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*Education Governance in America:
Who Leads When Everyone Is in Charge?*

“The buck stops here!” So stated the famous sign displayed on President Harry Truman’s desk in the Oval Office. In embracing that phrase, Truman asserted boldly that as America’s leader, a wartime president for much of his tenure, he was unambiguously in charge and prepared to make tough decisions to protect the nation’s interests. In short, Truman believed it was his duty to govern. Although the leadership style of “Give ’em Hell” Harry has inspired generations of officials across levels of government, the complexity of governing America’s diverse society means that even the most energized leaders may fail to meet the standard that Truman’s mantra suggests. In no policy area is governance in the United States more complex than in elementary and secondary education, where multiple actors and institutions have some formal say over what happens in the nation’s classrooms. As a result, bold local, state, and federal education leaders who assert their own rights and duties to govern often find themselves attacked from all sides as their rivals for control target their ideas.

Consider for a moment the governing tasks that confront the nation’s school principals, who lead America’s nearly 100,000 public schools. Like the president, school principals are chief executives, charged with managing and attempting to lead their organizations, albeit on a much smaller scale. Although governing from the president’s perch in the White House, or even the governor’s mansion in the state capital or the mayor’s chair in city hall, may be a daunting task, school principals face challenging management tasks of their own. That is especially true in three areas that matter most to chief executives: making personnel decisions, setting financial priorities, and exercising autonomy.¹

Principals work under several constraints as they try to execute such functions. Does the buck stop on the principal’s desk when it comes to hiring the teachers that principals and their administrative teams believe can do the best job? Not really. Can principals flexibly manage school budgets to accommodate a

pressing need or seize an emerging opportunity that could enhance opportunities for students? Perhaps on the margins, but in general, not so much. Do they wield decisive authority to set the academic and other priorities of their respective schools? Well, somewhat, but a litany of other leaders, some working in local communities and others in more distant state capitals and the federal government, also govern these matters. Those limits on the principal's power even apply to more basic school functions such as maintaining order and developing conduct codes for student behavior.² One reason these constraints exist is that opinions differ about the proper level of authority that principals should possess. Although principals themselves might prefer to have the flexibility of private sector chief executive officers, they are still public officials, so some constraints do seem appropriate to most people.

In practice, the buck seems to be always on the move in the nation's system of education governance. Such dynamics pose great challenges for anyone who has some interest in how schools operate. This includes principals and teachers, who work side by side with students every day; ordinary citizens, who seek to understand how their tax dollars are being used to support public education; innovators in the high technology and nonprofit sectors, who have promising ideas about how to improve the way schools work; and American politicians and industry leaders, who worry about the nation's competitive edge and struggle to understand what can be done to improve the education experiences of the nation's students. As overall achievement remains flat and achievement gaps between student groups persist, self-defined reformers inside and outside traditional education circles express much frustration at the seemingly slow pace of change that present governing arrangements foster. Nor do individuals and organizations with some of the most enduring legacies and attachments to prevailing modes of governance, such as local school boards and teacher unions, offer ringing endorsements of the status quo. In short, nobody seems satisfied with how the nation governs its schools. But what is to be done?

Before analyzing why prevailing modes of education governance breed such frustration and inspire calls for change, it is important to address a more fundamental issue. Who governs American schools, and with what results? That strikingly simple yet important question has received scant attention, even as concerns about the nation's students have grown. That is a stunning oversight, given that several decades of intense American school reform efforts, focusing on specific policy changes, have produced at best marginal gains in student achievement. During that same time, reports from academic researchers, governments at all levels, and think tanks that inhabit all corners of the political spectrum have concluded that the country's education system produces neither the academic excellence nor equality of opportunity required for its students to succeed in the rapidly changing and shrinking world. This book begins with the premise that

the structure of American education governance—highly fragmented, decentralized, politicized, and bureaucratic—contributes to these problems by undercutting the development and sustenance of changes needed to improve the education opportunities and academic performance of students. Although governance reforms alone cannot help all the nation’s young people reach higher levels and erase achievement gaps between advantaged students (typically white and from higher-income families) and their disadvantaged peers (frequently racial, ethnic, or linguistic minorities and those from low-income families), it is hard to imagine much dramatic improvement occurring without some fundamental rethinking of how the nation governs its schools.

