

ABSTRACT

The Business Roundtable and Systemic Reform: How Corporate-Engineered High-Stakes Testing Has Eliminated Community Participation in Developing Educational Goals and Policies

Throughout the history of K–12 public education in the United States, parents, teachers, students and other local community members have been able to participate in the development of educational goals and policy through their local school boards. While rarely prevailing, such community participation has led, at times, to schools being responsive to the diversity of opinion among its constituents. Since the early 1980s, however, state governments have seized complete control over the development and delineation of educational policy resulting in the pursuit of an accountability through high-stakes testing agenda in all fifty states. When enacted, this policy has reduced local school boards to implementers rather than creators of policy while giving corporate lobbyists a free hand at the state level to influence the details of education statutes and appointments to the state educational bureaucracy. This development has been orchestrated by one of the most influential organizations of corporate executives in this country — the Business Roundtable.

In the summer of 1989, the national Business Roundtable devoted its entire annual meeting to synthesizing the various business-led reform efforts of the 1980s into the high-stakes testing agenda. Once the agenda was crystallized around what would eventually be referred to as the “nine essential components,” each state’s business coalition was responsible for generating consensus among the state’s business leaders, persuading the governor and state legislators to enact each of the “nine components”, and regularly reporting back to the national Business Roundtable on the progress being made towards establishing state systemic reform.

This dissertation argues and offers evidence in the form of case studies that the advocacy of high-stakes testing agenda by a wide network of nonprofit and government agencies has eliminated public debate over educational goals and justified the

resegregation of the public school system. Goals associated with democracy and desegregation have been eliminated, leaving schools with the narrow charge of educating students to become highly skilled task completers in the New Economy.