

Chapter 2: The Contemporary Scene, Corporate Domination of School Policy

Introduction

The historical and contemporary research on urban school reform indicates that the conflict between community and corporate influence is like that between David and Goliath, but without the probability of divine intervention on behalf of David. While resistance to corporate determination of educational policy may not be futile, the obstacles are great. In the last twenty years, corporate America has been able to convince the public that there is a crisis in education and that only a national campaign can solve this crisis. What follows is an analysis of what appears to be the second fundamental reshaping of the public school system since its inception. Leading corporations, foundations, and state and federal governments have created a partnership during the last twenty years that has pushed for a national campaign of school-wide systemic reform; and this educational reform is inextricably linked to the transformation of the U.S. and global economies.

From 1979 to 1980, Japanese vehicle production superseded U.S. vehicle production (Womack, 1999; p. 248). This represented a major challenge to U.S. economic world hegemony because of the fundamental significance of car and truck production to the American economy. While U.S. production regained its competitiveness by 1983, public debate began to focus on the educational reforms of the 1960s and 1970s as a probable cause for the temporary stumble in U.S. economic growth.¹ The concern expressed by opinion writers critical of the growth of student-centered and multicultural education in the late sixties and early seventies was that this kind of education was not producing students who would be disciplined and intelligent workers. Interestingly, there were few who complained that the sixties' curricula reforms hadn't produced citizens whose political participation went beyond the ballot box. Instead, editorials and state school officials argued for a more "rigorous academic curricula" that was not dismissive of "rote learning" and taught "the basics" so students would be ready for the "real world" and "the future."

This rhetoric successfully combined both the cultural and economic concerns of business leaders. The back-to-basics rhetoric has been successful in minimizing the in-depth study of cultural minorities and the fundamental obstacles to democratic participation in this country. Equally, if not more centrally, the rhetoric of academic rigor also supported educational reforms that seem specifically designed to counter the economic threat from Japanese companies. The reasons for the dramatic increase in Japanese vehicle sales from 1960 to 1980 had to do with the invention and implementation of Total Quality Control or lean production. This allowed Japanese manufacturers to produce reliable cars and trucks at a lower cost than the traditional mass production techniques being used since the turn of the century. The key to lean production was a workforce that had the incentive

and ability to adapt to new production methods, especially to observe and intervene whenever problems arose on the assembly line or in the design process. Unable or unwilling to adopt all of the Japanese techniques to American production practice, U.S. CEOs developed their own versions of lean production. Central to their designs for the New Economy was transforming the structure of the public school system so it would be aligned with their version of lean production.

The Business Roundtable and Systemic Reform

During the 1980s, the leading CEOs in the country knew they wanted fundamental educational reform but had yet to reach consensus as to what that would be. By 1989, they had reached consensus. Since then, the CEOs of the major corporations in the United States have developed structures that allow them to speak with one voice on education.² The primary structure, the Business Roundtable, has taken credit for developing unanimity on educational reform by claiming that it took the lead in “establishing the Business Coalition for Education Reform [BCER], now a 13-member group³ that serves as a unified voice for the corporate community, and in developing a Common Agenda for reform endorsed by the business community . . . Roundtable companies are at the forefront of a national effort by businesses to stimulate academic progress by aligning their hiring, philanthropic and site location practices with our education reform agenda” (Rust, 1999).

The Business Roundtable (BRT) was founded in 1972. It is “an association of chief executive officers who examine public issues that affect the economy and develop positions which seek to reflect sound economic and social principles” (Business Roundtable, 1995; preface. Future references to the Business Roundtable will be listed as BRT). In 1989, CEOs of the nation’s largest 218 corporations met to decide how to promote the National Education Goals developed by the nation’s governors. Their decision to bring the resources of corporate America behind a specific educational reform agenda stemmed from what they saw and continue to see as the threat to the United States’ premier economic status in the world. Edward Rust, chair of the BRT Education Task Force in 1999, explained the economic motive behind their education agenda.

In a global economy built on knowledge and technical skills, employees must be able to do more now than they did a generation ago. And these demands will continue to increase. In 1950, 60 percent of jobs for new workers were classified as unskilled; by 2000, only 15 percent will be . . . The percentage of U.S. companies reporting a lack of skilled employees as a barrier to growth continues to rise—from 27 percent in 1993 to 69 percent last year (Rust, 1999; p.1).

Therefore, in order to increase the number of “skilled” workers necessary for “growth,” the educational system would have to be fundamentally overhauled.

The 1989 Business Roundtable meeting resulted in the promulgation of a nine-point program for educational reform that it became committed to implementing during the next ten years.⁴ The chart below (figure 2.1) reveals that the educational program outlined in 1989 has provided the blueprint for systemic reformers to the present day. The intimate relationship between corporate

CEOs and state governors (described in detail later on) is suggested by the immediate adoption of the BRT's agenda by the nation's governors the following fall. The nine educational goals, as presented in figure 2.1, sound innocuous enough. I will demonstrate, however, that they are not innocuous and are presented as such in order to co-opt any opposition to them.

Figure 2.1
Comparison of Corporate Educational Goals over Time

Summer 1989 BRT Educational Reform Goals (10 year commitment to implement Goals 2000)	Fall 1989 National Education Goals for 2000 (established by President Bush and the nation's governors)	1995 - BRT's "Nine Essential Components of a Successful Education System" (no time frame for implementation)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome based education • Strong and complex assessments of student progress • High expectations for all children • Rewards and penalties for individual schools • Greater school-based decision making • Emphasis on staff development • Establishment of pre-kindergarten programs • Provision of social and health services • Greater use of technology in schools <p>(Gelberg: 1997, p. 133)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students will leave grades 4, 8, 12 showing competence in core subjects • The high school graduation rate will be 90 percent • The United States will be first in the world in math and science • Professional development • All children will start school ready to learn • Every school will create partnerships to increase parental involvement • All adults will be literate • Schools will be free of drugs, violence and weapons <p>(www.negp.gov)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards • Performance Assessment • School Accountability • School Autonomy • Professional Development • Learning Readiness • Parent Involvement • Technology⁵ • Safety and Discipline <p>(BRT, 1995)</p>

In assessing the progress of the Roundtable's ten-year commitment, Rust admitted that it was "a sometimes frustrating but clearly important journey." He noted, however, that some of the individual state BRT coalitions had made progress. This progress has depended upon the intimate relationship between business and state government officials. In Washington State, "Boeing's Frank Srontz worked with Governor Booth Gardner to draft comprehensive reform legislation that passed in 1993. . . . In Kentucky, John Hall of Ashland, David Jones of Humana, and Oz Nelson of UPS personally intervened to save school-improvement legislation" (Rust, 1999).

The heart of BRT's agenda for the last ten years has been to move state governments to establish "rigorous standards" for *all* students (their emphasis) in core academic subjects (math, science, English, and social studies) that are measurable, and then adopt statewide testing to determine whether the standards are being met. If the standards are not met, then students should not be allowed to graduate and the individual school in which those students are found should be "sanctioned." That standards are measurable is crucial to knowing whether the standards are being met. Furthermore, measurable standards are the only way one can "have data that allows one to

guide efforts to achieve higher standards” (BRT, 1996; p. 6). BRT decided to place the focus on standards because “standards drive curriculum, teacher training and assessment” (BRT, 1996; p. 8). Or, in other words, “when standards are high and assessments are geared to such standards, teaching improves and student achievement rises” (BRT, 1998; p. 4).

Since 1989, members of the Business Roundtable have been successful in controlling the content of state standards in order to shape the direction of educational reform. BRT decided to “concentrate on the state level for two reasons. First, under the U.S. Constitution, states have primary responsibility for education. Second, no state had solved the problem of providing high-quality education to students in all localities” (BRT, 1995; p. 1). BRT’s *A Business Leader’s Guide to Setting Academic Standards* (1996) provides several case studies as examples of how business leaders have succeeded in being the ones doing the writing of the state standards. Examples of what BRT considers to be “relevant and rigorous” standards were demonstrated in Fort Worth, Texas. There, three hundred companies analyzed the tasks and knowledge needed for nine hundred different jobs. One survey result indicated that 72 percent of all jobs required a high level of math to be successful (e.g. an entry-level job of putting telephone poles in the ground required geometry). As a result, low-level math was deleted from the high school standards. Every ninth grader was required to take algebra. The curriculum was made even more “relevant” by having English students write “personnel evaluations as well as essays on Shakespeare.” The Texas BRT leaders believed that students would be better motivated to learn to write well “by showing them the importance of academic skills in the real world” (BRT, 1996; p. 21).