Why so little attention on education governance, then, if it is central to constructing a system of schooling that can meet the demands of the current century? One reason is that politicians and journalists often see governance as an arid, somewhat academic topic, better suited for ivory-tower debates or exchanges in scholarly journals. Questions about governance tend not to lend themselves to stark narratives that pit “us” against “them” or that line up neatly along the liberal to conservative spectrum that so many public officials and reporters use to organize the political world in their rhetoric and their articles. In contrast, other areas with compelling storylines, such as controversies over school accountability, student testing, teacher compensation, and the teaching of evolution, tend to fit into these more convenient narrative boxes and therefore provide much more interesting fodder for debate. The chapters in this volume reach beyond these headline-grabbing topics to illuminate why the understudied issue of education governance should be atop the list of anyone interested in the present and future of American education. In so doing, the book embeds specific policy issues, such as standards, teachers, and testing, in a larger context by focusing needed attention on the governance forest without getting lost in these policy trees.

Three key questions guide the analysis. First, how do existing governing institutions and relationships shape the content of education policy and school operations? Second, to what extent and in what ways has governance either assisted or stymied efforts to bring about systemic improvements? Third, how might reform of education governance promote positive changes in policy and ultimately improve student success?

This book demonstrates that choices about education governance can be at least as important, perhaps even more so, as the specific policy decisions that elected officials and civil servants make and implement each day. At the same time, the chapters disabuse readers of the notion that there exists an ideal governance arrangement that, if adopted, will automatically propel American schools and students to higher levels of performance. As in any complex area, panaceas do not exist, despite occasional claims to the contrary.³ Still, this book

does show that governance choices help to create conditions that can influence many things, including how teachers and principals use their time, whether promising new educational practices or organizational forms can gain traction, the degree to which parents and community members can understand how well schools are performing, and, above all, the opportunities that the nation's students enjoy in the classroom. Meeting the needs of all these groups, and the many others concerned about education in the United States, is no easy task. This book shows that the nation's fragmented and patchwork system of education governance has lowered the probability that any of these groups will be well served.

Contours of Education Governance in America

A striking feature of American governance in nearly all policy areas is federalism—the allocation of constitutional authority across federal and state governments. And nowhere is the impact of federalism more profound than in education. Several of America's international rivals have governments that centrally establish and administer education policy, including the creation of a single national curriculum and testing system. The multilevel and fragmented education governance structure and strong tradition of local control in the United States have made the creation of coherent policy in education much more complicated, both politically and administratively. In fact, saying that the United States has a “system” of education governance overstates the degree of coherence that exists, given the multiple centers of power that influence teacher preparation and licensing, school curriculum, accountability for performance, and budgeting, among other things. In short, education governance in America truly is a “tangled web,” as one prior book on the subject has argued.⁴

The lack of coherence in the nation's system of education governance is largely the result of two factors. The first involves ongoing disagreements over the best way to govern the nation's schools to serve both public and private ends. Divergent views exist on whether education should be considered a public good that benefits everyone or a private good that primarily serves individual needs. Such differences of opinion are not surprising in a nation as large and diverse as the United States. These disagreements result in governance proposals that swing from extreme centralization, wherein the federal government would make most consequential decisions about funding and standards, to the most decentralized libertarian-style approaches, in which parents would shop for schools in a market-based system. The present reality and the bulk of proposals for change reside between these two extremes and recognize that education serves both public and private ends. What sort of system can strike the best balance between centralization and decentralization to advance public and private interests? Based on the

empirical evidence to date, that question remains unresolved. And so the debates rage on.

The second main factor is that proposals about how to reform governance swirl in the nation's system of federalism and separation of powers (across legislative, executive, and judicial functions) and, if not shot down completely, emerge after leaders strike compromises based on competing plans. No governance proposal exits the process of political debate, legislative logrolling, and rule making in its pure or initially intended form. Ideas from numerous proposals are blended, sometimes with many lumps remaining, and layered onto or mixed with current arrangements. The result is a strange overall governance recipe or Rube Goldberg-like contraption (pick your favorite metaphor) that may barely resemble the initial governance proposals that began the debate. When asked whether this is the best that the country can do, even as the demands of citizenship and global competition become ever more challenging, large majorities say no, even though few clear answers exist about what might work better on a broad scale in a nation as large and diverse as the United States.

