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High-Spending, Low-Performing School Districts

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PROPONENTS OF "ADEQUACY" argue in court and in other forums that substantially more money needs to be spent on the existing school system in order to provide an adequate education for children. A premise of the adequacy campaigns is that it is easy to quantitatively measure and objectively determine the cost of providing an adequate public education to all children.[1] Once adequacy proponents come up with their cost figures, they demand the resources from the political system, usually through

The authors wish to acknowledge research assistance from Matt Rojansky, Kate Feinstein, Andrew Dawson, and Ze'ev Wurman. The authors also wish to thank Eric Hanushek, Derrell Bradford, Casey Lartigue, and Neal McCluskey for reading drafts of this chapter and making suggestions for improvement.

1. For a discussion of problems with determining how much government spending in some domain is enough, see Buchanan (1965), especially chapter 18.

the courts.[2] But if provided, would such money be effectively used?[3] After all, one should not judge a foreign aid program simply on the amount spent, nor should one review a Hollywood motion picture based on its budget.[4]

Do school districts, as presently constituted, have the capacity to succeed academically with low-performing students? Are school districts organized in a way that ensures they are making productive use of the money they now receive from taxpayers or of the additional money they would receive if adequacy campaigns prevailed? The goal of this chapter is to look at the politics and organization of school districts to see if they are likely to be productive enough that their schools can effectively teach low-performing students. Unless school districts as currently constituted have the needed capacity for productivity, channeling large amounts of additional money to those districts will not succeed in boosting student achievement.

Adequacy campaigns and adequacy lawsuits maintain that infusing large amounts of money into poorly performing districts will bring about student academic success. Yet money and other added resources have not in the past brought about successful schools (Hanushek 1986, 1989, 1997). In the case of Kentucky, the first state to which an adequacy verdict applied, George Cunningham writes that despite the "enormous commitment in resources" (almost a billion dollars in the first eight years) and putting in place the "most expensive testing system of any state"

2. To the extent that the lawyers for the plaintiffs are paid for or reimbursed with tax money, this is an instance of what Daniel Patrick Moynihan calls an "autogamous mode" of government growth: "big government ordering itself to become bigger" (Moynihan 1972, 70).

3. As one set of researchers put it: "[W]hile equal funding across schools and school districts might be desirable, it does not assure that funds would be directed productively toward the goal of academic achievement. . . ." (Ladd, Chalk, and Hansen 1999, 2)

4. The authors owe the film-reviewing analogy to Postrel (2006).

(on a per-pupil basis), there is "scant evidence" of any success in improving student academic performance (Cunningham 2004, 297, 299).[5]

Many proponents of adequacy efforts would, in a sense, agree with those who question the efficacy of merely adding funds and other resources. These adequacy proponents would say: "We agree with you that money should be spent wisely and spent on things that foster academic success."[6] But critics of adequacy campaigns ask: Will the school districts that receive all this money be blinded by fads and fashions? Will politics, ideologies, or the institutional structure of districts (including susceptibility to corruption) tend to divert money into paths and projects that do not advance student achievement? In other words, even if considerable sums of money are forthcoming from taxpayers, are there incentives in place in local school systems that will encourage, on a regular basis, effective efforts that lead to academic success?

Previous studies have compared school district spending and performance, for example, in the states of Colorado, Idaho, and Minnesota (Mitchell and Morson 2006; Wenders 2005b; Yecke 2005).[7] But here we will put five school districts under the microscope: Kansas City, Missouri; Washington, D.C.; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Newark, New Jersey; and Sausalito, California. Though these districts are high-spending (figure 4.1), they are also low-performing. Scrutiny of such districts can help to identify some of the reasons why adequacy funding might fail to

5. On Kentucky, see also Innes (2006).

6. For example, the court in *Abbott II* said: "[The research] does not show that money makes no difference. What it strongly suggests is that money can be used more effectively." *Abbott v. Burke*, 119 N.J. 287, 575 A. 2d (1990), 375. See also Schrag (2005, 115, 117–18, 243) ("if money is well spent, it can have a major impact"); Murnane and Levy (1996, 96).

7. Such comparisons were also done in the 1970s, during an earlier wave of school finance reform. For Michigan, see Murphy and Cohen (1974).

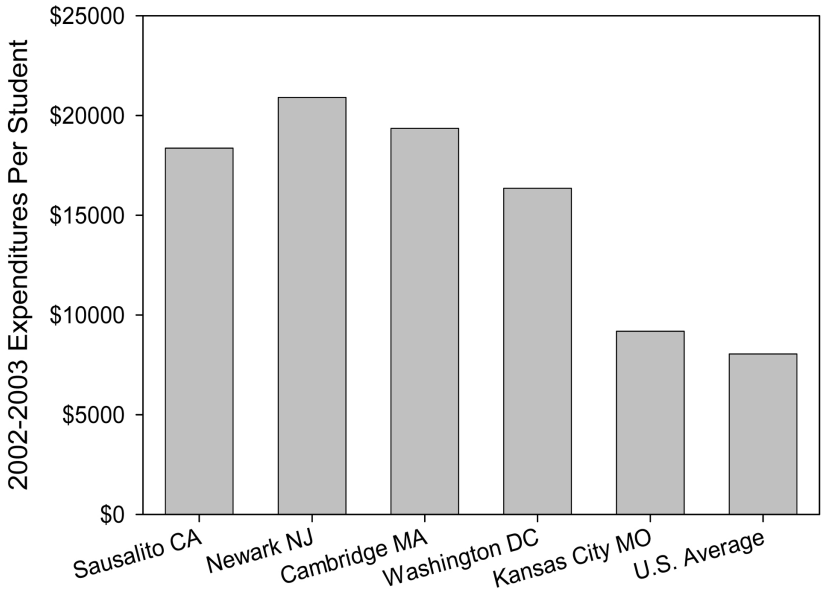

Figure 4.1 Expenditures per Student for 2002–2003 for Five Selected Districts and the U.S. Average

Note: This chart of 2002–2003 expenditures does not show the level of spending in Kansas City during its 1984–1997 desegregation plan. The peak of Kansas City school district spending came in 1991–1992, when the district was spending over $11,700 per pupil per year. This would be over $15,400 in 2002–2003 dollars.

Sources: Data from Ciotti 2001, 329; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data, http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/.

produce effective schooling. After looking at the five districts one at a time, we will compare what they did, and we will analyze the politics and operations of school districts in general to evaluate the prospects for adequate spending as a route to student academic success.

Case Studies

Kansas City, Missouri

Kansas City, Missouri, is a "low-key, sleepy" metropolis, at least as compared with New York, Los Angeles or Chicago, which are often the focus of discussions of urban school performance (Ciotti 2001, 310).[8] Yet a major, court-ordered experiment in high spending took place in the schools of Kansas City from 1984 through 1997, with effects that continue to the present. Despite continued spending on Kansas City's public schools to the tune of almost twelve thousand dollars per student (compared with an average of almost five thousand dollars per student at the state level at the time), the performance of the district's public schoolchildren would not qualify today as even mediocre.[9] This is not surprising in light of the district's long history of spectacular mismanagement.

