability as keys to improving learning.

Through both policy analysis and strategic partnerships with organizations such as the National Governors Association, CED intends to further mobilize the business community to foster systemic improvements in early childhood investments and to help identify and disseminate best practices. "CED's K-12 efforts will engage business leaders in sustaining support for performance measurement in education and in identifying and overcoming barriers to delivering public education in new ways" (CED 2001).

## Business Goals

Deron Boyles (1999) noted that in their call for educational improvements, corporations also shape and subsequently invoke "national goals,

## Enlightened Self-Interest

*The enlightened self-interest of corporate advocates for school reform commonly translates into the following business goals:*

- Cultivate a reliable source of skilled entry-level workers for high-tech jobs.
- Transfer work-force training costs from the private sector to the public sector.
- Improve schools to attract relocating businesses and foster economic development.
- Cultivate sophisticated consumers of expensive, high-tech products.
- Help shape national goals.

SOURCES: Mickelson (1999) and Kronley (2000)

particularly those that celebrate the need for international comparisons and increased competitiveness, to qualify what teaching entails and what success connotes" (Boyles 1999). In the 1990s,

## Business Reform Strategies

*Businesses use the following methods to achieve school reform:*

- Lobbying.
- Utilizing the "bully pulpit" in support of school reform (Mickelson 1999).
- Working with research and advocacy organizations.
- Networking with other businesses.
- Serving on task forces and school advisory boards.
- Forming partnerships with schools to develop curriculum, offer students career guidance, and assist with technology skill development.
- Donating corporate resources (Mickelson 1999).
- Conducting research, which includes empirical studies, information gathering, and fact finding.
- Disseminating research results to the public.
- Presenting workshops in leadership development.

SOURCE: Adapted from Kronley (2000) unless otherwise indicated

according to Boyles, the business community promoted especially the following three national education goals for the 21st century:

- American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
- American students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
- Every adult in America will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. (National Educational Goals Panel 1995, in Boyles)

Specific education goals and reforms vary from organization to organization. Following are some of the goals that corporate advocates for school reform are working toward:

- Revise skill and knowledge standards.
- Incorporate vital job skills into the curriculum.
- Improve the professional development of teachers through industry-related work experience and training.
- Provide students with opportunities for “real life” applications of their knowledge and skills through school-to-work programs and career-related partnerships.
- Ensure that all students are able to read, write, and make use of technological resources.
- Lower dropout rates.
- Measure student performance through state-mandated tests.
- Increase teacher and school accountability for student performance.
- Reform school funding.



# Reform in Action

**The depth of business involvement in school reform varies widely. By examining business-advocated school reforms in action, educators and policymakers can determine what is appropriate for their schools.**

## Lessons from Texas

*In 1990, realizing a need for reform, several members of the Board of Education of the Houston, Texas, Independent School District (HISD) set out to implement change in the district’s schools. Their first assignment was to create a mission statement, which they titled Beliefs and Visions.*

*The statement stressed four points:*

1. HISD exists to support the relationship between the teacher and the student.
  2. HISD must decentralize.
  3. HISD must focus on performance, not compliance.
  4. HISD must require a common core of academic subjects for all students.
1. The superintendent and the majority of the school board members must share a common vision and work together for an extended period to make urban school reform possible.
  2. Boards of education cannot reform urban school districts, or probably any school districts, without superintendent leadership. Only superintendents can lead change; boards can create environments in which reform can take place.
  3. Nontraditional superintendents might be the most effective reformers. These would include strong leaders with political and management skills as well as broad experience in areas other than education.
  4. Only minority leaders can reform America’s urban school districts, with a few rare exceptions. Race matters.
  5. School district administrators and building principals are the people who develop reform policies, put them into practice, and make them work.
  6. The focus on school reform should be on results, not methods.
  7. School trustees must not accept low levels of performance from poor children.
  8. Partisan politics must stay out of the board of education room.

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**“I believe business and community leadership in school board elections is essential and the key to improving urban schools. Without it, long-term reform is probably impossible.” —Donald McAdams**

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The school-reform efforts in Houston continue today. The struggles and successes of the Houston experience have been chronicled by school board member Donald R. McAdams in a book *Fighting To Save Our Urban Schools... and Winning! Lessons from Houston.*

Some of McAdams’ ideas for reform are controversial, but he believes that all school districts can learn from twelve important points that came from the reform efforts of the Houston Independent School District:

9. Business leaders play an important role in urban school reform.
10. Urban school reformers need help from the state.
11. The core issue in urban school reform is governance.
12. The root cause of failing urban schools is apathetic citizens who do not vote and have a limited understanding of the realities of urban education. (Delisio 2001)

## **A Study from Michigan**

John W. Sipple of Cornell University examined the actions and efforts of a group of business leaders from several large corporations in Michigan called the MI-Roundtable. Specifically, he explored “the direct and indirect influences and constraints on the formation and activity of the MI-Roundtable as it attempted to alter educational policy in Michigan” (Sipple 1999).