When relating what he learned from his experiences in setting state standards in Georgia, Gary Lee, director of the United Parcel Service foundation, offered a particularly effective piece of advice to “other employers” should they encounter any opposition to BRT’s agenda. Lee “urged other employers to remind their communities that U.S. based companies can find skilled workers for everything from manufacturing to software development overseas, adding that companies increasingly decide where to locate their operations both in the United States and abroad on the basis of workforce quality and the performance of local school systems” (BRT, 1996; pp. 26–7).

When developing the science standards in Delaware, Dupont’s Vice President and Chief Technology Officer, Joe Miller, suggested that business leaders make it clear what the goal of these reforms are: “to be the best in the world.”⁶ Japanese and British education standards were used as a basis for comparison to ensure that the Delaware standards were more rigorous than those of other countries. One of the criteria BRT insists that is used in selecting standards and assessment is that they be comparable to international standards. For example, if France or Germany has standards for each grade, then the United States must also have standards written for each grade as opposed to more general standards covering several grade levels.

In summarizing the lessons learned in these case studies, Rust (1999) emphasized that business leaders, in working with educators and other members of the community, “need to help [them] understand the constantly evolving needs of the workplace.” Standards must not be static,

but change as the needs of business change. Business leaders need to show the state standards to entry-level, front line supervisors to get input as to whether the standards help students to be successful on the job. Business leaders also need to show the standards to the people in the company with expertise in the subject; for example, a chemist should look at the chemistry section of the science standards. Input from business is to determine the content of the standards. Input from the community is cultivated in order to get them to “buy in” to the standards. “Don’t tell parents they are wrong . . . [instead] lead them to information sources [like toll free numbers for local BRT coalitions].” BRT knows that “without parental and public support, reform cannot succeed.” Yet it is clear that parents and teachers are to play an advisory role and only then as a means to gain their necessary support. Business insists that it must set the agenda. Rust concludes his assessment of the last ten years with this claim:

It is said that large organizations such as schools “don’t change because they see the light; they change because they feel the heat.” Business Roundtable CEOs have successfully applied the heat on state policy makers, while state coalitions are helping the public and educators see the light about the need for change. We need to keep it up The history of past reform attempts is very clear on this point. If we believe that school reform is vital to the success of America, we cannot — and will not — leave the job to others. There can be no turning back (Rust, 1999).

No Turning Back: Turning Up the Heat

Standards advocates have met periodic resistance to the high-stakes testing program. In order to deal with such resistance, the BRT has published several handbooks detailing effective strategies to deal with opposition. The purpose of the BRT document *Building Support for Tests That Count* (1998) is to “help business leaders be effective advocates for building and sustaining the necessary community support for rigorous assessments and student achievement” (p. 4). The Maryland BRT surveyed candidates during election years and testified in state legislatures. They also reviewed the state test in order to correlate student ability on it to the ability to perform well in the workplace. When MBRT sponsored focus groups of parents, teachers, and principals and discovered widespread concern about the tests, MBRT had the state delay the introduction of the new exams and then used funds from the Anne Casey Foundation to create a 45-member speakers bureau to begin to change the public opposition to the test.

Members of Washington’s BRT coalition, Partners for Leadership⁷, met with newly elected state legislators every two years and served on “cut-score” committees. The Partnership, upon discovering public concern over the reform agenda, launched a media campaign. They created a video and handbook to explain the new standards movement to parents and sponsored workshops for editorial writers, members of the chamber of commerce and community “movers and shakers” on “how to get the word out to the community.” Massachusetts’ Coalition for Higher Standards is now developing local leadership groups to effect school change. The Ohio coalition conducted a survey

that documented the gap between what high school seniors know and what they should know in the workplace. The Partnership for Kentucky's Schools funded an 8-page advertisement insert into the major newspapers in Kentucky as well as distributing 1.5 million copies of it through a direct mailing. The advertisement was translated into a video and aired on television.⁸ They used grants from the PEW Charitable Trust and the Annie Casey Foundation to fund research on professional development for teachers and made presentations to state legislators. McDonalds has sample test questions on its placemats. CEOs have "brown bag lunches" with their employees "to talk to them about the importance of high standards and assessments." The publisher of the Orlando *Sentinel* has encouraged the state education commissioner to meet with editorial boards, teachers, and parent organizations to introduce Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test. [See Appendix C for how the Washington state BRT organization handled its public relations campaign.]

One has to admire the ability of the CEOs of BRT to move state legislatures to adopt standards and assessment practices designed to increase the number of "skilled workers" in this country so United States businesses and the U.S. government can maintain its political and economic hegemony in the world. But in spite of being able to rally powerful political and media forces, the opposition to imposing the kinds of high standards and assessments as described above has continued, if not increased. During the awards dinner on the tenth anniversary of the founding of the 18-member National Goals Panel (12/1/99), Governor Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin proclaimed "Our goals are great We're going in the right direction, but we're going at a very slow speed" (Wilgoren, 1999). The slow speed he was referring to might have been a reference to the withdrawal of the statewide test in Wisconsin in response to parental demands (Steinberg, 1999). The "rumblings" of protest have forced several state legislatures to scale back implementation of the BRT agenda. Steinberg (1999) reported:

. . . that the politicians are tuning in, and responding to such rumblings was obvious in October, when many of the 24 governors who gathered at an education summit meeting in Palisades, N. Y., conceded that they had been taken aback by the "demoralizing effects" of their new policies. In urging them to stay the course, the organizer of the meeting, Louis Gerstner, chairman of the International Business Machines Corporation, asserted: "We understand the pain. And we're going to have to deal with it. But we're not going to deal with it by backing off."⁹

In the spring of 2001, the BRT published *Assessing and Addressing the "Testing Backlash": Practical advice and current public opinion research for business coalitions and standards advocates*. The authors reassured the members of the state BRT organizations that

tests provide important information that educators, parents, and citizens can use to improve school performance and accountability. Recent proposals by the president and other federal leaders on testing and accountability underscore the importance of this agenda (BRT, 2001; p.1).

The authors of *Assessing and Addressing* acknowledged, however, that those working to implement state standards and tests “are challenged by concerns and questions from increasingly vocal parents and teachers” (p.1). But this is to be expected and is part of the process of change.

This “backlash” to higher standards and increased accountability is not a surprise. It is a natural reaction to change and to tougher consequences for poor student performance” (p. 1).

The authors expressed confidence that parents and teachers who oppose the BRT agenda can be “handled” (p. 2). There is no “need to panic” (p. 2). But what is of real concern is that the “media” has “played up this conflict and presented a lopsided view of the issue.” So now “more than ever, the leadership and credibility of the business community is needed [to] address the ‘testing backlash’” (p. 1).

The handbook provided the following suggestions to the business community to help them “address the backlash.”

1. “Anticipate organized opposition” (p. 12)
2. Take advantage of the superior organization and resources of the BRT network (p. 12)
3. “Teachers are especially credible and influential voices [according to polling by Public Agenda¹⁰] but they also are more likely to be concerned about how tests are causing them to change instruction. Adjust state policies, if necessary” (p. 13).
4. “Be thoughtful about separating complaints that the standards are simply too hard from legitimate concerns from teachers about test alignment and lack of instructional support” (p. 14).
5. “Perhaps create an alternative appeals process for students who do not pass the tests but can show they nevertheless have mastered the material” (p. 15).
6. “Make sure assistance, such as after-school tutoring and summer school, is provided immediately to students who do not succeed the first time (p. 16).
7. Don’t back down but don’t rush either. “Changes can be implemented only so quickly by teachers in the classroom, and rushing risks errors that can undermine the overall effort” (p. 16).
8. “Find out what sort of support teachers need, such as sample lessons, classroom assessments, or time to plan with and learn from colleagues” (p. 17).
9. Make sure that “educators, parents and students receive testing results in a timely fashion so they can act on the information and make changes. Help them learn how to access this data, how to analyze it and how to act on it” (p. 17).
10. “Sponsor ‘take-the-test’ days” in order to “allow teachers, parents and citizens to see for themselves what students are expected to know and be able to do . . . If you are concerned that your state’s test might not withstand such public scrutiny, then you must improve the test” (p. 18).
11. “Target key audiences” – those people who can change the minds of those parents and teachers who believe that systemic reform is “too punitive, too rigid and too focused on measuring rather than improving student achievement” (p. 18).
12. “Make sure that people understand that students will have more than one chance to pass [the high school exit exams]” (p. 15).
13. “Remind people why states and communities are raising standards in the first place: Large majorities of employers, college leaders, education experts and citizens say too many American students are failing to leave high school with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college, at work, and in their communities”¹¹ (p. 19).