In April 1984, Federal District Judge Russell G. Clark found the state of Missouri and Kansas City, Missouri, School District (KCMSD) liable for the abysmal conditions of the city's schools that he said amounted to de facto segregation. Judge Clark believed that a rejuvenated school system would attract white students from the surrounding suburbs to return to the city. To achieve this revitalization, Judge Clark ordered the plaintiffs (who represented schoolchildren) to propose a list of ideal im-

8. This case study relies heavily on the research of Morantz (1996) and Ciotti (2001).

9. According to Ciotti (2001, 329), who cites the Desegregation Division of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, at the peak of KCMSD's desegregation-plan spending in 1991–1992, the district was spending over $11,700 per pupil per year. According to Morantz (1996), from 1985 (before the court order took effect) to 1992, total KCMSD expenditures per enrolled student increased from $3,464 to $11,513, while the state average increased from $3,030 to $4,723.

provements for their schools.[10] With the judge's backing and a guarantee of state financing compelled by the court, the plaintiffs dreamed up a bold plan to reinvent Kansas City schools. By 1997, when Judge Clark finally recused himself from the litigation, the plan had ballooned to a total cost of over $2 billion (Ciotti 2001; Gewertz 2000).

Much of the revitalization money went not to personnel costs but to lavish (and often wasteful) infrastructure projects. Fifteen new schools were built, and fifty-four others renovated, including the construction of an Olympic-sized swimming pool (which district officials called a "natatorium") with underwater viewing room, a robotics lab, a planetarium, an arboretum, a zoo and twenty-five-acre wildlife refuge, an elaborate moot-court layout, and a model United Nations chamber (with simultaneous translation facilities). As if such paradisiacal facilities would not promote themselves by word of mouth, the district also allocated almost $1 million for broadcast and print media advertising to attract suburban students back to the city's schools. The students could be brought by bus or taxi, to be paid for by the district, to schools where they would enjoy student-teacher ratios of 12 or 13 to 1, the lowest of any major school district in the United States (Morantz 1996; Ciotti 2001; Lindseth, this volume, chapter 2).

Worse than these outlandish and wasteful projects was the gross, even criminal, mismanagement of the flood of state funding. Employees stole hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment every year, finance officers wrote checks directly to themselves, and insiders described the atmosphere as that of a "third world country" suddenly endowed with "unlimited

10. In this case the plaintiffs (who represented schoolchildren) and the defendant (the school district) had cooperated to keep the case going during the trial and the appeals. They also worked together to create the revitalization plan (Morantz 1996; Ciotti 2001).

wealth." Nearly half the state's education budget was flowing to the KCMSD and St. Louis schools, which together had less than 10 percent of the state's students.[11] Even though the KCMSD maintained an administrative staff three to five times larger than that of any comparably sized school district, administrators in the district's central office were so overwhelmed by this lavish spending that they simply threw up their hands and allowed fiscal management to go into meltdown. Equipment and materials were arriving before building and remodeling projects were prepared to make use of them, and construction costs were pork-barreled up to three or four times what they would have cost in any other district (Ciotti 2001).

The district hired teachers with little weight being given to merit. Knowledgeable observers concluded that during the revitalization effort somewhere from 20 to 50 percent of teachers in the district were "totally incompetent" at their jobs. The district was so rapidly swamped with cash that it raised teacher salaries almost 50 percent in one year (Ciotti 2001). Yet when it came to salary hikes, the state of Missouri contended that the 1990 hike that was part of the revitalization effort had "virtually no effect on increasing the quality of new hires or decreasing the quality of staff who left the District" (Morantz 1996, 254). During the revitalization effort, class sizes shrank from the thirties to the low twenties (Gewertz 2000).

By 1991, even with the huge amounts of money being funneled from the state to improve the KCMSD educational offerings as part of the desegregation effort, the district was facing a multimillion-dollar deficit in its regular budget. Despite Judge Clark's doubling of Kansas City property tax rates to fund his school revitalization effort, the district could not come up with

11. The St. Louis school district had its own court-ordered finance plan that brought it extra money, but not at the scale ordered for Kansas City.

the financial wherewithal to service its debts, and thus flirted with bankruptcy and state receivership (Ciotti 2001).

As one might predict, the measurable academic results of the revitalization effort were as disappointing as the corruption, inefficiency, and mismanagement. Test scores failed to improve over the course of the program. For example, on the statewide criterion-referenced Missouri Mastery and Achievement Tests, for each year (1990–1993) and for each of the four grade levels tested, the KCMSD continued to be 10 to 20 points below the state average. The revitalization program also did not narrow the gap between the district and state averages (Morantz 1996). Likewise, the black-white gap remained substantial, with African American twelfth-graders scoring at levels roughly three years behind those of white students in the same grade. By the mid-1990s few white students remained in the district, and as a result, nonwhite enrollment was above 90 percent in many schools (Ciotti 2001; Armor 2002).

In the end, even most of the basic educational infrastructure that the district had built (leaving aside the lavish extracurricular investments) went unused, since the KCMSD's thirty-seven thousand students simply could not fill seats for fifty-four thousand. The inevitable finally happened in 1997, when the school board voted to shut down two high schools and a middle school, and Judge Clark finally recused himself from the case after twenty years of guidance from the bench (Ciotti 2001).

The KCMSD desegregation and revitalization plan, under the sponsorship of Judge Clark, suffered from two basic fallacies. The first was that the mere presence of whites is the key to African American achievement. In fact, this rigid policy simply meant that the pressing needs of urban African Americans were ignored, while millions of dollars were invested in educating white suburban students who hadn't needed extra help in the

first place.[12] The second fallacy was that simply throwing money at a problem like underperforming schools would solve the problem. The KCMSD did the usual things that advocates of more funding for public education propose, including boosting spending per student, raising teacher salaries, reducing teacher workloads and class sizes, and investing in facilities and resources. These are the inputs commonly suggested by the educational establishment as sure ways to enhance student performance.

Yet student test scores, the only impartial measure of academic success, had an almost inverse correlation to all these "improvements" in the educational system. The KCMSD students routinely scored lower than students outside Kansas City, where schools spent about half as much per pupil, and than Kansas City parochial school students, for whom the per-pupil cost was less than a third as much (Ciotti 2001).

After the final settlement of the desegregation case in 2003, the KCMSD situation began to stabilize somewhat. Nonetheless, the district still maintains only provisional accreditation from the state board of education and is surviving largely on the largesse of a four-year, $6.1 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. As shown in figure 4.2, the district's troubles with low student achievement have not subsided. Most of the seventh grade students still have unsatisfactory reading achievement, meaning that these students "lack the basic reading skills needed to meet typical grade-level expectations." Most tenth grade students are scoring at the "step 1" level in mathematics, meaning that they "demonstrate only a minimal understanding of fundamental concepts and little or no ability to apply that knowledge."

12. A telling illustration of this phenomenon was the district's policy in the early 1990s of indifference toward 50-to-70 percent drop-out rates among African American males in high school, because lowering black attendance was an easier way of bringing the black-white ratio closer to the prescribed 60-to-40 than attracting white suburban students (Ciotti 2001).

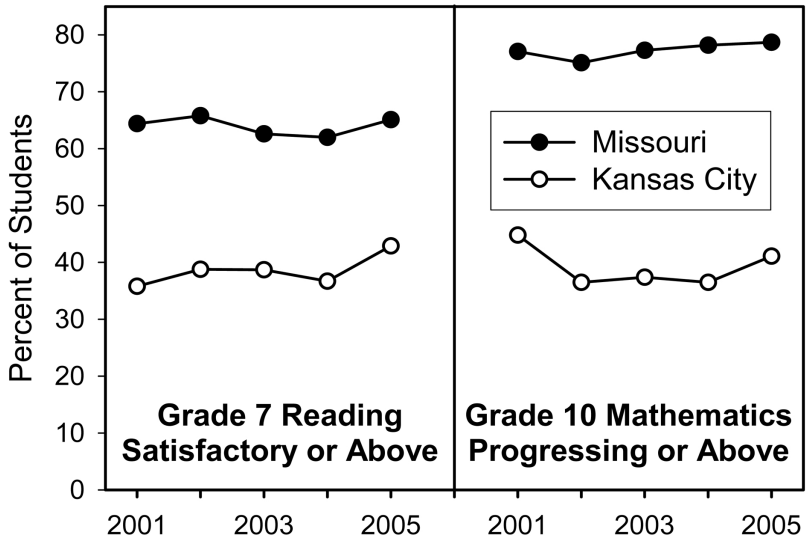

Figure 4.2 Achievement in Kansas City versus the Missouri State Average

Sources: Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP), Reading Score, http://dese.mo.gov/schooldata/four/048078/map7none.html.

Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri Assessment Program (MAP), table posted August 19, 2005.

Annual Report of School Data, http://dese.mo.gov/schooldata/four/048078/mapmnone.html.

Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri Assessment Program (MAP), table posted August 19, 2005.

The court provided the Kansas City district with, as Alison Morantz put it, "what most educators can only dream of," namely, "vast economic resources" with which to take on "the challenge of improving achievement" and of attracting white suburban students (Morantz 1996, 242). Unfortunately for Kansas City's children, and for those advocates with no better prescriptions for failing schools than high spending, the city's schools may have been among the best funded in the country, but they remain among the worst performing to this day.[13] As

13. In 2000 the district flunked every one of eleven performance measures

the Kansas City School Board treasurer commented in 2000, "we're not any better off than we were 23 years ago" (Gewertz, 2000).

It is apparent in retrospect (as it was to many observers at the time) that Kansas City and Missouri's investment in the KCMSD focused too much on glitzy inputs and not enough on internal effectiveness and outputs (Morantz 1996; Gewertz 2000). "We did all the easy but expensive things," commented the attorney for the plaintiffs, who was also a chief architect of the revitalization plan. District managers built new buildings, added new equipment, and created transportation programs. But they did not do "the inexpensive, dauntingly difficult things," like creating a curriculum, overseeing teaching practices, putting incentives in place, and hiring able teachers and principals and firing ineffective ones (Ciotti 2001, 320).[14] The court almost entirely declined to emphasize more effective teaching. The district neglected teacher quality, effective on-the-job teacher training, tenure reform, merit pay, empowerment of principals, charter schools, solid textbooks, and proven lesson plans. When Judge Clark repeatedly asked the district to come up with a core curriculum, it failed to do so (Ciotti 2001). Likewise, the monitoring committee pushed for greater concentration on curriculum and testing, but to no avail (Gerwertz 2000). But why should district officials have done the things that would have been effective, when they had no incentive to do so? In the words of the Missouri Board of Education president, Betty Preston, "you don't have a formula for success when you just throw money at a problem" (Gewertz 2000).

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for accreditation, which it lost, further jeopardizing its funding situation (Gewertz 2000).

14. Compare the comments of this attorney, Arthur A. Benson II, in Gewertz (2000).

Washington, D.C.

Under the sponsorship of President Thomas Jefferson, the District of Columbia's city council in 1804 established "a permanent institution for the education of youth in the city of Washington."[15] The Board of Trustees, to which Jefferson was appointed, declared that "in these schools poor children shall be taught reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, and such branches of the mathematics as may qualify them for the professions they are intended to follow" (Lartigue 2004, 69). Today, more than two centuries after the school system's founding, all too few of the schoolchildren of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) can read, write, and calculate, and its schools are in crisis, despite huge spending on public education.

In part, the crisis in Washington, D.C.'s schools stems from financial mismanagement, which Congress and President Bill Clinton sought to remedy through the formation of the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority (the "Control Board") in 1995. The Control Board concluded that "for each additional year that students stay in DCPS, the less likely they are to succeed, not because they are unable to succeed, but because the system does not prepare them to succeed" (Lartigue 2004, 70). Because of this, the Control Board restricted the Board of Education's management authority for five years (until 2000), after which the elected board resumed full authority.

Such dramatic failure, however, is not a new phenomenon for the DCPS but rather dates back almost a century. In 1920 a U.S. senator said "a crisis ha[d] been reached" for DCPS schools and their sixty thousand pupils, while in 1939, the DCPS super-

15. The authors are indebted to the work of Casey Lartigue (2004) and of the Council of the Great City Schools (2004).

intendent reported that police were called in to protect school principals from "youthful hoodlums" (Lartigue 2004, 69–70). Just eight years later, the school district's new superintendent described his domain as "one of the sorriest school systems in the country" (Lartigue 2004, 70). Journalist Peter Schrag calls the DCPS "perhaps the nation's most famously dysfunctional district" (Schrag 2005, 226).

One notable exception to the DCPS's history of consistent underperformance is the story of Dunbar High School during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dunbar was an African American high school whose students' standardized test scores in 1899 averaged higher than those of most white high school students in the district. The school was composed overwhelmingly of urban black students from poor households and had an all-black staff, including the principal, Mary Jane Patterson, who in 1862 became the first African American woman to earn a college degree. Principal Patterson's influence, along with that of other well-educated African American teachers, resulted in Dunbar graduates who outperformed the national averages consistently for some eighty-five years. From 1870 to 1955 most of Dunbar's graduates went on to higher education, many to Harvard and other elite institutions. The accomplishments of the school's alumni have been admirable. These alumni include the first African American graduate of Annapolis, the first African American woman to receive a Ph.D. in America, the first African American federal judge, the first African American general, the first African American cabinet member, and the first African American U.S. senator since Reconstruction (Sowell 2005).

The example of Dunbar shows that heroic individuals can build a culture of achievement. Such heroes can provide—with meager resources—a high-quality education in public schools, even for students from the poorest households.

Sadly, Dunbar's culture of achievement was destroyed in the

mid-1950s. After *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the DCPS ended Dunbar's status as what today would be called a magnet school and made it a neighborhood school. Enough of these neighborhood students were so highly disruptive and inadequately motivated that Dunbar's ethos of excellence was soon under siege. When district administrators and Washington, D.C., politicians declined to defend that ethos, Dunbar's all-star teaching staff retired or moved away, and its motto ("Perseverance is . . . king") was replaced by self-serving excuses. Today, although Dunbar has better facilities and funding than it ever had during its eighty-five-year reign as a jewel of student achievement, Dunbar is a failing ghetto school (Lartigue 2004; Sowell 2005).

For the past half-century, standardized test results have shown that both black and white students' achievement in Washington, D.C., fall significantly below the national average. In Spring 2003 DCPS students, on average, scored lower on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in mathematics and reading in fourth and eighth grades than did students in nine other comparable big city districts (State Education Office 2004).[16] The DCPS performance on the NAEP has been consistently dismal as shown in table 4.1. This is particularly true in mathematics, where DCPS eighth graders only outscored U.S. fourth graders by a margin of 9 points in 2003.

Underperformance is the norm today in the DCPS. Fully 85 percent of DCPS graduates who enter the University of the District of Columbia require remedial education for up to two years. In 1994 the bulk of DCPS students who took the Armed Forces Qualification Test after they had graduated from the District's schools failed it. For the past four decades, almost half of students enrolling in the eighth grade have failed to graduate from

16. The sole exception was eighth grade reading, where DCPS students, on average, outscored those in Los Angeles. But DCPS eighth grade readers did not outscore the students in the seven other cities.