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**A study of a coalition of business and education groups in Michigan suggested that, given sufficient information and time to reflect on the complex issues of school reform, it is possible for leaders in business and in education to agree and to work together on improvement in the schools.**

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The Michigan Roundtable, like other state Business Roundtables, is an association of chief executive officers of major corporations who examine public issues, including educational issues, that affect economic performance. The Business Roundtables advocate vigorous economic growth, a dynamic global economy, and a well-trained and productive American workforce.

Although Sipple’s study focused mainly on organizational activity within institutional sectors, he discovered that coalitions of leaders in education and business working together for school reform can be a strong posi-

tive force. Furthermore, he found that the goals of business, often assumed to be self-serving, can shift to be more attuned to those of its partners in education. “The MI-Roundtable, after coming into contact with university consultants, shifted its view of the problems from inefficiency and lack of effort to a lack of high-quality curriculum and assessment program” (Sipple 1999).

Based on his study, Sipple recommended three policy reforms for educators:

1. Policy reform advocated by business should not be blindly criticized and ignored. This study showed that business leaders functioning within the education sector—much to the surprise of some educators and policy leaders—are capable of developing a thoughtful and long-term approach to school reform.
2. Laying blanket criticism on business groups getting involved in education reform may serve only to antagonize the business leaders and heighten their mistrust of educators.
3. Garnering the support of business leaders for a given set of reform ideas (also supported by educators) broadens the support base and influence in policy arenas. (Sipple 1999)

Sipple acknowledged that his Michigan study, however comprehensive, dealt with only a single interest group. He recommended further studies of corporate involvement in school reform.

## **Recording Achievement in Maryland**

The Maryland Business Roundtable (MRT) and its partners have launched a school-reform effort called Achievement Counts. The statewide campaign was created to demonstrate the connection between achievement in school and success in the workplace.

One of the major goals of the Achievement Counts campaign is to make student educational records more meaningful, helpful, and available to students and employers. (*N.B.*: The privacy of student records is protected by

the Buckley Amendment, a federal law. The statute provides that personally identifiable education records can be released only with the consent of an adult student or parents of younger students.)

Making transcripts part of the hiring process will let students know that what—and how well—they do in school is important to prospective employers. It also tells them that the harder they work, the better their chances are for a good job. Too often, students don’t see the relevance of what they are learning in school to their life after school. Business needs to help make that connection. (Maryland Business Roundtable 2002)

Led by volunteers from the business community, committees were formed to gather input from human-resources directors and to answer their questions about student records. MRT also conducted workshops for human-resources directors and educators to help develop a transcript policy. As a result, many Maryland employers, large and small, have established or indicated they are interested in establishing a policy to use high school transcripts in their hiring decisions.

Making the transcript more meaningful is not the only goal of the Achievement Counts campaign:

The campaign is designed not only to send a strong message to students that their performance in school matters, but also to provide opportunities for graduates. We see the campaign as a win-win-win situation: students will work harder and be better prepared to succeed in the workplace and in college; more opportunities will be available to high school graduates; and employers will get a better qualified workforce. (Maryland Business Roundtable 2002)

The Achievement Counts campaign is supported by a large coalition of businesses of all sizes, chambers of commerce, charitable foundations, professional and trade organizations, and local governments. Cash and in-kind contributions come from such diverse groups as Bank of America, State Farm Insurance Company, Allegheny Energy, the Aber D. Unger Foundation, Mary-



land State Department of Education, Maryland Association of Elementary School Principals, and Maryland State Teachers Association, all under the guidance and administration of MRT.

## **Learning... to Work in Illinois**

One school district responded in a unique way to the business community's all-too-familiar call for a trained work force to help the United States compete in the global marketplace. The response of policymakers, teachers, and parents in School District 21 in Wheeling, Illinois, was a three-year initiative called Learning... To Work.