These suggestions focus on a few fundamental strategies. One is that opposition to systemic reform can be “handled” by more clearly and “proactively” communicating the reasons for such reform to “key audiences” (i.e., use propaganda to divide and conquer). Another one is to identify those changes that can be made in the strategies and tactics that do not alter the basic goal of reform

(i.e., focus public debate over the means to improve test scores without allowing debate over the validity of using test scores to enforce state standards). The ostensible goal of systemic reform is to increase the number of students who can “succeed in college, at work, and in their communities.” But BRT publications never explain how high-stakes testing would accomplish such a goal nor do they define what such success actually means. In the next section, I will to argue that such statements as number 13 above do not reflect the real goals of systemic reform; rather, they are strategic rhetoric being used to silence criticism surrounding the negative effects of high-stakes testing.

Students as Task-Completers, Not Problem-Solvers

Corporate advocates of “high standards” and “excellence for all” promise that systemic reform will increase the skills of graduates allowing them to fill the increasing percentage of high paying, New Economy jobs. All boats will rise with the tide of higher standards. Yet the New Economy has created more unskilled than skilled jobs and the income differences between the wealthy and the working class have never been greater than in the 1990s. Sassen’s (1998) analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) paints a somewhat different picture than the one Edward Rust portrays of the past and the future U.S. labor market.

[The] BLS projects a massive growth of low-wage service jobs, including service jobs catering to firms. Three service industries alone will account for about half of total U.S. employment growth between 1992 and 2005: retail trade, health services, and business services. Using . . . (223 categories), the largest increases in terms of numbers of jobs are, in descending order: retail sales workers, registered nurses, cashiers, truck drivers, waiters and waitresses, nursing aides, janitors, food preparation workers, and systems analysts. Most of these jobs do not require a high school education and they are mostly not very highly paid. Nor does the BLS expect an increase in the median weekly wage of workers. At the other extreme are jobs requiring a college degree. Their share was twenty-three percent in 1992 and is projected to rise only by one percent to twenty-four percent by 2005 (p. 143).

Contrasting these figures to those of Rust suggests that Rust would like to see a larger pool of skilled workers than there are jobs for them in order to keep wages low and profit margins high. Citing research showing that there is “no systemic shortage of appropriately skilled workers for contemporary jobs,” Michelson (2000) believes that corporate leaders are really “dissatisfied with the work ethic of their less skilled employees” (p. 151). Furthermore, “by focusing concern on the public schools, corporate leaders deflect attention from their own contributions to domestic and international productivity problems” (p. 129). Louis Uchitelle (*NY Times*, 2002; A1) described the growth of one sector of the “service economy” – call centers. Those hired to answer customer service 800 numbers represent the fastest growing job category of any major occupation, “making this work force roughly as numerous as the nation’s truck drivers, assembly line workers, or public-school teachers.” In spite of the surge in call center employment, call center workers’ salaries remained between \$7 and \$14 an hour throughout the so-called economic boom of the 1990s. Pay

remained low because call centers, unlike factories, “can be relocated easily to lower-wage cities or even overseas” and there is no shortage of applicants. Those who apply are mostly women with one or two years of college who can’t “find better-paying alternatives as bank tellers, teachers, office managers, or government clerks.” There is high turnover since much of the work is tedious and routine (employees call up scripted responses). Yet the employees must have a high level of social skills (answering complaints all day); knowledge of the product and they must meet the industry standard of one call per 3 minutes.

Other evidence that business leaders are perhaps disingenuous in declaring that the U.S. economy is desperate for a larger number of high-skilled workers is in Matloff’s op-ed piece (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 1/1/01). Business leaders have demanded that the federal government expand the H-1B guest worker visa quota because of a supposed shortage in computer programmers. Matloff, however, provides evidence that there is no shortage of programmers and that H-1B programmers “are paid \$20, 000 to \$25,000 less than Americans with the same skills.” This may be in part because the median age of an “H-1B” is 28 while available Americans with commensurate skills are over 40 years old. Richard Rothstein (*New York Times*, 9/6/00; A26) argues that industrial CEOs reduced wages of high-tech workers when there was a glut in 1995 of such workers, thus creating the present shortage and justifying their requests to extend the H-1B program. Rothstein points to a 1992 *NYT* article reporting that 1 in 5 college graduates had a job not requiring a college degree and a 1995 *NYT* article citing nationwide unemployment of engineers, mathematicians, and scientists. Rothstein further argues that any tightening of the labor market for computer workers is not because

students suddenly lack preparation. On the contrary, high school course-taking in math and science, including advanced placement, had climbed [from 1985-1996]. Further, math scores have risen; last year 24 percent of seniors who took the SAT scored over 600 in math. But only 6 percent planned to major in computer science, and many of these cannot get into college programs . . . colleges themselves have not yet adjusted to new demand . . . More H-1B immigrants can have a perverse effect, as their lower pay signals young people to avoid this field in the future, keeping the domestic supply artificially low.

Lowering workers’ wages is a major source of profit but so is “externalizing costs.” Maier (1989) explains that business wants the public school system to train its workers so it does not have to do so itself. For example, “training programmers for entry-level workers at United Technologies, which lasted two or three weeks in the early 1980s, now averages eight to ten weeks.”

In the light of the above information, caveats must be added to the basic argument that systemic reform is needed in order to produce a greater percentage of needed high-skilled workers.

Edward Rust argued in 1999 that

in a global economy built on knowledge and technical skills, employees must be able to do more now than they did a generation ago. And these demands will continue to increase (Rust, 1999; p.1).

More accurately, *some* “employees must be able to do more now than they did a generation ago” so

that *others* can be let go to join the growing ranks of low-paid, unskilled labor. Schools need to produce increased numbers of “high-skilled” workers so business executives can pay American citizens at the same level as H1-B employees, thereby increasing shareholder profits and winning bonuses for themselves. Those unable to meet the higher standards can fill the ranks of the growing number of unskilled jobs created by the New Economy.

The economic reasoning behind business leaders’ interest in educational reform resonates with two earlier periods of educational reform as I discussed in Chapter 1. The timing of the adoption of systemic reform suggests that the BRT decided to initiate the third major educational reform in U.S. history as part of the second major economic transformation in U.S. history. As mass-production replaced craft-production (circa 1870-1915) so now is lean-production replacing mass production. Lean production was developed in Japan after WW II. Lean production techniques have enabled manufacturers to reduce the size of their inventories (they carry fewer parts) and increase the reliability of their product through the introduction of “quality circles” at each stage of design and production. Every worker in the company, from industrial designers to assembly line workers, participate in study groups that research and discuss the means by which they can detect and resolve defects at every stage, not just with the finished product. These innovations allow manufacturers to reduce drastically the time it takes to make a product, and eliminate recalls as well as reduce overhead costs (Womack, 1990).

Lean production was first adopted by Toyota in the 1950s. By adopting lean production techniques, Japanese vehicle manufacturers were able to overtake U.S. manufacturers as the world’s leading producers of motor vehicles by 1978.¹² Ford, to avoid bankruptcy, was the first U.S. corporation to adopt lean production in 1981. General Motors and Chrysler, not yet facing bankruptcy, were resistant, choosing instead to close their least productive plants from 1987-1990. They choose to experiment with lean production by hiring Toyota to manage a reopened plant in Fremont, California (Womack, 1990; p. 244, 82). It was during this same period that the number of Japanese “transplants” in the U.S. increased significantly. Honda, the first major transplant, opened its vehicle assembly plant in 1982 (Womack, 1990; p. 241).