The simplest way to begin summarizing the complex web of education governance that has emerged is to note that the United States possesses nearly 100,000 public schools, which are overseen by almost 14,000 school districts, fifty state governments, and one federal government. Looking more deeply at the local, state, and federal layers and outside government at the private and non-profit actors involved reveals why the system is so complex. Locally, though nearly all school boards are elected, electoral processes vary widely, the basis of representation can depend on whether school board elections are at large or based on wards, and the evidence shows that those procedural and structural choices matter.⁵ In addition, a small but growing number of public charter schools exist, amounting to approximately 5 percent of all public schools.⁶ Depending on state law, charters may be granted and overseen by a diverse set of institutions, including state universities, local school districts themselves, and, in some cases, mayors' offices.⁷ Furthermore, in a very small (but growing) number of cities, and most notably in larger urban areas, the mayor possesses the authority to run the schools. Practically speaking, that power can include the ability to name the superintendent, reorganize the entire system, and implement various strategies to turn around struggling schools.⁸

State institutions that govern education also are numerous and diverse.⁹ In addition to governors, state legislatures, and state courts, every state has a state education agency headed by a leader, commonly called the state superintendent or chief state school officer. Those leaders are responsible for administering state and federal policy by providing oversight and guidance to local education authorities, affecting essentially all dimensions of school operations. That latter role of interpreting and helping local districts carry out federal requirements is becoming

increasingly important in light of the growing federal interest in education that exists alongside federal dependence on state governments for implementation of national initiatives. Governance of education truly is an intergovernmental endeavor. Depending on the state, the state education chief might be elected by the public at large, appointed by the governor, or appointed by the state board of education. Sometimes governors themselves maintain their own secretaries of education, typically cabinet-level officials who serve as the governor's point person for education inside the administration.

State governments also maintain an array of boards that govern different aspects of education. All states except Minnesota and Wisconsin have multipurpose state education boards. These bodies make policy for an entire state much like school districts do for local communities. Members of state education boards may be elected at large or on a district basis, be appointed by the governor, or attain their seats in other ways. Their duties include making substantive policy in areas such as defining state academic standards, establishing the cut scores that determine how well students must perform on state tests to be deemed proficient, and, in some states, defining requirements of public school teaching certification. Some states possess separate specialized boards, too, which address areas such as higher education, teacher policy, and vocational learning. Twenty-nine states have enacted takeover laws that permit the state to assume direct operational control of a school district or individual school, thereby bypassing the locally elected officials discussed above.

Finally, consider the federal level. Although federal involvement in education has received increasing attention since the No Child Left Behind Act became law in 2002, the federal government has no direct constitutional authority in this area, except in protecting civil and other rights of students. The vast majority of responsibility, money, personnel, and other resources that contribute to schooling in the United States comes from state and local governments; that has been true historically, and it remains true today. Operationally, the federal government gains much of its power in schools when states or local school districts accept federal money, which comes with strings attached that define federal priorities, a practice that the courts have deemed permissible.¹⁰ The federal financial contribution typically totals 8 to 10 percent of what the nation spends on K–12 schooling.

The U.S. Department of Education is the federal agency primarily responsible for managing and administering federal education policy, but other agencies play additional supporting roles, contributing to the network of actors involved. For example, the largest federal program for prekindergarten education, Head Start, is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the national school lunch program is run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The federal education department is a relatively small operation, and its main function

is to dispense money and oversee expenditures from several dozen grant programs that attempt to address federal objectives.¹¹ Additionally, the federal courts have played a consequential role in the nation's schools, in particular on questions relating to educational equity, discrimination, and the personal rights of students in school, such as speech, religious expression, due process, and privacy.

Because education governance involves more than government actors, it is important to consider some of the groups and individuals outside government that also play key roles. Federal, state, and local agencies often employ private contractors, such as companies that develop tests, to help manage and implement policy. Others also exist in the private and nonprofit sectors, such as education management organizations and charter school networks, including large ones like the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) and Green Dot, which run schools across several different districts and states. Technology companies and private foundations have also begun to take an increasingly active role in the operation of local schools, often entering communities as partners with local districts or, in the case of virtual schools, providing students with options that enable them to earn school credits outside traditional geographically bounded school attendance zones and districts. These groups represent a handful of the nongovernmental organizations that play some sort of governing role in American education. Subsequent chapters explore others, as well.