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**Educators often feel that business-advocated school reforms are an indictment of the education system. But, by most indicators, student achievement is high. The issue, according to the business community, is that the learning in the classroom doesn't keep pace with the demands of the marketplace.**

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Learning... To Work was unique in that it was designed for middle-school students and teachers, a segment usually passed over in most school-reform efforts. The program "exposes middle school students and their teachers to an education rich in both academic and practical work-related experiences" (National Alliance of Business 1999).

Learning... To Work offered students opportunities to:

- Explore career options through in-class activities and business-sponsored lessons in the workplace.
- Learn the skills and knowledge they'll need to excel in the 21st century.
- Cultivate an early respect for academic excellence and develop the self-confidence to master more advanced skills in high school. (National Alliance of Business 1999)

## **The Baldrige in Education Initiative**

*In 1999, 26 national business and education organizations, including the National Alliance of Business and the American Productivity & Quality Center, joined to form Baldrige in Education Initiative (BiE IN).*

### **Mission**

The consortium's stated mission is "to create a high performing education system that continually improves student performance by developing a common language, understanding, and approach at all system levels" ([www.nab.com/baldrige.htm](http://www.nab.com/baldrige.htm)).

### **Goals**

Baldrige in Education Initiative has three major goals:

1. To forge and maintain a national partnership to align policy and practice.
2. To partner with state and local leadership teams to accelerate deployment of Baldrige-based improvement strategies and share lessons learned.
3. To provide materials and assistance to key stakeholder groups nationwide that reinforce their participation at all levels of the education system. ([www.nab.com/baldrige.htm](http://www.nab.com/baldrige.htm))

### **Values**

The Baldrige in Education Initiative has adapted a set of eleven core values based on the need to engage students in the learning process and to help them attain the highest standards:

1. Visionary leadership that creates and balances value for students and stakeholders.
2. Learning-centered education that places the focus of education on learning and the real needs of students.
3. Organizational and personal learning that is directed not only toward better educational programs and services but also toward being more flexible, adaptive, and responsive to the needs of students and stakeholders.
4. Valuing faculty, staff, and partners by leadership who is not only dependent upon but committed to the knowledge, skills, innovative creativity, and motivation of its workforce.
5. Agility with an explicit focus on faster and more flexible responses to needs of students and stakeholders.
6. Focus on the future that takes into account both short-term and longer-term factors that affect the organization.
7. Managing for Innovation to improve the organization and create value for students and stakeholders.
8. Management by fact that uses performance measurement to focus on improving student learning.
9. Public responsibility and citizenship that goes beyond mere compliance.
10. Focus on results and creating value as the means to improving student learning and building loyalty.
11. Systems perspective that provides a keen understanding of alignment as a strategy for improving the overall organization. (BiE IN 2002)

Businesses large and small—such as Apple Computer, Motorola, United Airlines, LaSalle National Bank, and Le Francais Restaurant—were deeply involved in the program. Each business partner worked with three middle schools in the district:

- Offering structured work-based learning experiences for teachers over the summer.
- Providing staff with job shadowing and teacher-in-residence opportunities.
- Conducting tours of facilities.
- Teaching classes.
- Helping to develop school-based curricula.
- Delivering presentations about work to students. (National Alliance of Business 1999)

Teacher involvement and development were an important component of Learning... To Work. Teachers spent time in the workplace observing business processes and meeting with managers and workers to discuss work and school issues. One seventh-grade teacher, for example, spent several days at a hospital and came away with ideas on how to better design math lessons based on the day-to-day challenges in the health-care field.

From their short sabbaticals in the workplace, teachers also developed curricula, called “problem-based learning units,” that integrated academic and work-based learning. One unit established a catering service, in which students learned food preparation and accounting, marketing, and other business skills. These instructional initiatives have gained acceptance, and one has received special recognition from the National Middle School Association.

The experience of School District 21 has shown that by working together, educators and business leaders can create reform measures that produce positive results.



# Business Partners in School Reform

## Constituencies

*The constituencies identified by business advocates for educational reform vary throughout the country. Following is a sample of constituencies identified by the Columbia Group, a large advocacy network comprised of nine nonprofit organizations throughout the Southeast. The number of times the nine organizations within the Columbia Group identified each constituency is provided as an indication of which constituencies are most emphasized.*

- Policymakers (9)
- Educators (including education officials) (9)
- Business leaders (9)
- The general public (7)
- Civic leaders (7)
- The media (5)
- Parents (2)

SOURCE: Kronley (2000)

## Corporate Agents of School Reform

*The following types of organizations and individuals from the business community are involved in school reform:*