The success of Japanese car manufacturers, the increased productive capacity of lean production, and the ability to make more reliable products at less expense caused many MBA programs to incorporate the principles of lean production into their curricula. Many CEO’s sent representatives to study the Japanese techniques. The result of study and partnerships has resulted in various forms of lean production being adapted to production throughout the United States during the 1980s. The adoption of lean production by American manufacturers has not followed the Japanese model exactly. There are too many cultural and historical differences for copying to be exact. One of the modifications that U.S. CEOs have made to the Japanese model is to draw upon their historic relationship with education. The American people were threatened by a “crisis” in the educational system beginning with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the year after lean production began in Honda’s Ohio plant. In 1989, the BRT hammered out its agenda for systemic

reform, in the midst of plant closings brought on by the competition of lean producers.

That educational reform accompanied production reform is not a coincidence. Part of the evidence supporting this assertion lies in the historical patterns of the past as I have outlined them in Chapter 1. Another part lies in the similarity between the skills required in lean production and the skills promoted by the BRT's educational agenda. One characteristic of lean production is "total quality control" (TQC) which is sometimes referred to as Total Quality Management.¹³ Simply put, TQC is the process by which the detection and fixing of defects happens at every stage in the development and production of a product.

The truly lean plant has two key organizational features: It transfers the maximum number of tasks and responsibilities to those workers actually adding value to the car on the line, and it has in place a system for detecting defects that quickly traces every problem, once discovered, to its ultimate cause.

This, in turn, means teamwork among line workers and a simple but comprehensive information display system that makes it possible for everyone in the plant to respond quickly to problems and to understand the plant's overall situation Every time anything goes wrong anywhere in the plant any employee who knows how to help runs to lend a hand

Building these efficient teams is not simple. First, workers need to be taught a wide variety of skills . . . then they need encouragement to think actively, indeed, proactively, so they can devise solutions before problems become serious.

Once lean production principles are fully instituted, companies will be able to move rapidly in the 1990s to automate most of the remaining repetitive tasks in auto assembly – and more. Thus by the end of the century we expect that lean-assembly plants will be populated almost entirely by highly skilled problem solvers whose task will be to think continually of ways to make the system run more smoothly and productively (Womock, 1990; p. 99).

For a factory to run "more smoothly and productively," it needs workers to take on increased "tasks and responsibilities," have a "wide variety of skills," learn how to work in "efficient teams", and be able to "think actively". These "highly skilled problem solvers" are perhaps some of the kinds of employees that Edward Rust and the BRT CEOs have in mind when they call upon the public school system to have "high standards for all" for the purposes of increasing the numbers of highly skilled workers. In raising the bar for everyone, systemic reformers expect that more students will master advanced academic subjects. The reformers also expect that by insisting on site-based decision-making, teachers will use a variety of teaching techniques such as group work to teach "problem-solving skills".

Corporate CEOs certainly wish to have some workers who can "do more now than they did a generation ago" and they want more of them than they need. But equally important, they want to keep control of the kinds of problems to be solved. Those who are presiding over the transformation of the economy want to increase the numbers of graduates who are able to work in groups to solve highly complex tasks. Many educators are attracted to and co-opted by the rhetoric of systemic reform because it promises to be more challenging. But the promise is an empty one. The state standards coauthored by members of the Business Roundtable reveal the business leaders' inability

to allow real problem solving to be taught in the schools.

To teach real problem solving, it is crucial that the student be able to choose the problem. Otherwise students are merely completing a task. To complete a task, one needs to rely on habitual activity, rarely needing, if at all, the kinds of thinking involved in problem-solving (i.e., the processes of fact gathering, hypothesis development, testing ideas, putting ideas into practice, revising hypothesis, etc.).¹⁴ The BRT envisions teachers having the authority to teach the habits with which their students will complete the tasks determined by statewide standards. While couched in terms of “problem-solving skills,” an educational theory and system based upon state standards eliminates problem setting, a crucial step in real problem solving. No real problem solving can occur if the student is never able to pursue “a matter of curiosity” to the point of articulating it “in such a way that it becomes amenable to inquiry that is relatively systematic” (Arnstine, 1995; p. 113). To tell a student what to learn and when to learn it, however complex the learning may be, is the surest means of preventing that student from being engaged in the material. Without engagement or interest, none of the dispositions necessary to successful problem solving are developed.

Solving problems isn't just a mechanical procedure; it calls for more than a set of skills. It requires attitudes and dispositions – like the courage needed to acknowledge the existence of a problem that has to be dealt with; the patience and persistence required when a problem isn't easily resolved; a willingness to risk, to seek help and to give it, to accept personal responsibility, and to admit error (Arnstine, 1995; p. 129)

For the quality circles in lean production to work effectively, workers need to learn to “think outside the box.” The mass production model required a high degree of specialization. There was no requirement that an employee make connections between what his job was with what other workers were doing on other tasks. Lean production requires workers to create interdisciplinary teams, as it were, in order to understand the implications of how their job impacted upon other's jobs. The rhetoric supporting the BRT educational agenda and the new, TQM structure they are attempting to put into place reflects the CEOs' concern that both teachers and students learn to “think outside the box.” But in looking at the actual standards being written, it seems as if American CEOs are unwilling to let go of “the box.” They seem to merely want to make “the box” bigger in the hope that high school and college graduates can learn to “problem-solve” without learning to “problem-set.”

The Business Roundtable's choice of an example from the National Center for Education and the Economy's (NCEE) New Standards reveals their confusion over the concept of problem-solving. In the example, the language of problem solving easily turns into simple task completion. According to the NCEE, “hands-on learning” and “long-term group projects” develop “problem solving” (sic). In developing the “tools and techniques for working with others,” elementary school students can

Work with others to achieve a shared goal, to promote *on-the-job learning* and to respond effectively to *the needs of a client*.

The student works with others to complete a *task*; that is, the student

- reaches agreement with group members on what work needs to be done to complete the *task* and how the work will be tackled . . .
- consults with group members regularly during the *task* to check on progress completing the task, to decide on any change that is required, and to check that all parts have been completed at the end of the *task*. [my italics]

The “tasks” listed above will not lead to problems to solve and the development of the dispositions necessary to solve those problems unless the students have an interest in them, i.e., unless students are allowed to choose topics and teachers work to arouse the students’ curiosities. State standards and tests are less and less likely to provide room for student choice given the BRT’s desire to make the standards as “specific” as possible. The BRT Virginia coalition, for example, referred to this narrowing of choice as “more specific and rigorous.” The 1989 standard: “Students will *explain* how scientific and technological changes have made *major impacts* on society” was rewritten in 1995 to be “more specific and rigorous.” The 1995 version: “The student will *analyze and explain* the effects of the Industrial Revolution, in terms of . . . how scientific and technological changes, *including the inventions of Watt, Bessemer, and Whitney*, brought about *massive social and cultural change* . . . [not environmental or political?]” [my emphasis] (BRT, 1996; p. 25). The latter version is, indeed, more specific, although teachers are left to figure out what is more “rigorous” about analyzing as well as explaining.¹⁵

While the BRT seems intent on promoting standards which reduce problem-solving to task completion, it also seems equally intent on eliminating the concept of interpretation. Both reveal a refusal to relinquish control of the goals of education as well as the goals of production. When writing standards, BRT advises business leaders to make sure that “educational jargon” is eliminated for the purpose of “clarity.” The illustrative example provided reveals that what is being eliminated is the need for students to construct their own meaning from the text. BRT (1996; p. 22) writes:

Here is a draft standard for reading in Washington State that was rewritten after business leaders and others complained it was difficult to understand. The revised version uses clearer language, for example, omitting the phrase, “construct meaning,” which is educational jargon.