Fragmentation, Confusion, and Dissatisfaction

Owing to this complicated array of institutions, American public schools operate in a complex and challenging environment, with multiple sources of funding and numerous masters who sometimes possess conflicting priorities and demand incongruous results. Federalism has produced dramatic variation across and within each state, while a historical attachment to localism has left superintendents, principals, and elected school board members to make most major decisions about personnel, programming, and budgets. The massive number of school districts nationwide makes it difficult for federal and state officials to provide effective oversight and for local officials to leverage their collective efforts. At the same time, individual school leaders have lost discretionary power in the face of the many mandates from district, state, and federal policymakers. The hierarchical organization of American public schools has often produced a compliance culture that stifles the ability and willingness of school teachers and leaders to improve school practice organically or to faithfully or effectively implement external reforms.

Insiders who work in the diverse institutions that oversee education and outsiders hoping to advance new ideas regularly express frustration with existing arrangements. Local school officials, teachers, and their unions lament the

apparent loss of flexibility that has come with accelerating standardization and testing. These groups often favor greater decentralization and control, which they see as a means to more accurately incorporate into schools on-the-ground wisdom and insights and to reflect local values and priorities. State administrators, board members, legislators, and governors struggle to advance their own initiatives while responding to mandates from state courts and the federal government.

Those working outside the traditional system who offer new methods for instructing children, organizing schools, integrating technology, and ushering teachers into the profession are often stymied as they try to implement their initiatives and bring them to scale within the complex web of institutions and rules that govern education. Even where new institutions have emerged that appear to break with prior practices, as with boards that authorize and oversee charter schools or collaborative efforts such as the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which attempts to define more uniform sets of student expectations, many questions remain about whether these arrangements can deliver on their ambitious promises absent broader structural changes in education governance.

In short, while public officials, advocates, and researchers may disagree on how to improve governance, there is considerable consensus that such improvements could help the nation make progress toward achieving its urgent education goals. With such agreement that the nation can—and must—govern education better, the moment is ripe for a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of what remains of the old, what has emerged of the new, and what alternatives to current governing arrangements might produce better education outcomes for children. It is our great hope that the analysis in this book can inform future attempts to adapt the country's nineteenth- and twentieth-century education governance structures to the changed demands of the twenty-first century.

Governance versus Policy

Scholars working around the globe in a diverse range of areas, including social welfare, labor, the environment, and energy, have considered the relationship between governance and policy and how both intersect to influence people's lives.¹² Although this book distinguishes between governance and policy, it is a fuzzy region of overlap rather than a bright line that separates the two. Still, maintaining a working distinction is useful because it clarifies that choices about governance and about policy are not necessarily the same thing. A key conclusion of this book, in fact, turns on that distinction. We hold that a challenge for education reformers is to harmonize governance and policy choices to foster conditions that maximize the opportunities for all students to have rigorous and

inspiring experiences in school, experiences that will help enrich their lives and allow them to become adults who contribute to the nation's democracy and economy. To clarify the distinction between governance and policy, we offer the following specific definitions.

Governance refers to the process by which formal institutions and actors wield power and make decisions that influence the conditions under which people live in a society. Those institutions may be representative bodies, such as legislatures, school boards, and the governor's office of a particular state. They also include institutions of government that make rules and implement policies, such as bureaucracies, and others, including courts, that offer judgments about whether certain policies are appropriate, given constitutional and other statutory commitments. It has become increasingly common for the institutions that govern to include private and nonprofit actors working alongside their public (read *government*) counterparts.¹³ Frequently, groups outside government are ushered into the system by granting or contract relationships. A common example in education is the use of education management organizations that run public schools in some large cities. The links that connect these various institutions and actors may imply lines of authority, as when one organization employs another to complete some task, or they may imply looser lines of collaboration, communication, or common interest. The former occurs, for example, when the U.S. Department of Education offers grants to state education departments to carry out some federal objective.¹⁴ The latter scenario arises when school districts, law enforcement agencies, and philanthropic groups, including churches and foundations, collaborate on specific projects—sometimes formally, by jointly administering a federal or state grant, but also informally, too—that help young people stay out of trouble and succeed in school.¹⁵