- Individual firms
- Professional organizations
- Large independent foundations
- Elite corporate heads
- Midlevel executives
- Small business owners
- Corporate employees, hourly wage earners working in ongoing reform programs
- Corporate leaders as educational decision-makers (for example, school board members, elected or appointed officials in federal bureaucracy)

SOURCE: Adapted from Mickelson (1999)



# Education Goals

**A**lthough specific educational concerns vary according to organization and region, most corporate advocates for school reform promote one or more of the following goals for education:

## ***Prepare students for the workplace***

- Promote school-to-work initiatives (for example, the Workforce and Education Act of 1994).
- Incorporate workplace skills and competencies into the curriculum.
- Implement a technology-based curriculum.
- Increase business input in schools' curriculum, standards, and finance decisions.
- Increase the number and quality of school-business partnerships.

## ***Raise academic achievement levels***

- Raise academic standards (for example, math and science skills, literacy).
- Improve teacher quality through teacher education programs and scholarships.
- Reduce teacher shortages (for example, through research on teacher "pipeline" issues and legislation that provides incentives for teachers to relocate to critical shortage areas).

- Increase community and parent involvement in school policies and activities.
- Conduct research in collaboration with government research organizations (for example, SERVE, the federal education research laboratory for the Southeast).

## ***Reform school funding***

- Raise public and private funds for schools.
- Increase business sponsorship of schools.
- Promote vouchers, school choice, and charter schools.
- Tie school accreditation, and therefore funding, to student performance on standards-based assessments and exit exams (for example, the South Carolina Education Accountability Act of 1998).

SOURCE: Adapted from Kronley (2000)



# Educators' Misgivings About Corporate Involvement

**While school-reform efforts initiated by corporations generally are instituted with the best intentions, some critics have concerns about the role of business in school reform.**

## Three Major Concerns

### 1. Lack of Accountability to the Public

Despite their call for school accountability, corporate advocates for school reform are not themselves accountable to the public, according to Mickelson (1999): "Because corporations are private entities, there is no legal imperative for public disclosure of goals, processes, and resources."

Mickelson cited a Charlotte, North Carolina, reform initiative that was announced to the public only after its terms had been shaped by corporate leaders:

Once citizens in Charlotte scrutinized the proposed Education Village, they found that what appeared to be a tidy integration of work, school, and family

was a reform initiative shaped to a considerable degree by the strategic interests of a handful of private firms. (Mickelson 1999)

### 2. Lack of Systematic Evaluation

While many corporate advocates of school reform promote corporate grants and partnerships with schools, few systematic evaluations have been conducted to determine the educational value of these activities.

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**As far back as 1983, the U.S. Department of Education called on schools to help solve industry's problems, suggesting that the economic crisis of the 1980s was attributable to the failings of schools.**

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According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, no central data source tracks the value of corporate contributions to precollege education. As for school-business partnerships, Mickelson (1999) observed: "There are few if any systematic evaluations of these programs," and therefore, "very little reliable evidence that these, in fact, lead to positive outcomes for students."

### 3. Diversion of Public Attention from Larger Problems

*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, the U.S. Department of Education's seminal report, suggested that a significant source of the problem with schools lay in the multitude of often conflicting demands placed on educators who were routinely called on to solve "personal, social, and

political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve" (U. S. Department of Education 1983).

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**Employer dissatisfaction tends to be associated with employees' work ethic, not their skills, and technology cannot address that dissatisfaction. —Mickelson (1999)**

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The report warned, "We must understand that these demands on our schools and colleges often exact an educational cost as well as a financial one." Nevertheless, the report called on schools to help solve industry's problems, suggesting that the economic crisis was attributable to the failings of schools and calling for greater accountability and higher standards.

Bonstingl (2001) questioned the link between the economic decline of the 1980s and the next generation's mediocrity in school: "Never mind that the implied cause of our country's poor economic and industrial health in the early 1980s was pinned on the educational failure of people who were only kids during the economic decline."

## Reforming Schools While Cutting School Taxes

In his presidential address to the Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society in 1999, Deron Boyles raised "the basic question regarding why schools are faced with shortages in funds for the very computers grocery chains are supplying in the first place" (Boyles 1999).

## What Worries Educators

**C**ritics warn against corporate school-reform efforts that:

- Are more self-serving than they are "enlightened."
- Take place without adequate disclosure to the public.
- Are accompanied by conflicting practices such as lobbying for cuts in the very taxes that fund schools.
- Focus on the wrong problems facing schools.
- Equate education with workforce preparation.