Washington Standards, Before Revisions

Essential Learnings: Reading

2. The student reads to construct meaning from a variety of texts for a variety of purposes.
 - comprehends important ideas and details
 - analyzes and synthesizes
 - thinks critically
 - reads to learn new information
 - accesses information to solve problems and perform tasks

Washington Standards, After Revisions

2. The student understands the meaning of what is read. In order to meet this standard, the student will:

- comprehend important ideas and details
- expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing of information and ideas
- think critically about authors' use of language and style, purpose, and perspective, and know how to apply ideas to new situations

What is made “more clear” in the revision is that the business community wants to control what students and their workers “think critically” about. By replacing the student’s need to “construct meaning” with the requirement that the student must “understand the meaning of what is read,” the authors of the Washington Standards are narrowly defining what “thinking” means. A further indication of this appears in Education Trust’s analysis of the reading portions of a variety of standardized tests.¹⁶ The Education Trust’s team of analysts considered the New York Regents exam and the Massachusetts state exam (MCAS) to be the “best” exams of all available state K–12 tests. These tests stood out because they had “written, open response questions” to “sophisticated and varied reading passages”. Such a characterization, however, is misleading. “Sophisticated” apparently means “dense with single spaced text and no supplemental decoration” (Education Trust, 1999; p. 23). “Open response” is misleading since the reading pieces were “clarified” for the students by a set of multiple choice questions which “acted as scaffolding to support students through their timed writing tasks” (Education Trust, 1999; p. 21). To emphasize that textual meaning comes from an “authority” rather than from the dynamic interaction between reader and text, the analysts strongly urged that the writing required on tests should not be dominated by “personal and reflective essays” since “the writing needed in college and in work is not primarily concerned with personal feelings or ruminations, but with analysis, reporting, summary, argument, persuasion . . . connected either to reading or observation” (Education Trust, 1999; p. 25). Apparently students are to be trained to write about what is given to them in a way that does not involve their interests or values.

While the demands of lean production require workers who can “think actively,” the new standards for the New Economy reveal the limits CEOs wish to place on such thinking. Instead of investing in worker-organized study groups, newsletters, institutes and other supportive structures that was done in Japan after World War II, American CEO’s expect the public school system to take on the responsibility of producing employees who are highly skilled at and highly motivated to solve complex problems. That they think systemic reform will accomplish this reveals the extent to which they cannot truly problem-solve themselves. For if they could, the CEOs of the BRT would realize that their goals of maintaining control in a hierarchal system and having motivated, disciplined, and thoughtful employees are mutually exclusive.

School Boards as Middle Managers

Through systemic reform, the BRT does not only want to maintain its control over the goals of educations through state control of content standards, but to do so through fundamentally altering the structure by which decisions are made. Denise Gelberg in *The “Business” of Reforming American*

Schools (1997) documents the adoption of Total Quality Management theory (one effect of the diffusion of lean production principles) to educational reform in the 1980s. The downsizing or “rightsizing” of the last twenty years has been part of a fundamental transition in the workplace in which certain decisions have been taken away from middle managers (thus needing fewer of them) and placed in the hands of the assembly or frontline workers. Upper management still has absolute control of what the production goals are but now frontline workers, instead of middle management, have the added responsibility of devising strategies and techniques to fulfill those goals. The parallel with educational reform seems clear. Business CEOs, through state standards and tests, decide the goals of education while school staffs are responsible for devising the means for improving student achievement as defined by those standards. In newly created site-councils, teachers and parents must devise a variety of instructional strategies to help students master the state standards. This, theoretically, eliminates the program and policy-making role of school boards. School boards, if they are to maintain any relevance within this new structure, must agree to be middle managers K — ensuring that site-councils operate within the limits imposed by state standards and tests while providing whatever support they can in helping teachers and principals raise test scores.

This means that school boards cannot be forums for dissent by members of the local community who are opposed to the BRT educational agenda as they were briefly in the late Nineteenth century and during the Community Control movement of the sixties. In order to obviate or undermine the representative function of school boards, standards advocates have revived Progressive period arguments regarding the role and values of school board members. The cultural legacy of these arguments is one reason why they remain powerful today. As I explained in Chapter 1, progressive business leaders, at the turn of the twentieth century, powered the restructuring of municipal governments. In most of the major cities in the United States, power was centralized in a strong mayor. City councils and school boards were reduced in number and either appointed by the mayor or elected at large. The reformers argued that these changes would lead to government by expert professionals with a citywide perspective instead of a government by narrow, corrupt, ignorant, and inept nepotists. The effect of these reforms was essentially to eliminate working class representation from city institutions. School boards, in particular, became dominated by businessmen intent on transforming the public school system into a top-down hierarchy operated according to the principles of scientific management.

During the social reform movement (roughly 1955 – 1975), school boards were increasingly vulnerable to pressures from organized community activists. But with renewed interest on the part of business to once again transform the public school system so it resembled the business structures of the New Economy came a renewed interest in the role of school boards in school governance. As school boards have continued to operate as potential platforms for community opposition, business and educational professionals have begun to focus their attention on regaining control of school board culture. The Danforth Foundation’s 1992 *Facing the Challenge: The Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on School Governance* made this strategy explicit. The membership of the

Task Force (TCFTF) which wrote the *Report* is reminiscent of the “interlocking-directorate” (Tyack, 1967) leading the reforms of the progressive era.¹⁷ In making an explicit reference to such a past, The Task Force’s *Report* calls for a “restructuring of the public school system like that of 1900” (TCFTF, 1992; p. 9). The *Report* justified its focus on school boards by arguing that “the current debate about the future of education in America . . . has focused largely on issues such as choice, school based management, class size, teacher preparation, and student assessment, not on the governance role of school boards . . . [R]eform efforts will have only limited impact until the role of governance is addressed and the question of how basic decisions are made is answered” (TCFTF, 1992; p. 1).

The *Report* explained that school boards were obstacles to reform when they “interfere with the day to day tasks of administration of their districts that is properly the realm of the professional administrator” (TCFTF, 1992; p.5). School boards need to act as “disinterested” citizens focusing on broad educational policy instead of “constituent service” (TCFTF, 1992; p. 6). On the other hand, “boards recognize that they need leadership training as well as dialogue with the community to define areas of governance responsibility if they are better to meet constituents’ expectations.” The distinction between constituent “service” and “expectations” is a revealing one. In 1994, this “problem” was addressed again by one of the authors of the *Report*. Danzberger (1994) argued that the problem with school boards is that they are

not structurally suited to govern effectively in an increasingly divisive society that is facing unprecedented social and economic challenges. The American public increasingly uses the public schools to fulfill immediate political demands (from creationism to Afro-centrism), at the same time that society faces the challenge of the need to improve schooling and increase educational achievement for all students (p. 371).¹⁸

Michael Kirst echoes dissatisfaction with the local concerns of school boards when he writes that they must “spend more time on systemic policies that help implement curriculum frameworks based on national standards” (Kirst, 1994; p. 379).¹⁹

This desire to turn back the gains made by the Community Control movement and return to the days of 1900 reveals itself again in one of the Task Force’s structural recommendations. They want to see a “mixed system of at large and district-based elections so a citywide perspective is represented” (TCFTF, 1992; p. 16). In spite of the concession to “district” or constituent representation, the Task Force wishes to reduce the school board’s ability to function as an arena for conflict of interests (“embroiled in constituent politics”). The Task Force warns that if school boards continue to be such arenas, as they were in the 60s and 70s, they will not “pursue coherent and continuous initiatives” needed to stop increasing numbers of children from failing (TCFTF, 1992; p. 51). Conflict “can be devastating for school systems that are attempting to effect long-range systemic reform” (Danzburger, 1994b; p. 369).

Donald McAdams (2000) concluded from his ten-year experience on the Houston, Texas, school board that the “core issue in urban school reform is governance” (p. 260). More specifically,

“school reformers must design systems of governance that get politics out of schools” (p. 262). He argues that school boards need to be elected at large or appointed, all possible non-educational functions must be privatized, and that as many charter schools or voucher programs should be implemented as possible. Every possible reform needs to be done to “insulate the education of children from direct democratic control” (p. 263). The Texas Education and Business Coalition continues to lobby for state mandated rules and regulations for school boards to prevent such boards from continuing to indulge in “protracted and truly dysfunctional governance situations.” TEBC has eleven items on its legislative agenda all designed to curb the ability of a school board member or trustee from acting as an individual and to prevent the board from acting independently of the superintendent. In addition to limiting board meetings to once a month, the TEBC wants to promote “cumulative voting” or at large elections arguing that a requirement “that candidates for the board must reside within different defined geographical areas of the school district [will] ensure that all members of the community are fairly represented on locally elected school boards” (www.tbec.org/2001session/governance.htm).