Table 4.1 National Average and Washington, D.C., Average NAEP Scale Scores

	US	*DC*	*DC Rank*
Grade 4 Reading			
1998	213	179	Last
2002	217	191	Last
2003	216	188	Last
Grade 8 Reading			
1998	261	236	Last
2002	263	240	Last
2003	261	239	Last
Grade 4 Math			
1992	219	193	Last
2000	224	192	Last
2003	234	205	Last
Grade 8 Math			
1990	262	231	Last
1992	267	235	Last
1996	271	233	Last
2000	272	235	Last
2003	275	243	Last

Rank is for Washington, D.C., and all participating states in each test.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2004.

high school (Lartigue 2004). In 2005 DCPS students who took the College Board SAT test had scores that were on average 210 points below the national average of 1028 (Office of Accountability 2006). The historical achievement record of the DCPS on the College Board SAT is shown in table 4.2, along with funding information and Stanford-9 composite scores. Washington, D.C., students are not catching up with the rest of the country despite funding levels at 50 percent, 60 percent, and even 70 percent above the national average.

Much of the DCPS's failure can be attributed to poor admin-

Table 4.2 Washington, D.C., Public School Expenditures and Standardized Test Outcomes

	Spending ($ per ADA)				*College Board SAT Mean Scores*						*Stanford-9 Scores Proficient or Above*	
					Verbal			*Mathematics*				
Year	*US*	*DC*	*DC as a % of US*	*Rank*	*US*	*DC*	*Difference*	*US*	*DC*	*Difference*	*Reading (%)*	*Math (%)*
88–89	5,092	8,204	161	3								
89–90	5,527	9,596	174	1								
90–91	5,856	10,109	173	1	422	405	−17	474	435	−39		
91–92	6,052	10,334	171	1	423	405	−18	476	437	−39		
92–93	6,252	10,063	161	2	424	405	−19	478	441	−37		
93–94	6,473	10,589	164	1	499	479	−20	504	468	−36		
94–95	6,715	9,847	147	4	504	485	−19	506	471	−35		
95–96	6,922	9,990	144	4	505	489	−16	508	473	−35		
96–97	7,244	9,784	135	4	505	490	−15	511	475	−36		
97–98	7,633	10,127	133	3	505	488	−17	512	476	−36		
98–99	8,047	11,309	141	3	505	494	−11	511	478	−33		
99–00	8,505	13,302	156	1	505	494	−11	514	486	−28	12	10
00–01	9,086	16,319	180	1	506	482	−24	514	474	−40	15	11
01–02	9,520	18,277	192	1	504	480	−24	516	473	−43	15	11
02–03	9,834	18,088	184	1	507	484	−23	519	474	−45	12	11
03–04					508	489	−19	518	476	−42	13	10

Notes: From 1993–1994 the College Board SAT results are in recentered values. Throughout this period DCPS College Board SAT scores were typically either the lowest in the nation, or the second lowest. Spending rank is compared to states.

Sources: Spending per average daily attendance (ADA) data are from NCES Common Core of Data based on total expenditures and ADA for fifty states and the District of Columbia, http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat/index.asp.

College Board SAT scores from NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 2004, table 131.

Stanford-9 scores from Office of Accountability (2006).

istration, and even corrupt or deceptive practices, but certainly cannot be attributed to a lack of funds or personnel. Today the DCPS has a ratio of one employee for every six students. In 1997, to support its continuing employee bloat, the school district took $1.6 million meant for teaching underprivileged students and diverted it to salaries, causing the federal government to revoke $20 million in targeted grants. Similarly, the school district falsified its records and over-reported enrollment figures to increase its budget and support-staff salaries and benefits. DCPS school administrators have employed ghost workers (who never came to work) and kept two sets of accounting books. The DCPS employed 511 central-office staffers in 1979, when it served 113,000 students, but by 1992–1993, despite the loss of 33,000 students, the DCPS's central office staff almost doubled to 967 employees (Lartigue 2004). Again in 1992–1993, the DCPS had 16 teachers for every administrator, whereas the national average for public school districts was 42:1 and Washington, D.C., Catholic schools had 255:1 (Shokraii et al. 1997).

Together with inadequate financial controls and dishonest spending, the DCPS has simply not paid attention to academics. An investigative team from the Council of the Great City Schools found that "the district hasn't done anything to improve achievement" (Council of the Great City Schools 2004, 10). This team found that the DCPS's academic content standards were not rigorous and that on-the-job teacher training ("professional development") was unconnected to what was being taught.

What the Great City Schools investigative team discovered was a school district without a coherent curriculum, with each school venturing off on its own. Schools either had a hodgepodge of conflicting academic programs or adhered to a "whole school reform" scheme that was not effective.[17] Teachers and staff (but

17. For example, the whole-school interventions in elementary schools have

not parents) "throughout the district's schools" had low expectations of students (Council of the Great City Schools 2004, 29). Children were overclassified as learning disabled, in large measure because the district was doing an ineffective job of teaching reading.[18] Children of Latino background were actively discouraged from exiting from mostly-Spanish instruction.

When it comes to teacher quality and to student, teacher, and administrator accountability, there are problems as well. Out of the twenty-two states and Washington, D.C., that use the Praxis teacher-readiness test, the DCPS is one of five that accepts the lowest minimum passing score for reading and one of four that accepts the lowest minimum score for writing (State Education Office 2004). The DCPS had no districtwide high school end-of-course exams or exit exam.[19] "[N]o one in the central office" was held accountable for student achievement, and teacher evaluations had "no meaningful tie" to it as well. Principals were considered responsible for achievement, but their evaluations were "weighted heavily towards items that are more procedural and operational than academic" (Council of the Great

followed the model created by the National Center on Education and the Economy. It is a content-oriented Progressive Education approach, featuring discovery learning, performance-based standards and assessment, portfolio assessment, and "real world" problem-solving. See National Center on Education and the Economy (2002). Academic results have been decidedly mixed. See Academic Performance Database System (2005).

18. The "ineffective district reading program" contributes to "the over-identification of students as disabled" (Council of the Great City Schools 2004, 40). On the "pattern" of "uncontained" spending on certain aspects of education for learning-disabled students ("special education"), see State Education Office (2004, 61–62).

19. Before switching to the Stanford-9 in 1997, the DCPS used the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. Here is the testimony of Bruce K. MacLaury, chairman, Emergency Transitional Education Board of Trustees, DCPS: "For 13 years, the CTBS, the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, was used, and I am told that exactly the same exam was given year after year after year, so that it was compromised, and, from my point of view, useless" (Committee on Governmental Affairs 1997, 36). On such testing practices, see Cannell (2006).

City Schools 2004, 34). The District of Columbia State Education Office (2004, 62) summed up the accountability problem, saying that, first, there "are not clear, publicly embraced goals" for public education in the District of Columbia, and, second, there "is not the kind of accountability system needed" to measure progress toward and attainment of such goals.

Besides their corrupt and inefficient financial practices and lack of attention to academics and accountability, DCPS officials show a routine indifference to their students' failing performance on standardized tests, and they continue to move students forward through primary and secondary education, even when they are clearly unqualified for promotion.[20] In 1997, at two high schools, every student was "Below Basic" in mathematics achievement (Committee on Governmental Affairs 1998). Ninety percent of students at fourteen of the DCPS's nineteen high schools are unable to do math at grade level (according to the Stanford-9 exam). These poor math competency scores are complemented by failing reading and writing scores (one quarter testing at the failing "Below Basic" level on the Stanford-9). Yet despite such scores, 86.5 percent of DCPS high school students were promoted to higher grades or graduated in 2002 (Division of Educational Accountability 2002; Lartigue 2004).