## What Is an Adequate Level of Funding for Schools?

*In a “seismic shift,” school-finance litigation now emphasizes educational adequacy rather than equal provision of resources to students, according to Lawrence Picus, professor and chair of the Division of Administration and Policy at the Rossier School of Education, and director of the Center for Research in Education Finance at the University of Southern California.*

As Picus (2000) put it: “Adequacy shifts the focus of school finance reform from inputs to outcomes.” After examining a number of school-finance lawsuits, he observed: “This spate of lawsuits shows the importance of determining the cost of providing an adequate education for every child” (Picus 2000). He also wrote: “It is important to understand the legal definitions of adequacy, the approaches of various states, and the issues school district officials should consider as they seek to provide adequate education to all of the children in their district” (Picus 2000).

Picus acknowledged the challenge involved in defining *educational adequacy*: “Finding an acceptable definition of adequacy is not easy; there has not been a lot of agreement over what constitutes an adequate education” (Picus 2000).

However, one of his first steps in that direction yields a remarkably clear and detailed definition of educational adequacy. Picus described an early judicial ruling:

Perhaps the first judicial attempt to define an adequate education was in

West Virginia’s *Pauley v. Kelley* in 1979. In that ruling, the court defined an adequate education as one that teaches students literacy; the ability to add, subtract, multiply, and divide numbers; knowledge of government to the extent that each child will be equipped as a citizen to make informed choices; self-knowledge and knowledge of the total environment so as to allow each child to choose life work intelligently; work training and advanced academic training if a child chooses; recreational pursuits; all creative arts, such as music, theater, literature, and the visual arts; and social ethics, both behavioral and abstract, to facilitate compatibility with others. (Picus 2000)

Although Picus does not discuss the relationship between educational adequacy and work-force training in his article, his observations bring important legal considerations to view as corporate advocates seek to shape and reform public education.

Boyles questioned the consistency of corporate leaders who advocate for school reform but oppose paying school taxes. He cited Jonathan Kozol, author of *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools*: “City and state business associations, in Chicago as in many other cities, have lobbied for years against tax increments to finance education of low-income children” (Kozol 1991, quoted by Boyles).

From the standpoint of education, advocating for schools while opposing the payment of taxes that will be used to financially support these schools

might appear contradictory. However, from the standpoint of corporate interests, this strategy makes good business sense. Boyles noted that as charitable donors, corporations receive tax incentives, a beneficent public image, and the ability to influence the curriculum and purpose of schools to meet their own needs:

Corporations would rather “donate” computers than pay taxes because “donations” can be curtailed. Corporations benefit doubly. They enjoy tax breaks for locating in their respective municipi-

palities and, with only some of the money they would pay in taxes, cast themselves as beneficent charities and responsible members of the community. In so doing, corporate interests are able to leverage the curriculum as well as the general purposes of schooling by reinforcing the community belief that schools exist to prepare future workers. (Boyles 1999)

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**Even though funding from corporations is welcome, critics, as well as educational organizations, maintain that taxpayers, not businesses, are responsible for the adequacy of public-school programs.**

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## Equating Education with Work-Force Preparation

Boyles raised concerns over corporate school-reform efforts that assume the main purpose of schools is to prepare students for jobs and, reciprocally, to supply companies with workers who meet the companies’ skill specifications. One of the problems “with schools as sites for corporate influence is that it reinforces the assumption that schools primarily exist for workforce preparation” (Boyles 1999).

Boyles called attention to what constitutes an education, over and above work-force skills training. An emphasis on training-oriented schooling over “education-oriented schooling... risks undermining the potential for democratic citizenship” (Boyles 1999).



# Evaluating Corporate School-Reform Initiatives

## Guidelines for Policymakers

*Educators and policymakers are working with corporate leaders to design and implement a growing number of local and national school-reform initiatives. The following questions are designed to stimulate discussion and provide a basis for guidelines in evaluating specific reforms.*

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**Changes in curriculum initiated and promoted by businesses often equate positive educational outcomes with future employability. Do such objectives agree with the district's objectives?**

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### Initial Inquiries

The following questions could prove particularly useful in evaluating a reform for approval:

- How will students benefit from the reform?
- Does the proposed reform meet the district's standards of educational adequacy?
- What is the advocate's track record on past school-reform efforts or school-business partnerships?
- What was the educational outcome of the advocate's past interactions with schools?
- Does the proposed reform have a proved educational outcome?
- Is the initiative supported by systematic studies of the proposed practice or policy? If so,
- Are there a number of studies conducted by different institutions over the years?
- Are the institutions that conducted and funded the studies credible?
- Do these studies adequately address competing educational theories?