In the context of TQM/TQC-style “systemic reform,” school boards have a very specific role to play. They must give individual schools more authority and define the “new roles for participants in school-based decision making” as well as identifying the “locus of accountability within the school system” (Danzburger, 1994b; p. 369). School boards are seen as “middle management” through the TQM lens – they are no longer to micromanage their teacher-workers as in the scientific management model. Instead, school boards along with principals are to provide “support” for the teacher-workers who have become responsible for deciding how to reach the goals (high test scores). Middle management no longer needs to concern itself with the responsibility of assuring “accountability” since that is achieved by measurements of goals/production/output. As the facilitator between state standards and assessment practices and the pedagogical practices within schools, school boards need to “take a comprehensive look at the objectives of the local school community and examine progress toward meeting state and central district objectives” (Kirst, 1994; p. 380). School boards must link policies and reform initiatives to student outcome objectives, curriculum frameworks and assessments; establish staff development consistent with district goals and objectives; and convene community forums to discuss educational policy (Danzburger, 1994b; p. 372). In other words, school boards need to co-opt parental and teacher support in the service of state standards established by the Business Roundtable Coalition.

To this end, Brown’s 1996 study of Maine’s adoption of the National Science Foundation’s Statewide Systemic Initiative (SSI) program (which is part of the Comprehensive School Reform initiative of the federal government and the Education Commission of the States) provides some evidence that a “climate” change among school board members can occur with the infusion of federal money and facilitators. The researchers noted that if the SSI project can move local school boards in Maine towards the kind of policy-making body that BRT school board reformers advocate, then it can be done anywhere, since Maine school boards are renowned for their “independence.”

The results of their study led the researchers to suggest that “school boards can be responsive to programs supportive of systemic change and that boards themselves through their policy-making mandates can be positive players in engendering [results driven, schoolwide] systemic change” (Brown, 1996; p. 5).

In spite of the tremendous corporate pressure for systemic reform, school board members continue to be caught in the middle between the concerns of local community members and the demands of the national corporate reform agenda. The National School Board Association (NSBA) resolved in 1992 that “local boards are ‘the nation’s preeminent expression’ of grassroots democracy and . . . fundamental to the continued success of public education”. While conceding BRT’s “America First” principle [to “keep America free and first among the nations of the world”] Shannon (1994), executive director of the NSBA, argues that it is the school boards and no one else that are responsible for creating the “vision of the educational future of its community” and that all true reform, even systemic reform, must be local.

The Business Roundtable Network

In the summer of 1989, the top CEO’s of the nation’s corporations hammered out an educational agenda. The first part of that agenda – state standards, state mandated tests, and rewards/sanctions – has been successfully implemented in over a dozen states. Such enormous change has been made in less than 15 years. The nation’s business leaders have been so efficacious because they have been able to create an interlocking network of state and national business organizations, state and federal governments, private foundations and nonprofit organizations. It is a network of organizations that is mind boggling in scope. I have already explained how the national Business Roundtable, working with other business groups, was able to provide the template for the 1989 National Goals Education Summit attended by both CEOs and state governors and convened by President Bush. In the following section, I detail the relationships that the top corporations are able to cultivate with organizations that are willing to promote the BRT educational agenda.

Through grants and contributions, the top corporations fund the Institute for Educational Leadership. IEL is a nonprofit organization that has national influence over the training of superintendents and the socialization of school board members. One of the most influential roles that IEL plays is to train people to go out and start other organizations that will promote “student achievement” – which necessarily means “higher test scores.” Another nonprofit organization supporting the BRT agenda is called Public Agenda. This organization conducts public opinion polls relating to current educational issues. The web site of Public Agenda is intended to be a source of information for news reporters who are doing research on education. No information is provided that allows one to challenge the goals of systemic reform. Not surprisingly, IEL and Public Agenda cosponsor other organizations and supply data for BRT publications.

There are several organizations that foster dialogue between state governors and corporate

CEOs. One of the oldest and most important is the Education Commission of the States. Started in 1966, the current role that ECS plays is to provide state governors with practical resources with which to implement systemic reform in their respective states. One of those resources is IEL. Another organization of CEOs and governors is Achieve, Inc. Both ECS and Achieve are partnered with the Annenberg Institute that in turn has partnerships with Public Agenda as well as dozens of other institutes and research centers, all promoting standards-based, systemic reform.

Institute for Educational Leadership

Educational researchers, school boards, and administrative and teacher unions have been successfully co-opted by the wide network of programs and partnerships funded by the major corporations of this country. (The effectiveness of this network in co-opting educators and parents will be explored more fully in the next chapter.) The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is a major player, and its programs and partnerships provide structural support for BRT's standards and assessment agenda. IEL is a nonprofit institution established in 1964 in Washington, D.C. to run a "Washington Internships in Education" program. Today, sixteen major foundations and forty-four corporations support a wide array of programs, publications, and networks sponsored and supported by IEL.²⁰ IEL describes itself on its Web page in the following manner:

Improving education requires a nationwide commitment that transcends institutional and partisan loyalties. For more than three decades, IEL has helped build that commitment. By establishing broad-based leadership networks and by creating innovative approaches to complex issues, IEL has brought forth change and produced striking results. With more than twenty programs and partnerships in place, IEL is a national institution that reaches deep into states and communities throughout the country (iel.org/programs, p. 1).

IEL's School Board Effectiveness Program helps school boards "focus on the critical issue of student performance" (IEL, 1999a).²¹ Six major foundations helped IEL to establish Superintendents Prepared. This program provides training and on-the-job support for aspiring urban school superintendents "to strengthen the pool of individuals . . . in an era characterized by declining public support and funding, by growing diversity among students and by rising awareness for the need to focus more attention on student achievement in order to develop and prepare students for the twenty-first century" (IEL, 1999b; p. 1).

IEL programs provide structural support for the development of an "interlocking directorate" that promotes BRT's standards and assessment agenda. IEL's Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP) has produced "4000 plus alumni who now lead in K-12 and higher education, foundations, education policy groups, nonprofits, government and the private sector" (IEL, 1999c). The "ten month program in fourteen sites across the country . . . offers a wide-angle perspective on the leadership challenge facing education and related issue areas, helping them link seemingly unrelated policy issues and understand how to effect change in their communities" (IEL, 1999c). Once the

“leaders” are in place, EPFP provides ongoing workshops and national forums. One of the two national meetings takes place in Washington, D.C., and “connects Fellows to national policy processes and personalities” (IEL, 1999d; p. 2) as well as to “develop professional relationships with EPFP colleagues” (p. 3). In North Carolina, the Public School Forum, the Roundtable’s administrative nerve center in the southeast, “takes a cohort of mid-level professionals through a series of seminars on how educational policy is made in North Carolina and on the national level” (PSF, 2000; Programs). The California site, located in Downey, serves research fellows from the Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) that produces research to guide the development of teacher training. Such training and professional development models are to help teachers adapt to their new roles in the developing TQM system promoting the BRT agenda of high standards and assessment. The following selection, from the foreword to a SWRL publication, illustrates this development.

While the changing student population presents numerous challenges to teachers and other persons involved in teacher development, future agendas for school improvement/restructuring also hold heavy expectations for changes in teacher responsibility and performance. For instance, new approaches to student performance assessment, including application of national standards and use of alternatives to standardized achievement tests, call for teacher participation in development and interpretation of performance measures as well as application of them. New models of schooling that incorporate high technology and school-business collaboration ask teachers to expand their instructional processes to include an enlarged array of human and technical resources Reconceptualization of both teaching and the teacher development process is required if persons who assume this professional role are to be both effective teachers of diverse student populations and effective contributors to reform of the schools in which the students are enrolled. . . . The ideas advanced in this occasional paper suggest some ways to accomplish this” (Tikunoff and Ward, 1994; vi-vii).²²

The vague language above perhaps indicates the ambivalence the authors feel towards the BRT agenda. It is difficult to imagine that many “alternatives to standardized achievement tests” will exist in the context of state-mandated standards and statewide tests. In the context of “reform”, “effective” teaching of “diverse student populations” can only mean developing methods to prepare all students for one test.