Although the DCPS spends more than fifteen thousand dollars per student annually, the system is also losing students every year.[21] The result of the DCPS's unacceptably poor performance has been a dramatic decline in enrollment in Washington, D.C.'s public schools, as families leave the city and as the remaining students who can afford to do so switch to private education. In 1969 the DCPS enrollment was at a high of 149,000, but by 2006, audited regular-school enrollment had

20. In theory the DCPS abolished social promotion in 1985 (Committee on Government Reform and Oversight 1998, 13).

21. On the DCPS per-pupil spending, see Lartigue (2004, table 5-11, 94).

dropped to 58,394, its lowest level in seven decades (*Washington Post* 2006).[22] In contrast, despite a decrease in the number of school-age children living in the district, private school enrollment figures have remained consistent at around 20,000 for the past half-century (Lartigue 2004). Mayor Anthony Williams, despite his record of increasing the DCPS funding 39 percent since taking office in 1998, is correct to question why the DCPS should receive any further money when it is so obviously underperforming, asking "how can you justify increasing funds for a school system that is losing students?" (Bhatti 2001).

The DCPS is yet another case in which huge spending by local and federal taxpayers has yielded only waste and underperformance. Despite resources above the national average, students continue to fail on national standardized tests, yet are still promoted through the system by an overstaffed administration.

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Cambridge, Massachusetts, is a "town and gown" community outside Boston, where the academic gowns are worn at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).[23] The presence of these great universities in Cambridge is palpable. Harvard's domes and bell towers dominate the town skyline, and experimental alternative-fuel vehicles frequently appear on the town streets around MIT. Most Cantabrigians have a college degree. Though most of the town's children attend public schools, a larger than normal proportion go to private schools. The public school system must balance between children from well-educated households, some of whom are often

22. When charter school students are included, enrollment is 71,969 (*Washington Post* 2006).

23. We are indebted to the work of the Education Management Accountability Board (2000).

non-English-speaking foreigners arriving in the United States for the first time, and other local students, whose parents are less educated and work in blue-collar service jobs. Yet for a municipality so overflowing with academic brilliance, Cambridge's public schools consistently disappoint.

Cambridge Public Schools as a district serves roughly sixty-five hundred students and spends an average of $17,239 per pupil to provide for public education—almost twice the state average per student.[24] This spending costs taxpayers an average of two thousand dollars per taxpayer per year, which is substantially higher than the amount paid by property owners in any neighboring communities (Schlichtman 2003). Per-pupil expenditures by the district, the state, and the nation are illustrated in figure 4.3. Cambridge's property values are about double the state average, yielding much higher property tax revenues than elsewhere in Massachusetts.[25] The student-teacher ratio is low (11:1) compared with the state average, class sizes are comparatively small (on average fifteen students or fewer in core academic subjects), and teacher salaries are comparatively high (Education Management Accountability Board 2000).

Despite this substantial expenditure per student, the district consistently performs below both the state and national averages for grade-level reading and math proficiency. Besides Cambridge's 6,500 public school students, 1,218 students attend private and parochial schools, and 367 attend public schools outside the Cambridge district (*Boston Globe*). These relatively high numbers of students outside the Cambridge Public Schools system attest both to the failure of public schools in serving student needs and to the preference of many parents for the more rigorous education in private schools.

24. Figures from 2004 and 2003, respectively (SchoolMatters).
25. Figures from 2005 (SchoolMatters).

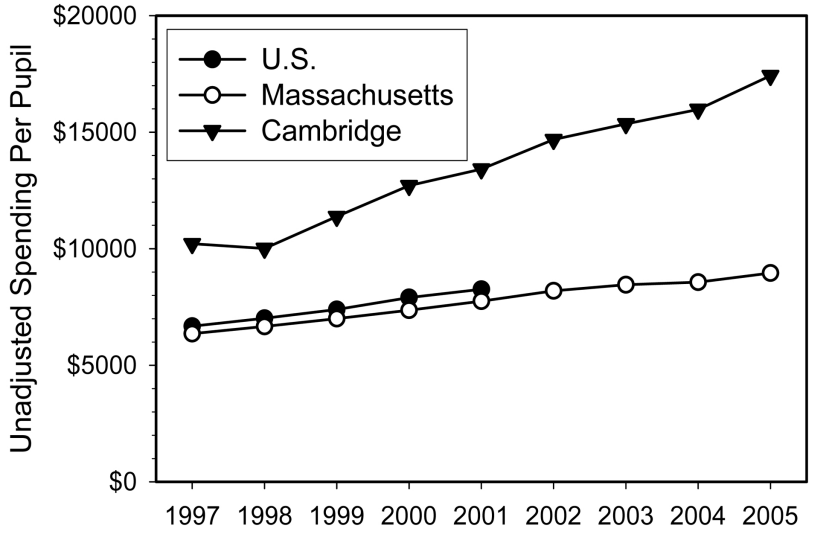

Figure 4.3 Per-Pupil Expenditures in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Nationwide

Sources: U.S. Data: Table 168: Current Expenditure per Pupil in Average Daily Attendance in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by State or Jurisdiction: Selected years, 1959–1960 to 2001–2002, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Statistics of State School Systems, 1959–1960 and 1969–1970; Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1979–1980 and 1980–1981; and The NCES Common Core of Data (CCD), "National Public Education Financial Survey," 1989–1990 through 2001–2002,. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/tables/dt04 168.asp. (This table was prepared April 2005.)

Massachusetts and Cambridge Data: Massachusetts Department of Education, Chapter 70 Trends, FY97 through FY06, http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/Chapter70/profile.aspx?.

As of 2005, despite an increase in reading and math achievement, Cambridge tenth graders' tests at the proficient or advanced level haven't shown nearly the gains that the Massachusetts average has shown. In fact, the performance gap between Cambridge and the rest of the state has increased from about 2 percent in 1998 to 21 percent in 2005.[26] In 1998 the percentage

26. See table 4.3.

of Cambridge students failing standardized tests in the fourth, eighth, and tenth grades was roughly equal to the state average, while by 2005 the percentage of Cambridge students failing was nearly double the state average, despite a decrease in the numbers of students failing (Massachusetts Department of Education). In other words, Cambridge has consistently trailed improvements in the rest of the state despite much higher spending per pupil, volunteer work by students from Harvard, MIT, and elsewhere, and improvement programs that follow the ideas of professors at Harvard and other universities (Solo 1992).[27] This phenomenon is illustrated in figure 4.4 where value added by the district is plotted against spending. Note that Cambridge stands out in spending but does not show any benefit as a result.

