

Foreword

Some years ago, Tad Taube and I met on several occasions to discuss the quality of schooling provided to America's children, particularly those in low-income situations. Tad is president of the Koret Foundation, a philanthropic organization that, in recent years, has focused on ways of improving the quality of public education in the United States. Tad also serves on the Board of Overseers of the Hoover Institution and is a member of the board's Executive Committee. In this capacity, he encouraged Hoover to find ways of mobilizing its intellectual resources to help achieve the critically important policy objective of improving public education in the United States.

With Tad's encouragement, and the strong support of the board of the Koret Foundation, the Institution embarked on the *Initiative on American Public Education*. The purposes include presenting key facts on the current condition of American education, contributing to the debate over ways in which it might be improved, and developing proposals for education reform. The centerpiece of the initiative has

been the formation of a task force of educational experts who are well regarded within the education community and who have a broad understanding of the country's capacity for school reform. The Board of Directors of the Koret Foundation, interested in supporting this effort, provided crucial resources that allowed for the establishment of the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education, a group of eleven scholars, namely, 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. (Their titles and affiliations are provided elsewhere in this volume.)

The Koret Task Force on K-12 Education has proven to be more productive than even the most optimistic of us had anticipated. Since it formally convened in 1999, it has developed a strong collegial spirit and a willingness to work cooperatively on behalf of a common goal. Its work has culminated in a variety of publications. It has issued three books, *A Primer on America's Schools* (Hoover Institution Press, 2001), edited by Terry Moe; *School Accountability* (Hoover Institution Press, 2002), edited by Williamson M. Evers and Herbert J. Walberg; and *Choice with Equity* (Hoover Institution Press, 2002), edited by Paul T. Hill. Koret Task Force members also serve as editors, contributors, and members of the editorial board of a new journal, *Education Next: A Journal of Opinion and Research*, which the Hoover Institution publishes and which is available by subscription, at bookstores throughout the country, and on the Internet at www.educationnext.org. Koret Task Force members have also prepared numerous interpretative essays that have appeared in newspapers, journals, and magazines throughout the country. In recognition of these accomplishments, the task force received the prestigious Koret Prize in April 2002.

The Koret Task Force once again breaks new ground with the publication of *Our Schools and Our Future: . . . Are We Still At Risk?* The Koret Task Force, in this volume, reviews the state of American

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education twenty years after the original report on the quality of America's schools by the National Commission on Educational Excellence, appointed by President Ronald Reagan's secretary of education, Terrel H. Bell. As Paul Peterson discusses in the preface that follows, *A Nation at Risk* identified a rising tide of mediocrity in American education and asked Americans to halt that rise by renewing their commitment to quality education. Examining the progress—or lack thereof—during the ensuing years, the Koret Task Force has produced its own updated report on the condition of American education and the steps needed to make significant progress in the future. Included with this jointly authored report are essays on more specific topics prepared by individual members of the task force, providing documentation for the findings and recommendations made in the comprehensive statement itself. In *Our Schools and Our Future: . . . Are We Still at Risk?* the Koret Task Force renews the call for excellence but also asks the country to bring accountability, choice, and transparency into the structure and operation of its public schools. Only by taking such steps can public education achieve the excellence the National Commission demanded.

Many individuals have made essential contributions to this undertaking. In particular, I wish to thank Patricia Baker, Marshall Blanchard, David Davenport, Peggy Dooley, Christie Harlick, Laura Higgins, Tyce Palmaffy, Joan Saunders, Richard Sousa, and Ann Wood for their outstanding efforts.

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