Public Agenda

Public Agenda is another nonprofit organization whose apparent purpose is to be a source of information for newspaper reporters investigating educational issues.²³ Public Agenda has “discovered” that four “alternative perspectives” on educational reform exist. One is that “higher academic standards and well-defined goals are essential.” A second point of view is represented by those who believe that “student-centered schools” should be created to teach “problem-solving skills.”²⁴ A third position argues “the fundamental problem is that most parents don’t have a choice about where their kids go to school.” A fourth perspective is that there is not enough funding for schools. Public Agenda concedes that these four perspectives “are not necessarily mutually

exclusive” but insists that “each leads to a distinctive prescription about what is to be done” (Public Agenda, 1999). From the point of view of BRT, all four are essential factors to be implemented into systemic school reform. So the debate is kept nicely within the boundaries of the agenda as defined by BRT’s “Nine Components of a Successful Educational System” — the TQM/TQC management model. If one wished to go outside of the narrow boundaries of the “four perspectives” offered by Public Agenda, one would find many other “perspectives” leading to “distinctive prescription[s] about what is to be done.”²⁵ Yet Public Agenda, IEL, and the BRT wish to keep the debate within the narrow confines of high standards and high-stakes testing. They ignore altogether some 2500 years of debate about educational means and goals.

Public Agenda has joined with IEL to create Engaging Americans in Education Reform (EAER). This is a program to help shape any grassroots debate over public education by defining what the “public” thinks. EAER provides start up kits for school district and state educational leaders interested in “fostering productive discussion among community members.” These kits (video tapes and print material)

use a ‘choice’ work approach which presents alternative perspectives on educational issues through ‘real world’ scenarios. These choices are framed in the language of ordinary people, not in professional jargon. They focus on the kind of concerns and values in which non-experts can readily engage, and not the technical issues that sometimes drive professional debate and exclude the public (IEL, 1999g).

Education Commission of the States

IEL is also partnered with the Education Commission of the States (ECS). The 1966 National Governor’s Conference voted unanimously to create the ECS as a vehicle to “improve education with the active leadership and personal participation of the governors” (ECS, 1999a). On the 1999–2000 executive committee there are three governors, the chair of the U.S. Budget and Taxation Committee, the vice-chair of the U.S. Senate Education Committee, an assistant superintendent of public instruction of Utah, a retired superintendent, the educational policy advisor to the governor of Colorado, and Carl Takamura, executive director of the Business Roundtable of Hawaii. Takamura also serves on the ECS Steering Committee (ECS, 1999b). The blueprint for action by ECS is laid out in a document called “ECS Priorities.” It is a good summary of the goals and aims of all of the organizations mentioned above. High standards and assessment are at the heart of the agenda. These provide the data to which teachers, students, and individual schools can be held “accountable” through a system of incentives, rewards, and sanctions. Complex assessment of measurable standards will provide “credible and reliable data” to “communicate to people what they need to know, when they need to know it, and in a form that is understandable and useful to them.” Data is needed so as to be able to share “what works.” Disaggregated data — e.g., test scores separated out by race/ethnicity and gender — is especially important so no student falls through the cracks (ECS, 1999c).²⁶

ECS is committed to the principles of lean production (a.k.a., TQM, TQC and de-regulation).

They agree with IEL's position that state governments need to "reduce bureaucratic barriers and not micromanage from on high." ECS works with state governments to promote flexibility among school systems through decentralized decision-making (problem-solving), charter schools, and by joining the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Project (one example of which is the SSI project described above). It is the position of ECS that teacher "quality" needs to be improved; "research has shown" that the quality of the teacher is the "single most important variable in determining student achievement." Teachers also need to be trained on how to use data (test score results) to make decisions to improve student performance (higher test scores) (ECS, 1999c).

Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Headquartered at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, the Annenberg Institute was established in 1993 and operates on an annual budget of \$5 million. Warren Simmons, the executive director, calls the Institute a "standards-based, practice-centered policy research and technical assistance organization" (Annenberg, 1998a; p.1). The organization is also one of the central hubs in the vast network of standards-based reform. As a central hub, the Institute coordinates a network that is attempting to replace school boards as the governing agency of local schools. This network is called the Task Force on the Future of the District and includes the Education Commission of the States, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, the Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform, and the New American Schools (Annenberg, 1998a; p.4). Another project is Annenberg's Tools for Accountability Project that is pursuing a key component of the BRT strategy – data driven reform (Annenberg, 1998a; p.6).

Much of the resources of the Institute is devoted to the development of "public engagement" — co-opting members of the community to support standards-based reform. The Institute has contracted with Public Agenda to determine what are "the attitudes of school board members, administrators, teachers, and the general public on the challenges and impediments to effective, sustained public engagement around the issue of education" (Annenberg, 1998a; p.7). One Public Agenda poll published by the Education Commission of the States reveals, "85 percent or more of parents approve of their local school district holding students to high academic standards and involving the business community in changing schools" (Annenberg, 1998c; p.23). One might question the self-serving nature of how the survey questions were framed or wonder at the usefulness of such a gross generalization.

Nevertheless, with this and other "data," the Institute is confident that "engagement techniques" have been developed and implemented that are "channeling a community's concern, apathy or anger into informed and constructive action" (Annenberg, 1998b; p.3). These techniques include house meetings, neighborhood canvassing, focus groups and meetings among local business owners" (Annenberg, 1998b; p.8). "Business and community groups are launching parent institutes" and radio, TV stations, and newspapers are establishing "civic journalism projects" to help

communities “make tough decisions” about educational reform (Annenberg, 1998b; p.9). The success of these techniques can be seen in that “many groups can already point to substantially improved student performance” and there is evidence of “involvement of the public in formulating new standards for student achievement.” The future challenge is to figure out “how to bring in senior citizens, small business owners, or citizens without school age children” into the discussion of how improve test scores (Annenberg, 1998b; p.9). The 1998 Annenberg summary of “public engagement” efforts focused on those efforts being made to include parent participation in improving “student achievement”, that is, improving student scores on state standardized tests. The report noted that

once standards, especially statewide benchmarks, are adopted, public engagement continues and is often even more important. In many places, it *is needed to sustain political and popular support for standards over time* [my emphasis] (Annenberg, 1998b; p.32).

The Annenberg Institute casts a wide net. It is partnered with the Public Education Fund Network²⁷, Achieve²⁸, the Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform, the Providence Public Schools, the University of Pittsburgh’s Institute for Learning, and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Sharing resources and information with its partners, the Institute has spent \$500 million dollars to fund 18 “locally designed school reform projects” assessed by university-based researchers. Among the Institute’s Program Advisory Group are university education professors, several Local Education Foundation (LEFs) representatives, as well as representatives from each of the following: Achieve, Inc., Public Agenda, the Disney Learning Initiative, the Education Trust, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). Without such a network, it is unlikely that so many parents and educators would have been misled into believing that systemic reform can deliver on its promise to make the educational experience successful for all students.

¹ A sample from school-related articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* during the 1980s yields the following result: Fred Hechinger (1982) in a book review approved of the authors’ critiques of the 1960s reforms as “hostile to competence” (6/27/82; p. 2). A *Chronicle* editorial on 12/13/82 argued that the “challenge” facing the new state superintendent of schools, Bill Honig, was to “fix the disaster of the 60s”. Several months later, another opinion piece in the *Chronicle* supported Honig’s assertion that the 1960’s “lax and permissive approach” has been responsible for “plunging student achievement scores” (Pierce, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2/27/83; B9). Two years later, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported upon a new trend in the CSU and community college curricula – the addition of “Critical Thinking.” Honig was reported as explaining, “today’s lack of critical thinking is the consequence of the laid back 70s when academic rigor succumbed to academic self-indulgence.” The need for critical thinking skills was important in the 1980s since employees in “sophisticated information and service industries need” the capabilities of “abstract thought and logical reasoning” (Curtis, 4/1/85). A *Chronicle* editorial in 1987 believed that recent test scores heralded the public schools’ return to “academic basics” and “away from the free-swinging and often undisciplined habits of the 1960s” which did not prepare students “for the real world” (4/23/87; p. 62). In an opinion piece, Abe Mellinkopf expressed relief, “The horrible drop [in the quality of education] of the late 1960s and the 1970s has been braked . . . [but cautioned] we have yet to climb back up to where we were in 1963” (4/29/88; A6).

² Cornell Maier, a business lobbyist in California, explained the evolution of business interest in the following way: “When they first read *A Nation at Risk*, the 1983 report . . . businessmen charged into partnership with the schools.