In contrast to governance, *policy* refers to the array of initiatives, programs, laws, regulations, and rules that the governance system chooses to produce.¹⁶ Policies can be quite broad or narrow. Much social science research and popular discussion have examined the degree to which certain education policy initiatives will improve the nation's schools. Consider these specific policy questions that have received increasing attention during the past decade: Are grant competitions a better way to distribute education funds than traditional formula allocations? Should teachers be evaluated based in part on student performance? If so, how should that performance be measured, and what elements should the evaluation include? Do students need to be tested in all (or many) grade levels for accountability systems to work? Should schools that struggle to perform receive additional funding, be subject to restaffing, or embrace new organizational designs? Should these schools be closed altogether and their students given opportunities to attend school somewhere else? Policies addressing these questions might result from the choices that elected officials working in legislatures and the executive

branch of government produce, such as a law like No Child Left Behind that requires all students to take standardized tests in reading and math in grades three through eight. Other policies might emerge in the form of regulations by which government bureaucracies, including local school district offices, state education agencies, and the federal education department, fill in the gaps needed to implement laws or court rulings. Furthermore, in states that allow collective bargaining between teacher unions (a nongovernmental actor) and district school boards (nearly always elected by the public), teacher contracts that emerge from union-board negotiations define numerous policies that dictate how schools and districts will handle personnel and other matters.

One reason the lines between governance and policy discussions can get blurry is that policy choices often have direct governance implications. This can happen when policies fundamentally alter the relationship between institutions and the actors that govern them. For example, some state laws allow for the creation of public charter schools, which operate without the same regulatory and other requirements as traditional public schools. In contrast to the typical school principals described in the opening pages of this chapter, charter school principals generally have much more discretion because they do not work for traditional school districts and are often not bound by the terms of a collectively bargained contract. Another recent example involves state laws that have empowered mayors to run a handful of schools or the entire local school system. Those policy changes have dramatically undercut the historically dominant governance role of school boards and the superintendents those boards hire. State charter laws or laws that provide for mayoral control can substantially alter the array of actors that govern public schools, resulting in new relationships within the governance system.

The chapters in this volume argue that understanding how specific education policies perform requires careful analysis of the broader governing arrangements that influence their content and implementation. In other words, all policies emerge from and reside within systems of governance. Recognizing the distinction is important because it helps to identify the factors that contribute to the most important outcomes in education, namely, how well students do in school and the degree to which school helps prepare students for their adult lives. It could be that the same policy produces much different results in the presence of different governing arrangements. In that case, a policy change would be ill advised, whereas a governance change might improve performance. It also may be that a variety of policies perform quite well regardless of the governance system in place. Helping readers to think through these possible scenarios, and cultivating more careful and nuanced discussions about the relationships between governance and policy, is one of this book's main contributions.

Plan of the Volume

Taken together, the chapters that follow provide a comprehensive overview of the operation and effects of education governance in the United States. The book's approach is comprehensive in that the numerous diverse institutions and actors involved receive detailed attention, which contrasts with much work on governance that tends to focus on a relatively narrower set of players or topics.¹⁷ Although this prior work does illuminate how particular institutions govern, produce education policy, and influence school behavior, its discussion is nevertheless limited because it accounts for only a small number of governing institutions that influence the way the nation's schools operate. Notably, with few exceptions these works also tend to emphasize the role of government actors in education governance while understating the role of nongovernmental groups that are playing increasingly important roles.

These chapters also provide a powerful comparative perspective that other analyses of governance, in education or other policy fields, typically lack. Some of our authors offer comparative perspectives by examining the United States in light of broader concerns about governance and specific reforms in other nations around the world. The analysis includes a comparison of education governance with governance in other sectors such as health care and environmental policy, both of which involve complicated policy networks and often hard-to-measure or relatively long-term outcomes, much like education. An additional comparative perspective our authors bring is the juxtaposition of scholarly writers and those who work more directly in the policy world (including those who have had experience in both). These perspectives serve to check each other, as does the fact that the authors were chosen for their knowledge and expertise, not because they adhere to any unified vision of what governance should look like. Although all chapters in this volume approach the issue of education governance with a healthy skepticism—no author believes that prevailing arrangements are perfect, and several believe it is downright dysfunctional—the contributors come at the issue from a wide variety of professional and ideological perspectives; readers will find no groupthink in the ensuing pages.