Cambridge's school district has enjoyed increased revenues from school adequacy lawsuits and responsive legislation in the 1990s. The 1993 adequacy case of *McDuffy v. Secretary of Education* resulted in a victory for the plaintiffs and the passage of the Education Reform Act three days later. This act decreased reliance on property taxes for school funding, in order to equalize funding across districts, and established a set of state standards and accountability measures known as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) (Ward 2005). The MCAS required student assessments at three grade levels in five subject areas (English, math, history, science, and foreign languages), leading to increased standardized requirements for high school graduation across the state. But Cambridge is a stronghold of Progressive Education (see discussion of Progressive Education under Teaching Practices: Counterproductive Ideology, later in this chapter), and many Cambridge teachers, parents, and students oppose these tests because the tests alleg-

27. Other colleges and universities include Wheelock College and Lesley University.

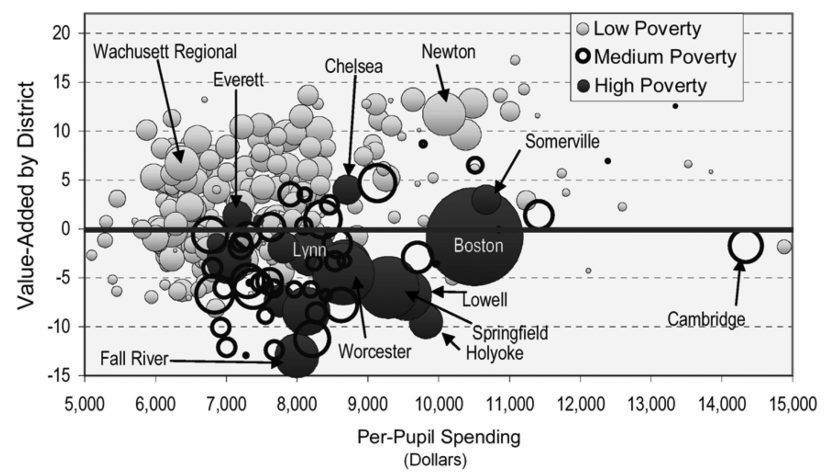

Figure 4.4 Value Added versus Per-Pupil Spending for Selected Massachusetts Districts by Poverty Level of District (<20% Low, >40% High)

Source: The testimony of Ed Mostovitch of Cape Ann Economics in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts case *Julie Hancock and others v. David P. Driscoll and others,* Superior Court Civil Action No. 02-2978 and Supreme Judicial Court No. SJ-1990-0128, Nov. 3, 2003, exhibit 5378.

Notes:

All the students were classified by the following demographic characteristics: sex, race or ethnicity (white, Asian, Native American, black, Latino, mixed, other), limited English proficiency, poor (defined by eligibility for free or reduced price lunch), and not poor. Expected scores were calculated for each group.

The left axis is "value added," which is the difference between the Proficiency Index (0–100) used by the state and an estimated Proficiency index based on what would be expected if each student scored at the average score of his or her demographic group. Thus, a positive number indicates performance higher than expected based on demographics. The bubble size represents the district size based on examination counts.

The bubble design indicates economic status based on percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

Proficiency is from the 2001–2002 MCAS.

edly encourage teachers to concentrate narrowly on the subject matter listed in the state's academic content standards. Some Cambridge teachers spoke out against the tests, and some Cambridge students boycotted them (White 1999; Gehring 2000). Moreover, the local school board in 2002 approved a resolution

Table 4.3 Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Above on MCAS Exams for Massachusetts and for Cambridge

	MCAS English Language Arts			*MCAS Mathematics*		
Year	*Mass.*	*Cambridge*	*Difference*	*Mass.*	*Cambridge*	*Difference*
1998	38	37	−1	24	22	−2
1999	34	24	−10	24	21	−3
2000	36	15	−21	33	15	−18
2001	50	37	−13	45	36	−9
2002	59	40	−19	44	30	−14
2003	61	48	−13	51	43	−8
2004	62	47	−15	57	46	−11
2005	65	44	−21	62	41	−21

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Directory Profiles, http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/results.html.

that said that the test was not conducive to testing different learning styles and that the district would, in defiance of state policy, award diplomas to students who hadn't passed the MCAS (Gehring 2002). The MCAS data for Cambridge are displayed in table 4.3 and show a continued progressive decline from 1998 through 2005.

Cambridge's academic failures are ironic when one considers that researchers at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, and others, have put in place school-improvement programs throughout the city's schools. The nearby availability of these schools and students has been of use to researchers. For example, Graham and Parks Alternative Public School takes a "developmental approach." Its premise is that children should develop "their intellectual, social, and moral capacities through their own self-selected activity rather than through formal instruction." In other words, the students themselves decide what they will study (Clinchy 1997, 28). For a long time, the now-defunct Pilot School, a school-within-a-school at the high school,

was "the oldest progressive alternative public school . . . in the United States" (Grady 1994, 14).[28] King Open School proclaims that its teachers "engage in open conversation with the students," rather than in expository teaching.[29] In addition, "Different Ways of Knowing," which supposedly follows Harvard educational psychologist Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983), has taken hold in the classes of dozens of Cambridge elementary school teachers. At Harrington Elementary School, for example, students come together to perform visual arts and mental association exercises. The Gardner-style approach claims to organize instruction to mesh with the different learning styles of students (Viadero 1994). At the high school the Harvard-based "Teaching for Understanding Project" has been directly under the guidance of Gardner himself (Grady 1994).

Over the years Cambridge has been renowned for letting each of its fifteen schools "do its own thing" in both content and teaching practices.[30] Cambridge has had (and in many cases still has), in addition to the formats already described,

- multicultural schools,
- self-esteem programs,
- a school-sponsored, student-led effort at curriculum reform,
- authentic, portfolio and project-based assessment,
- schools with multidisciplinary classes (e.g., a ninth-grade history-literature-math class on the theme "location"),
- a school without report cards or grade levels,

28. The Pilot School was founded as a clinical site for the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

29. See Cambridge Public Schools (2006).

30. In 1998 developments in statewide accountability reined in Cambridge's decentralized practices to some extent.

- mostly-Spanish programs,
- project-based learning,
- cooperative learning,
- learning through community service,
- radical, constructivist discovery learning K–8 math (e.g., Connected Mathematics Project, TERC's *Investigations*[31]),
- "real world," discovery-learning algebra,
- mathematics-light physics, and
- outdoor adventure learning (including ropes courses).[32]

Yet the test scores for Cambridge indicate that these site-based improvement efforts did not result in academic gains.[33] These Cambridge schools offer an illustration of the reason why the American Federation of Teachers president, Albert Shanker, disdained "all those alternative schools of the 1960s." Without testing and accountability, Shanker said, alternative schools were irrelevant and "useless" (Shanker 1994).

Cambridge Superintendent Bobbie D'Alessandro acknowledged that the district's curriculum "wasn't aligned to state standards." In other words, Cambridge schools haven't differed from one another only in the way they provide education; they have differed from one another and from the rest of the state in the subject matter they teach. Furthermore, a state audit of the district's operations found that the district had no districtwide professional development plan, no in-depth principal evaluations,

31. TERC was formerly the Technical Education Research Center.

32. Compare Cambridge Public Schools (2005). See also Grady (1994); Cambridge Public Schools (2006).

33. The district superintendent acknowledged that a barrier to education reform in the district was a "lack of systematic process" for evaluating academic programs in terms of their effect on student achievement (Education Management Accountability Board 2000: Appendix F).

and scanty teacher evaluations (Education Management Accountability Board 2000; Richard 2000).[34]

While in some ways the Cambridge Public Schools' story has much in common with other high-spending, low-performing districts, it is unusual in three respects. First, while many other high-spending, low-performing districts have been plagued by corruption, Cambridge has had considerable funds, spent them for educational purposes without corruption, and still not succeeded academically. In fact, a plurality of Cambridge teachers have come to believe that in their district increased spending does not lead to improved schooling.[35] Second, Cambridge has defied the maxim that "a rising tide lifts all boats." Since the 1990s, Massachusetts public schools' performance has improved dramatically as measured by statewide and national standardized tests, yet these improvements have largely left Cambridge behind. This underperformance is especially striking in light of the third feature of the Cambridge school district, namely, its elite academic setting, with its many highly educated parents and unique access to university researchers. Since Cambridge lacks neither financial resources nor improvement proposals and is not more challenged by socioeconomic conditions than are comparable cities elsewhere, one would have to consider whether it is these improvement plans themselves, together with recent local resistance to the state's accountability efforts, that have held the district back in the past two decades (Evers 2001; Alexakis 2001).

