

# Foreword

*“He who fails to plan is planning to fail”*

—Winston Churchill

One of the most important elements in economic productivity growth—if not *the most important* element—is human capital development. At the foundation of human capital development is a solid footing in K–12 education. Sadly, that solid footing in the United States is, at best, crumbling and, at worst, barely standing.

In an increasingly complex global economy, providing the highest-quality education to tomorrow’s leaders is crucial if the United States is to maintain its competitive edge and its position as the world’s leading economic power. The public recognizes this. Although lists of citizens’ concerns are still topped by national security and combating terrorism, government gridlock and potential financial default, and stubbornly high unemployment and a persistently underperforming economy, American parents and the general public still worry about how well (or poorly) we educate our children. In a recent Rasmussen Poll, 62 percent of surveyed voters listed “education” as a “very important” issue to them—more important than, for example, “immigration,” “national security,” and “environment.”

Almost fifteen years ago, Hoover’s Koret Task Force on K–12 Education first appeared on the map as a team with the release of *A Primer on America’s Schools*. Part of the volume’s purpose was, in the words of Terry M. Moe, the volume’s editor, “simply describing and assessing the current state of American education.” The task force members did not paint a pretty picture.

In the ensuing decade and a half, much has changed in American education. Charter schools were just a blip on the radar screen; now

there are more than five thousand charter schools in the United States with total enrollment approaching two million students. There has been a noticeable change in the demographics of America's children; 61 percent were white in 2000, but by 2010 that number had fallen to 54 percent. (For K–12 public school enrollment, the change is even more dramatic: from 61.2 percent white in 2000 to 52.4 percent white in 2010 to a preliminary estimate of 51.0 percent white in 2013.) Digital learning was more *Jetsons* than *Leave It to Beaver* and, conceptually, was limited primarily to a few science classes at the university level. MOOCs, STEM, Khan Academy, and No Child Left Behind were not in the education lexicon.

Education reform remains necessary because, regrettably, many of the reforms proposed during the past fifteen (some say thirty) years have not worked due to bad design, poor performance, political resistance, or flat-out fear of change. Simply throwing more money at the problem (and K–12 education is a \$700 billion industry) has not and, in the task force's view, will not solve our education troubles.

Looking backward with 20/20 hindsight is easy; predicting the future is not, but *planning* for the future is necessary. In this volume, the task force (as it did in 1999–2000) looks at where we've come from but, more important, looks cautiously to the future of American education (as hinted by this book's cover).

There is room for hope, and the task force members express their hope for the future of American education in this volume. Knowing that an educated public is necessary for a free society, we must prepare our children to compete internationally in a highly complex, more technical, global economy. With new technologies, by inculcating a creative educational philosophy, and, at some levels, by breaking from the past, we can prepare our children. In this volume, the task force provides advice for change.

The Hoover Institution strives to generate, nurture, and disseminate ideas defining a free society. Ideas should bloom in the classroom. The intersection of idea-generation at a research center and in the classroom is part of the motivation for the Institution's

attention to K–12 education and for the creation of Hoover’s Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.

I thank the eleven members of the task force for their work on this book. When the task force first convened in September 1999, today’s high school seniors were not yet in kindergarten. Fifteen years later, nine of the eleven original task force members are still with us—a testament to their camaraderie (or resiliency) and to the intellectual stimulation of the task force. I offer special acknowledgment to Chester Finn, the task force chair, and to both Chester and Richard Sousa, who edited this book.

I wish to thank our generous and faithful donors, starting with the Koret Foundation and the Taube Family Foundation and Tad Taube, representing both these philanthropic institutions in their founding and longstanding support for Hoover’s education initiative. Other supporters are deserving of acknowledgment for their generosity as well: Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Edmund and Jeannik Littlefield, John M. Olin Foundation, Bernard Lee Schwartz Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Jack R. and Mary Lois Wheatley, and William E. Simon Foundation. Without their efforts, we would not have accomplished the important and sustaining work over these many years.

For nearly one hundred years, the Hoover Institution has collected rare and at-risk materials for its archives, and our scholars have examined political, economic, and social change. We will continue on that path, developing and marketing *ideas defining a free society*. Nowhere is that more important than in human capital development for our young children. In this volume, Hoover extends its legacy of excellence, producing high-quality scholarship and thoughtful prescriptions for productive policy alternatives.

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