The book is organized into four parts. Part 1 sizes up the education governance problem as it presently exists in the United States. What are the shortcomings of the current system? How might they affect students and the schools they attend? In chapter 2, Chester Finn and Michael Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute begin the discussion with a forceful critique of the present governance system. They take sharp aim at the nation's tradition of local control and the numerous ways it undercuts coherence, excellence, and educational equity.

In chapter 3, the University of Washington's Marguerite Roza tracks the many sources of funds that contribute to the nearly \$600 billion K–12 education industry in the United States. Roza notes that local school boards possess much power to spend this money but operate under numerous constraints as they develop and fund the programs that these revenues make possible. A major problem with present patterns of governance for finance, she notes, is the lack of coherent approaches that accurately account for the cost of providing education services to children and the inability of current approaches to adjust revenue and expenditure streams as broader economic conditions change.

Next, in chapter 4, the journalist and *Education Week* writer Michelle Davis examines the challenges confronting public officials who operate within the current system of governance and attempt to adapt policy to meet shifting demands and to leverage new opportunities. As Davis shows, these challenges emerge for leaders across levels of government, in urban and rural settings, and in states that allow and in those that prohibit collective bargaining for teachers. No matter where these potential innovators operate, it seems, systems of governance create a thicket of obstacles that are difficult to navigate.

In chapter 5, Steven Wilson examines similar sets of constraints, but in contrast to Davis's chapter, he considers innovators working outside the system. Wilson, who is the chief executive officer of Ascend Learning, a charter school management organization in New York City, focuses on innovators in three areas: charter schools, nontraditional teacher preparation, and digital learning. He explains that although innovators who have worked outside the traditional lines of education have seen their initiatives gain momentum in recent years, they still struggle amid prevailing education practices that long-standing governance arrangements help to maintain. Yet as word has spread of these disruptive innovations and the educational opportunities they create, public support for the powerful alliance of interest groups that maintains the governance status quo is beginning to erode, a trend that Wilson predicts will continue into the future.

Although patterns of education governance have remained resilient, numerous trends are in motion that have already begun to alter patterns and practices across federal, state, and local governments. The chapters in part 2 examine these traditional institutions that are now in flux. That analysis begins in chapter 6, where Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute and Olivia Meeks of the District of Columbia Public Schools examine some of the tensions between traditional models of local control and alternative models that have been proposed and implemented in some contexts, including mayoral leadership. The chapter pushes beyond assessing these prevailing trends, though, and offers reasons that future changes may produce even more dramatic departures from current practice, including the separation of education governance from local geographic boundaries.

Kathryn McDermott of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst examines state-level dynamics in chapter 7, focusing on emerging models of interstate governance that have the potential to influence how future standards, testing, and accountability policies unfold. The role of networks involving many states and nongovernmental organizations receives much attention here as McDermott analyzes the various state consortiums that have emerged from the Common Core State Standards Initiative. She compares that effort with a smaller one with a longer track record, the New England Common Assessment Program, to describe the current features and likely future paths for interstate governance.

In chapter 8, Kenneth Wong of Brown University examines the evolving federal role and the various education federalisms that this evolution has produced during the past several decades. Wong zeroes in on how initiatives such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have helped move the nation from a “categorical federalism,” focused on redistribution of funds, to new phases of “performance-based federalism” that now are designed to promote accountability for improved outcomes and institutional innovation as well as redistribution. The chapter considers how sustainable this new federalism may be as it confronts and tries to alter prevailing approaches to governance.

Jeffrey Henig of Columbia University provides a broad perspective that cuts across levels of government in chapter 9. His analysis examines how presidents, governors, and mayors—what he calls “education executives”—have begun to take on new governing roles in education. An important development fostered by increased executive interest, Henig explains, is the erosion of barriers that have kept education isolated as a special, exceptional, function of government.