34. The Report of the Education Management Accountability Board (2000, 2) said: "There were no clear lines of accountability or reporting for curriculum, professional development, or testing."

35. When asked "Have you perceived an increase in school funding tied directly to improvements in education in your district?," 17 percent said "Yes"; 42 percent said "No"; and 41 percent said "Not Sure" (Education Management Accountability Board 2000, Appendix E).

Newark, New Jersey, and *Abbott* Districts

New Jersey is number one—the highest spending state on K–12 public education in the nation.[36] That makes it an important case study in evaluating the extent to which "money matters." The state has been the top spender nearly every year since 1990. Indeed, since the 1960s the three highest spending states have consistently been Alaska, New York, and New Jersey (U.S. Department of Education 2004).

Although New Jersey has been a long-term leader in K–12 spending, its big-city politicians and special interest groups have sought for decades to boost the funding of the urban school districts (Badessa 2004). Their efforts have been greatly facilitated by the courts. As a follow-on to previous lawsuits on school finance, a class action suit (*Abbott v. Burke*) was brought on behalf of students from low-wealth school districts, now known as *Abbott* districts. When the court handed down its initial decision in this case in 1990, it held that twenty-eight low-income districts were not providing a "thorough and efficient" education (a phrase out of the state's constitution). As evidence of inefficiency and lack of thoroughness, the court cited the scores of ninth graders from the low-income districts on the state's high school proficiency test. In *Abbott* districts, less than half the students passed the separate reading, mathematics, and writing tests while in well-to-do districts, more than 90 percent passed each test. The court pointed out that school spending in well-to-do districts averaged $4,029 per student (1984–1985), 40 percent more than the $2,880 average in the low-income districts. These figures did not include considerable federal aid that was (and

36. The authors are indebted to the treatments by Wilbur Rich (1996) and Peter Schrag (2005) and to Derrell Bradford of Excellent Education for Everyone (in Newark) for assembling background materials on the *Abbott* districts.

still is) targeted on the poorer districts (Coate and VanderHoff 1999).

Ultimately, the court ordered the state to give the *Abbott* districts as much money per student as the average per-student spending of the well-to-do suburban districts and to provide supplemental programs that would (it was thought) improve education. In 1999, in one of the *Abbott* cases, the state supreme court outlined the supplementary support the state was to provide in these districts. The court ordered the state to put into effect whole-school reform, provide full-day nursery school and kindergarten for all three- and four-year-olds, launch a state-managed building program, provide advanced technology, and provide additional vocational education, summer school, and after-school programs (Schrag, 2005).[37] The funding increase and the supplementary plans were, according to long-time education journalist Peter Schrag, one of the "best plans" ever devised for consciously providing an adequate education (Schrag 2005, 239).

Rather than focusing directly on improved student achievement, the court and the state commissioner of education focused on plans for whole-school reform. But the favored version of whole-school reform did not succeed. One critic says it was too monolithic and inflexible and not aligned to New Jersey's curriculum and testing.[38] Other critics say it concentrated on reading to the neglect of other subjects. Many schools using the favored reform did not bring student achievement up to the state average (Walberg and Greenberg 1998; Pogrow 2003). Not sur-

37. The building program amounted to $10–12 billion, of which over half would go to the *Abbott* districts (Schrag 2005).

38. Gordon A. MacInnes, the assistant state commissioner of education for the *Abbott* districts, testified that whole-school reform in the *Abbott* districts had prevented teachers there from teaching what was in the state curriculum. Asked by a state senator how this had happened, MacInnes said that he didn't know and could not explain it (Bradford 2005).

prisingly, in light of what modern bureaucracy theory would predict that officials would avoid doing—but "most perplexing" to Peter Schrag—the state (despite years of high adequacy-based spending) had "no effective mechanism" for assessing student performance until 2003 (Schrag 2005, 121).[39]

Today, statewide current-operations spending for K–12 education in New Jersey comes to about $12,000 per student per year on average. Spending in many *Abbott* districts exceeds $15,000 per student. In certain *Abbott* districts (such as Asbury Park and Camden), it is as high as $18,000 per student. In comparison with the *Abbott* districts, suburban districts spend less, about $10,000 to $11,000 per student (Denton 2002; Schrag 2005).

Yet despite more than $3 billion in additional funds, there has been no improvement across the *Abbott* districts. Student achievement in New Jersey's lowest-income school districts is persistently far worse than that in other school districts in the state. As Peter Denton—founder and chairman of Excellent Education for Everyone (E3)—says, the "horrible reality" is that over the several decades in which New Jersey has tripled spending on its low-income urban schools, their performance has "steadily declined," as measured by college attendance rates, standardized test scores, K–12 attendance rates, and high school graduation rates (Denton, 2002).

Likewise, Douglas Coate and James VanderHoff, economics professors at Rutgers University, analyzed in 1999 the effect of the state's school-finance system on student achievement. According to their findings, increased spending per student had no positive effect on achievement in the state. Moreover, when they looked specifically at the *Abbott* districts, they once again found

39. New Jersey's lengthy evasion of a workable accountability-oriented testing system calls into question Schrag's thesis that adequate funding will lead directly to increased accountability (Schrag 2005, 240–241).

no positive effect (Coate and VanderHoff 1999). Nonetheless, the law professor who initiated the *Abbott* suits claims that the results have been "an enormous success" (Schrag 2005, 125).

Among the *Abbott* districts is Newark, which has had public schools since 1666 (Rich 1996). One promotional statement describes the city as one of the Garden State's brightest flowers:

> As the third oldest city in America, Newark is home to generations of Americans drawn by economic opportunity, cultural offerings, quality of life, and a superior location. Today, more than three centuries after a band of Puritan settlers arrived at its shores eager to build a new life in 1666, the 275,000 people who now hang their hats in Newark are breathing new life into this vibrant urban center, and every day, more people are calling Newark their home. (Renaissance Newark Foundation 2006)

An alternative appraisal has been given by Steven Malanga, an editor of *City Journal*, who has said that for decades Newark has been one of the "most crime-ridden, inhospitable" cities in the country, a depopulated city of vacant lots and empty buildings (Malanga 2005).

Cory Booker, elected mayor of Newark in 2006, suggested a few years previously that there are six themes to political life in that city:

> First, . . . by every means necessary, protect your turf. Second, resist change. Third, expand one's sphere of control, always hoping to control more and more resources and authority. Fourth, enlarge the number of subordinates underneath you because having subordinates means having power, having election workers, and keeping yourself in office. Next, protect programs and projects regardless of whether they are effective or not. Finally, maintain the ability to distribute the greatest amounts of wealth from taxpayers to people and organizations of your own choosing. (Booker 2001)

Some of the crime Stephen Malanga alluded to has included corruption in the Newark school system. Under district leaders from a variety of ethnic groups over the years, there have been tales of new cars, fancy meals, trips to tropical places, ghost students, ghost teachers, contractor kickbacks, and selling jobs. The school system makes a tempting target, for it hands out more jobs and contracts than the city of Newark does (Rich 1996; Segal 2004). Wilbur Rich writes: "The [Newark] school system retains its reputation as being one of the most corrupt in the nation" (Rich 1996, 123). Peter Schrag says that in light of the pervasive corruption, there were "serious questions" about whether Newark and the other *Abbott* districts had the capacity to spend their adequacy money well (Schrag 2005, 124).[40]

