

Foreword

In January 2006, Florida governor Jeb Bush made a two-day visit to the Hoover Institution. His visit coincided with the semiannual meeting of the Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education, a group of well-known experts whose research addresses American education policy. Governor Bush's timing was intentional and appreciated. We were delighted to welcome Governor Bush and discuss Florida's achievements. While he was there, he invited the task force to undertake an assessment of Florida's education policy and practices under his administration.

Governor Bush's request of the task force was not without precedent. In 2003, Texas governor Rick Perry asked the Koret Task Force to prepare policy recommendations on critical education issues facing that state, and, in 2004, the task force was asked by Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee to engage in a similar undertaking. Both projects introduced into statewide discussions a wide-ranging set of education policy ideas that engaged state leaders, lawmakers, and educators.

Governor Bush's involvement with the task force began when he met with members of the Koret Task Force and Florida's top education officials in 2004. At that time, the task force learned of the extensive and high-quality information being collected on student achievement in Florida. Individual task force members were given access to the data to examine critical education policy questions and have used these data in the analysis found in this volume.

Acknowledging its role as a critical—and reasoned—analyst of student, teacher, and school performance, Governor Bush proposed, in his 2006 visit to Hoover, that the task force take on a more unified and comprehensive project: analyzing and assessing state education policy, recommending future initiatives, and placing the Florida reforms within a broad, national perspective—including their implications for the No Child Left Behind Act. The task force accepted the challenge and produced a sweeping, separately published, study of education in Florida that provides the results of its investigation.

The Koret Foundation has a long record of seeking ways to strengthen American public education. In extensive discussions in 1998, Koret Foundation president Tad Taube and I developed the concept of assembling a task force of leading reform-minded scholars to address the country's most pressing issues in K–12 education. With the foundation's initiating support, the Hoover Institution gathered together eleven preeminent scholars (John E. Chubb, Williamson M. Evers, Chester E. Finn Jr., Eric A. Hanushek, E. D. Hirsch Jr., Paul T. Hill, Caroline M. Hoxby, Terry M. Moe, Paul E. Peterson, Diane Ravitch, and Herbert J. Walberg) to form Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education, a major part of the Hoover Institution's Initiative on American Public Education. For the past seven years, this group of scholars has conducted influential research and analysis on public education, presented pertinent facts about key issues, and developed proposals for reform. The resulting body of work, including this volume, has come to play an important role in the public discourse and debate about education policy.

The three core principles the Koret Task Force articulates in its proposals and analysis are accountability, choice, and transparency. Rigorous academic standards and assessments as well as incentives and interventions tied to results, open competition among schools combined with parental choice, and readily accessible information about every school and each school system are the practices that will drive excellence in education. No policy arrangement can be effective if those principles are ignored; the task force uses them all to evaluate educational performance, and this philosophy is evidenced in the group's work in Florida.

The task force would like to thank Governor Bush for inviting us to Florida to undertake this assessment. His dedication to education reform in Florida is integral to the success of the state's children. In Florida, the task force enjoyed the generous assistance of many who gave their time and expertise. Thanks to their support and effort the Koret Task Force's insights into Florida's public education system can now become a part of the state's vibrant and ongoing discussion.

A number of my Hoover colleagues—Marshall Blanchard, Jeff Bliss, Amy Finnerty, Jennifer Navarrette, Caleb Offley, Kyoko Oishi, Richard Sousa, and Ann Wood—also were instrumental at various stages of this project; their work is acknowledged. Chester Finn, chairman of the Koret Task Force, and Paul Peterson, editor of this volume, were engaged every step of the way in shepherding this project to its conclusion. Finally, the work of the Hoover Institution can be completed only with the financial assistance of our loyal donors. A number of them explicitly supported this project, and I thank them: Javier and Jeronimo Arango, Howard H. Leach and Robert A. Day, Tom Stephenson, Chris Sullivan, and Zachariah P. Zachariah, M.D.

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