The book’s field of vision expands in part 3, where authors provide valuable comparative perspectives that help to place American education governance in broader contexts. These comparisons begin in chapter 10, where Sir Michael Barber of Pearson derives lessons for the United States based on his personal experience as an education official in England and as a consultant to numerous countries and organizations around the world. As Barber sees it, the United States and England seek similar ends, such as improved student performance and enhanced equity in outcomes, but he notes how their different governance contexts have led them to pursue these goals in different ways. Still, especially important in both nations (and any nation, really) is the need to cultivate an effective “mediating layer” that helps harmonize the interests of central authorities with the real-time challenges on the ground that teachers, principals, and innovators face each day as they teach and deliver other services to students.

In chapter 11, Sandra Vergari of the State University of New York at Albany offers another comparative perspective in her analysis of education governance in the United States and Canada. Vergari’s analysis provides a useful contrast between what she calls national and federal education policy, the former emerging from the

collaborative work of subnational governments and the latter the product of assertive central-government action. Her examination shows that provincial education leaders in Canada wield tremendous power compared with national leaders and local officials in Canadian school districts. Strong provincial leadership has produced a relatively coherent approach to schooling across the country that stands in marked contrast to the more fragmented approaches present in the United States.

Chapter 12, written by Michael Mintrom, of Monash University and the Australia and the New Zealand School of Government, and Richard Walley, of the New Zealand Ministry of Education, examines a handful of high-performing nations, relating their governance systems to student outcomes. The chapter shows how different governing institutions and relationships contribute to policy content and student performance. The authors note that the direct links between governance and achievement are weak, yet it is clear that governance approaches, whatever they are, can contribute to success as long as they make education effectiveness their central mission. The chapter derives six broad lessons that have the potential to help reformers connect governance changes to this key goal.

In chapter 13, Barry Rabe of the University of Michigan returns the focus to the United States but continues the comparative approach of part 3 by considering what insights one might draw for education governance by examining health care and environmental policy. Specifically, Rabe describes how two key policies, Medicaid and the Clean Air Act, are governed in the nation's federal system. He also analyzes the implications that governance has had on policy development and health and environmental outcomes, while comparing these developments with education. Rabe sees similarities and differences across these three policy areas, in particular, their complex intergovernmental structures and shared governance arrangements.

Part 4 considers paths forward and offers some specific governance reforms that would break with current practices. Cynthia Brown of the Center for American Progress begins this discussion in chapter 14, where she builds on Roza's earlier analysis of the mechanisms of school funding by demonstrating how these practices undercut equity. Brown argues that the nation should move toward a system that maintains the federal redistributive role while also centralizing the governance of education finance at the state level.

In chapter 15, Paul Hill of the University of Washington proposes a new model of education governance, essentially starting from scratch, that aims to cultivate fresh incentives and opportunities for managers and political overseers of schools. The model retains important yet specific and limited roles for elected officials and simultaneously provides school leaders with more flexibility to govern along with higher performance expectations. The model also attempts to

limit the influence of organized interests on school governance while empowering parents and placing them in an even more important role.

In chapter 16, Kenneth Meier, of Texas A&M University and the Cardiff School of Business (U.K.), provides an assessment of the broad theoretical assumptions that the previous chapters have either embraced or implied. He shows that approaches to governance reform depend on how the governance problem is conceptualized. Different theories of the problem can produce divergent proposals grounded in different theories of action. Meier concludes by noting that regardless of the governance path chosen, a constellation of supporting policies, which he advocates, can help make numerous governance reforms more effective. He also emphasizes that regardless of the governance system, success is unlikely to occur if local districts and schools fail to develop and keep talented system- and school-level managers.

Finally, in chapter 17 we identify several lines of agreement and disagreement, and enduring questions that emerge from the diverse perspectives and bodies of evidence that our talented authors have assembled. Ultimately, we conclude that although no perfect or ideal form of education governance exists, anyone interested in improving student opportunities and performance in the United States absolutely must consider the ways in which governance influences how specific programs or policies are carried out. Although it may be difficult to find direct evidence that specific approaches to governance contribute to positive outcomes, it is relatively easy to see how certain approaches, when they encounter specific conditions on the ground, can get in the way and even do harm. The chapters in this book explain why this is true and what the United States might do to better harmonize its system of education governance with those ground-level conditions to achieve the country's stated goals of providing excellent and equitable school experiences for all students while maintaining a system that is transparent to politicians and accountable to the broader public.