Companies, in their thousands, hurried to adopt schools. These partnerships, which included things like buying chic uniforms for school bands and school basketball teams, make local people happy. But business leaders began to realize that they did nothing for true educational reform. But the Boston Compact, and the copycat programs that followed, are today regarded as a disappointment [see Chapter 4 for a description of the Boston Compact]. In Boston the number of students failing to complete high school has actually increased. The partnership programs now tend to be dismissed as no more than ‘temporary palliatives.’” This is why, in the summer of 1989, “the Business Roundtable devoted their entire annual meeting to the subject” (Maier, 1989).

³ Among its members are: the Business Roundtable, the National Alliance of Business, and the U. S. Chamber of Commerce.

⁴ Perhaps it is possible to trace the reform agenda back to the *Nation At Risk* report or President Reagan’s promulgation of his “Six Fundamentals”: (1) give more authority to teachers to demand that students take tests, hand in homework and “quiet down” in class; (2) remove drug and alcohol abuse from schools; (3) raise academic standards; (4) establish merit pay for teachers; (5) restore parents and local governments to their rightful place in the educational process; (6) teach the basics (as reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12/9/83, p. 11).

⁵ A recent survey by the Progressive Policy Institute (an affiliate of the Democratic Leadership Council) used 16 “indicators” to create a “new economy index” by which to evaluate an “area’s ability to take advantage of the “new economy.” One of the sixteen indicators was “computer use in schools.” The report is expected to be used to “promote the tech policies of elected [Democratic] officials, and help mayors and city managers adopt tech-friendly policies to boost the income of their residents” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 4/19/01).

⁶ Miller and his co-chair on the committee, a Delaware teacher, wrote the standards. They submitted the document to teachers at the 301 participating schools for review and rewrote the standards using this input (p 23).

⁷ Funded by Boeing, Microsoft, Washington Mutual, and Weyerhaeuser (p. 8).

⁸ During the last ten years, the media has donated 254 million dollars of space and time for BRT’s public-awareness strategy of which Washington and Kentucky have made particularly good use (Rust, 1999; insert).

⁹ The reporter continued writing: “At the end of the two-day gathering, the governors were among the signers of a mass pledge that, if carried out, would give students and teachers the very underpinning they have requested.” The NYT reporter identified “professional development and smaller class sizes” as the teachers’ demands. Reducing class size in K–3 has been implemented in California while professional development is considered one of the Nine Essential Components. In this context, professional development will necessarily be confined to techniques to help students improve their scores on statewide exams, which are not necessarily the same as those techniques “requested by teachers.” Class size reduction has been seriously undermined which raises doubts about the states’ commitment to responding to teacher “demands.”

¹⁰ Public Agenda is a nonprofit polling organization that works closely with the BRT agenda. I describe it in more detail later in this chapter.

¹¹ No one can argue with this statement. But such a statement ignores equally important concerns. One important concern systematically ignored by the BRT rhetoric of reform is the high number of dropouts, possibly being made higher by the implementation of high school exit exams. In spite of the BRT’s insistence on “date-driven” decision-making, there has yet to be any reliable data gathered to explain the rather astonishing attrition rate that public high schools have experienced. See footnote 18 in Chapter 8 for some examples of this. That the BRT focuses on increasing the number of college prepared students and does not care to explore the causes of dropouts is one clue to revealing what the real goals of systemic reform are.

¹² Motor vehicle production in the United States dropped from its historic zenith in 1978 (about 12 million vehicles that year) to 6 million vehicles in 1982. Japanese vehicle production, however, had climbed from approximately 7 million in 1978 to 11 million in 1982 (Womack, 1990; from graph on p. 248).

¹³ For a complete description of Total Quality Control see *What Is Total Quality Control? The Japanese Way* by Kaoru Ishikawa, (Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1985).

¹⁴ I am grateful to Don Arnstine for this insight and recommend *Democracy and the Arts of Schooling* (1995) for anyone who wishes to try to teach students real problem-solving dispositions.

¹⁵ I would argue, however, that it doesn’t really matter how rigorous and specific the standards are in determining what and how teachers teach in the classroom. As long as teachers feel compelled to teach from a textbook, the books will determine what the impact of the Industrial Revolution was, with no “higher order thinking” required from the student except to understand the bias of the textbook and conform to it. The standards do force a teacher to rely on a textbook by identifying a huge amount of information to be learned by the student in a short amount of time.

¹⁶ The Education Trust is a nonprofit, corporate funded organization based in Washington, D.C. Among its financial backers are the Pew Charitable Trust and the Knight Foundation. The Education Trust is working to align state high school graduation tests with state university admission/placement tests. The stated purpose of such alignment is “to promote high academic achievement for all students at all levels.” This will guarantee “equity and excellence” in

the educational system.

- ¹⁷ Membership of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on School Governance includes seven professional administrators, four heads of corporations, three representatives from school board associations, two writers, two professors of education (Stanford and Harvard), two presidents of local teacher unions (Rochester and Seattle). Such a task force is heavily weighted by top administrators who value efficiency over democratic decision-making and put a great deal of value on “expertise” over experience. Parents, students, and organizations like the NAACP or the Urban League are not represented at all.
- ¹⁸ To argue that debates over content (creationism and Afro-centrism) are “political” and a proposal to reduce the community’s input in the formulation of school policy is *not* “political” suggests that such a position represents propaganda rather than research.
- ¹⁹ Kirst is a Stanford University professor, codirector of Policy Analysis for California Education and a former member of the California State Board of Education. Most recently (March, 2000), Kirst has served on Oakland, California, Mayor Jerry Brown’s Education Commission and supports Brown’s attempts to gain mayoral control over the Oakland School Board. The narrow passage of Measure D on March 7, 2000, expanded the Oakland School Board from seven to ten members. The additional three members will be mayoral appointments while the other seven will continue to be elected by district. A statewide political action committee, the 3R’s, and local real-estate developers raised \$350,000 dollars for the Measure D campaign while opponents of the Measure, the NAACP, the Teamsters Union, local activists and the majority of the school board members could only raise \$19,000 (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 2/28/00; A1).
- ²⁰ See Appendix E for a list of IEL’s Grants and Contributors.
- ²¹ J. P. Danzberger is the director of Governance Programs at IEL and coauthor of the 1986 and 1992 school board reports as well as contributor to the Danforth Foundation’s Task Force report on school governance. Michael Usdan is President of IEL.
- ²² The paper was prepared under subcontract with Far West Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development and has a Department of Education code number.
- ²³ The subtitle to Public Agenda’s Web Page is “The Journalist’s Inside Source for Public Opinion and Policy Analysis.”
- ²⁴ For Engaging Americans in Educational Reform “problem-solving skills” means the completion of tasks assigned by others. It is difficult to ascertain whether, when doing its survey, Public Agenda pollsters clarify what they or their respondents mean by “problem-solving.”
- ²⁵ See Appendix D for a small sample of alternative perspectives.
- ²⁶ See Appendix A for some of the context from which systemic reformers view the need for disaggregated data. More will be said in later chapters on why the BRT, and especially one of its allies, the Education Trust, are particularly interested in disaggregated data.
- ²⁷ The Public Education Fund Network is a corporate funded organization that coordinates and supports the activities of Local Education Funds in many major cities in the United States. These LEFs are organizations of local business leaders who promote standards based reform in their city. One indication of the web-like structure of networking among business and educational leaders is the resume of Paul S. Reville. Reville is on the board of directors of the Public Education Network. As a Harvard faculty member, Reville teaches a course on standards-based reform and coordinates state relations at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Reville is also the executive director of the Pew Forum on Standards-Based Reform, chairman of the Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission, which oversees the implementation of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. If that did not make him busy enough, Reville is also the co-founder and executive director of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, the state’s Business Roundtable organization (publicagenda.org/aboutus).
- ²⁸ Achieve, Inc., is an organization of the nation’s top CEOs and state governors which provides states with assessments of their standards and testing programs (for a fee) and supports an on-line database and “links” to help state governments develop and implement standards and assessment. As of June 2000, Louis Gerstner of IBM and Tommy Thompson, Governor of Wisconsin, were the co-chairs of the board of directors. Governor Gray Davis of California was among the other ten members of the board (achieve.org). Achieve has a partnership with the American Federation of Teachers.