### Likely Effects

School districts generally apply a variety of approaches to the process of defining an adequate education, whereas school reforms advocated by businesses tend to center on the needs of employers, businesses, and the larger economy. School reforms initiated and advocated by businesses often directly or indirectly equate positive educational outcomes with future employability.

Educators evaluating such reforms might consider whether the proposed curriculum change or skills test meets the school district's standards of educational adequacy. They also might consider the possible outcomes of the proposed reform, intended as well as unintended, long-term as well as short-term.

- How does the proposed reform define a positive educational outcome?
- Is this outcome in keeping with district goals?
- Does the outcome complement or potentially undermine an existing successful educational practice or reform?
- How does the proposed reform relate to educational reforms already in effect?
- How will the reform affect other schools within and across districts?
- Is the initiative a systemic educational reform that effectively redefines the mission of public schools in terms of employer/business needs?

In evaluating systemic educational reforms, educators and policymakers might consider judicial rulings that address educational adequacy in their dis-

trict, in their state, and throughout the country.

### Available Funds

Reforms that raise school standards and hold schools accountable for student performance on newly mandated tests without allocating the necessary public funds could result in what critics call "unfunded mandates." Such mandates effectively call on schools to implement reforms using existing (and often already inadequate) funds or face loss of accreditation and closure.

- Does the reform initiative create an unfunded mandate?
- Does the proposed reform allocate adequate public funds to cover the expenses of implementing the reform?
- Have any of the reform's corporate advocates lobbied for tax cuts that resulted in reduced funding for public schools?

### Valued Partners

Mandated reforms not accompanied by adequate funding can pressure schools to turn to school-business relationships they might otherwise forego. Some educators and policymakers have criticized school-business relationships that commercially exploit children in the classroom, compromise the educational mission of public schools, and violate the public's trust.

**Corporations can be energetic and powerful partners with plentiful resources when it comes to school reform. Under what conditions do districts benefit most from such partnerships?**

Moreover, some reforms may increase funds to certain “magnet schools” by diverting public funds from the schools that are suffering the most from lack of funds. Schools hardest hit by such reforms are especially susceptible to forming what many critics consider to be inappropriate and unethical types of school-business partnerships.

- Does the reform directly promote school-business partnerships? If so,
- What are the specific terms of these partnerships?
- Are the partnerships structured to be positive learner-centered partnerships that meet the school’s educational requirements?
- Do the partnerships include commercial activities in the classroom?
- Even if school-business partnerships are not directly promoted, is an increase in the number of corporate sponsorships a reasonably foreseeable effect of the reform?

## Public Input

Parents and members of the local community have a stake in school reform and in most cases should be involved throughout the process.

- Is the approval process open to the public?
- Is there full public disclosure of the goals, processes, and resources of the corporation or corporate advocacy organization lobbying for the reform?
- Was the proposed reform announced to the public at the very outset of the approval process?
- Are the discussions between corporate advocates and local policymakers open to the public?



## Resources

*The following organizations can provide more information about and links to issues surrounding corporate involvement in school reform.*

- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development ([www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org))
- Baldrige in Education Initiative ([www.biein.org](http://www.biein.org))
- BellSouth Foundation ([www.bellsouthfoundation.org](http://www.bellsouthfoundation.org))
- Business Coalition for Education Reform ([www.bcer.org](http://www.bcer.org))
- Business Roundtables ([www.brtable.org](http://www.brtable.org))
- Committee for Economic Development ([www.ced.org](http://www.ced.org))
- Education Excellence Partnership ([www.edex.org](http://www.edex.org))
- Educational Resources Information Center ([www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov))
- National Alliance of Business ([www.nab.org](http://www.nab.org))
- National PTA ([www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org))
- SERVE ([www.serve.org](http://www.serve.org))
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce ([www.uschamber.org](http://www.uschamber.org))
- U.S. Department of Education ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov))

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- Statement of Patricia Willis, president, BellSouth Foundation
- Statement of Susan Collins, senior vice president, Jostens Learning Corporation, on behalf of the Software and Information Industry Association
- Statement of Joan Verplanck, president, New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce
- Statement of Renee Lerche, director, Workforce Development, Ford Motor Company
- Statement of Paul J. Raab, partner, Facilitator Capital Fund
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