Notes

1. On matters such as hiring people to staff the White House, helping to set the nation's budget agenda, and adopting policy initiatives with the stroke of a pen, as when Truman signed Executive Order 9981 that legally ended racial discrimination in the U.S. military, presidents wield much power. For an examination of the reach and limits of executive power in government, see James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

2. Although variation in state and local policies gives some principals more power to make these decisions—as in large urban districts in Texas, where they have much power to hire and fire teachers (see chapter 16 in this volume)—the typical American principal operates under the sorts of constraints described here.

3. In their classic work on school choice, for example, John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe note, “Without being too literal about it, we think reformers would do well to entertain the notion that choice *is* a panacea. . . . [Choice] has the capacity *all by itself* to bring about the kind of transformation that, for years, reformers have been seeking to engineer in myriad other ways” (emphasis in original). Chubb and Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* (Brookings Press, 1990), p. 217.

4. Noel Epstein, ed., *Who’s in Charge Here? The Tangled Web of School Governance and Policy* (Washington and Denver, Colo.: Brookings Press and Education Commission of the States, 2004), p. 1. See also Frederick M. Wirt and Michael W. Kirst, *The Political Dynamics of American Education*, 4th ed. (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan, 2009), and David T. Conley, *Who Governs Our Schools?: Changing Roles and Responsibilities* (Teachers College Press, 2003).

5. Kenneth J. Meier and others, “Structural Choices and Representational Biases: The Post-Election Color of Representation,” *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 4 (2005): 758–68.

6. National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2010* (U.S. Department of Education, 2011), table 100.

7. See National Association of Charter School Authorizers, “Authorizer Comparison,” 2012 (www.qualitycharters.org).

8. Kenneth K. Wong and others, *The Education Mayor: Improving America’s Schools* (Georgetown University Press, 2007).

9. Arnold F. Shober, *Splintered Accountability: State Governance and Education Reform* (State University of New York Press, 2010); Wirt and Kirst, *The Political Dynamics of American Education*.

10. James E. Ryan, “The Tenth Amendment and Other Paper Tigers: The Legal Boundaries of Education Governance,” in *Who’s in Charge Here?* edited by Epstein, pp. 42–74.

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

12. Barry Rabe, ed., *Greenhouse Governance: Addressing Climate Change in America* (Brookings Press, 2010); Carolyn J. Heinrich and Laurence E. Lynn, eds., *Governance and Performance: New Perspectives* (Georgetown University Press, 2000); Kenneth J. Meier and Laurence J. O’Toole, *Bureaucracy in a Democratic State: A Governance Perspective* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Simona Piattoni, *The Theory of Multi-Level Governance: Conceptual, Empirical, and Normative Challenges* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

13. Lester M. Salamon, ed., *The Tools of Government* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Meier and O’Toole, *Bureaucracy in a Democratic State*.

14. The classic statement on this sort of relationship is Martha Derthick, *The Influence of Federal Grants* (Harvard University Press, 1970). A recent example in education is Paul Manna, *Collision Course: Federal Education Policy Meets State and Local Realities* (Washington: CQ Press, 2011).

15. Robert Agranoff, *Managing within Networks: Adding Value to Public Organizations* (Georgetown University Press, 2007).

16. One could also add the nuance that policies are also suggested by the absence of these laws, initiatives, and programs. Scholars of agenda setting have noted that choosing

to ignore an issue or a potential topic of concern also implies a set of policy priorities (for example, “Our policy in area X is that we have no policy”). See, for example, Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1993); John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (HarperCollins, 1984).

17. Examples include William G. Howell, ed., *Besieged: School Boards and the Future of American Politics* (Brookings Press, 2005); Jeffrey R. Henig and Wilbur C. Rich, eds., *Mayors in the Middle: Politics, Race, and Mayoral Control of Urban Schools* (Princeton University Press, 2004); Eric A. Hanushek and Alfred A. Lindseth, *Schoolhouses, Courthouses, and Statehouses: Solving the Funding-Achievement Puzzle in America's Public Schools* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Patrick J. McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy, 1965–2005* (University Press of Kansas, 2006); and Paul Manna, *School's In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda* (Georgetown University Press, 2006); Shober, *Splintered Accountability*. Exceptions include Wirt and Kirst, *The Political Dynamics of American Education*; Conley, *Who Governs Our Schools?*; and Epstein, *Who's in Charge Here?*