Newark has a strong teachers' union, which has dominated school board politics since 1983. From the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, Kenneth A. Gibson, Newark's pioneering African American mayor, attempted several performance-oriented reforms. For example, in 1978 Gibson proposed evaluating teacher performance and requiring less teacher absenteeism. The union filed an unfair labor practice suit against the district over the absenteeism-reduction effort. The union built its reputation and legitimacy on its opposition to this effort, while it also sought a union say on textbook selection and exclusively-union classroom evaluations of teachers (Rich 1996). After he was no longer mayor, Gibson told an interviewer:

> The union just spends all its time fighting for the interest of the teachers, 'If we were better paid, morale would be better.' They opposed any kind of merit system. Everybody gets paid the same. An outstanding teacher cannot be given more. There is no incentive to be a teacher outside the love of children. (Rich 1996, 122)

40. Schrag (2005) emphasizes the corruption problem in another *Abbott* district, Camden.

Newark's social problems have attracted the attentions of the poverty-alleviation industry, including urban-renewal contractors who have torn down entire once-thriving neighborhoods (Malanga 2005). The schools are part of the poverty-alleviation effort and have sought their share of the money. In 2004–2005 Newark had 41,710 students and spent $21,978 per student, the student-teacher ratio was twelve to one, and the average teacher salary was $77,000 (Newark Public Schools 2005, 2006; Rone 2005). After this infusion of funds and supplemental programs, Newark's graduation rates have improved slightly, and its test scores have gone up.[41] But achievement in Newark still lags far behind that of the state as a whole. Figure 4.5 shows the state of achievement in Newark on the 2004 New Jersey Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (New Jersey Department of Education 2005).

Booker said in 2000.

> If you look at the entire school system in Newark, you have to find it repugnant. The graduation rate in public schools is down to 45 percent. Over 75 percent of eighth graders fail math proficiency tests, and nearly 50 percent fail in the language arts. . . . [T]oo many grade schools, especially in the area I represent which is the poorest ward in the city, have failure rates that range upwards into the 90th percentile. (Booker 2001)

Currently, most of Newark's freshman high school students cannot read at grade level. In 2005 Newark school board member Dana Rone provided specific numbers:

> Of Barringer's 459 incoming freshmen, 324 of them read at or below a sixth grade level. At Shabazz, 303 of 385 freshmen

41. Both New Jersey and Newark scores are going up, Newark's at a slightly faster rate. See Grade 4 New Jersey Assessment of Knowledge and Skills and Grade 8 Proficiency Assessment, 1999–2004 (New Jersey Department of Education 2005).

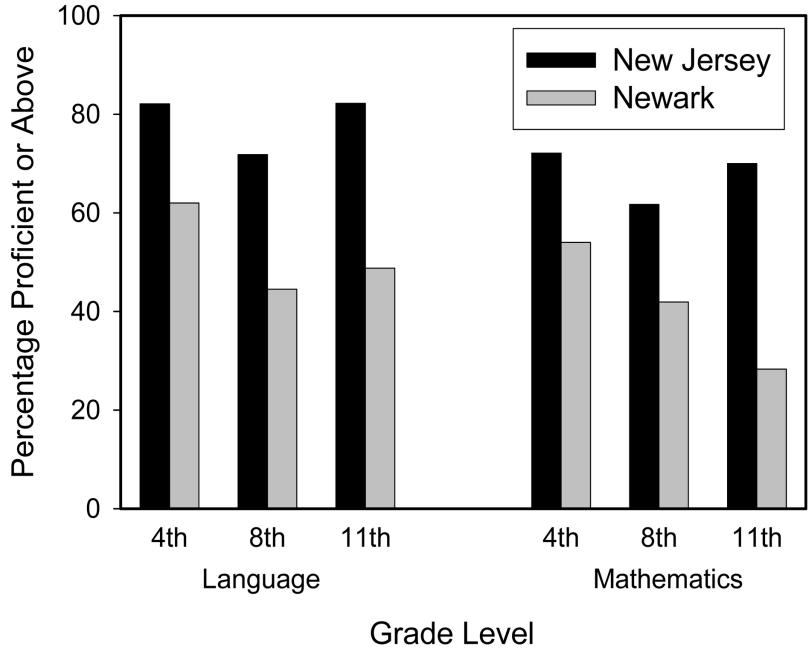

Figure 4.5 Results of the 2004 New Jersey Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

Source: New Jersey Department of Education, 2005 New Jersey Department of Education Statewide Assessment Reports, http://www.state.nj.us/njded/schools/achievement/2005/njask4/.

> read at or below a sixth grade level. And at Weequahic High, once considered one of the nation's finest high schools, 253 of 346 incoming freshmen read at or below a sixth grade level. In effect, many of our middle schools are, annually, generating only nine students who can read on grade level. (Rone 2005)

Some might suggest that given how dismal the record has been in Newark, why not have the state take over the operation of the district? It has already happened. Newark does not have local control of its schools, which have been run by the state since 1995. But students in state-takeover districts—that is, Newark, Paterson (run by the state since 1991), and Jersey City (since

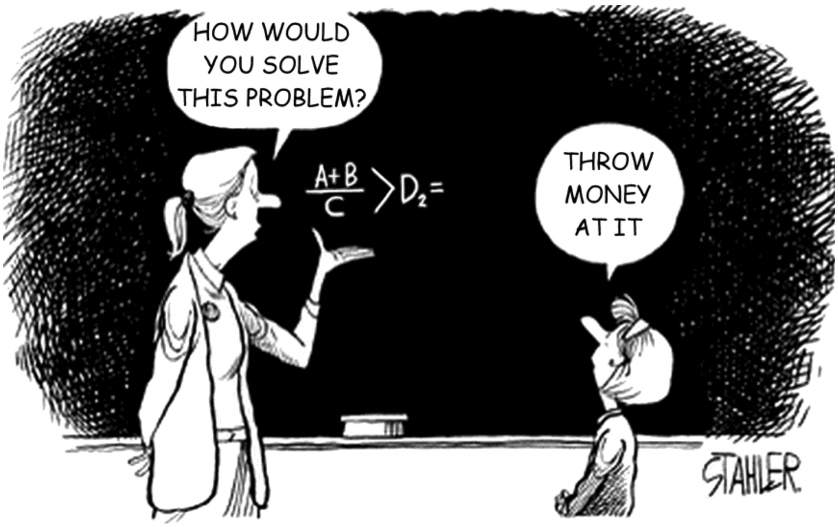

Figure 4.6 Jeff Stahler, *The Cincinnati Post*, May 9, 1998 [reproduced with permission]

1989)—have long had and continue to have among the lowest test scores in New Jersey (Kvasager 2005).

The state of New Jersey requires that students demonstrate proficiency in knowledge of academic subject matter in order to graduate. Ordinarily, students satisfy this requirement by passing the High School Proficiency Assessment. But for those who fail three times, there is an alternative test, the "Special Review Assessment," which is widely recognized as much less rigorous. In a July 25, 2005, *Star Ledger* opinion column, Dana Rone wrote that the New Jersey State Board of Education should drop the alternative test, which she called an "academic charade," because it permits many students to "dodge" the state's regular high school exit examination. She contends that there is a lot of evidence that the students who obtained diplomas through the alternative process had not learned the material (Rone 2005).

In testimony before the budget committee of the New Jersey assembly, Rone laid out Newark's school problems and tore the

veil off what is hidden by Special Review Assessment. She noted the startling results if one combined the data from Newark and Camden, two of the state's most troubled *Abbott* school districts, which are also northern and southern New Jersey's largest school districts. Their combined budget in 2004 was about $1 billion dollars. If one throws out the academically substandard students who graduate through the alternative-test process, the cost per academically qualified high school graduate in these two districts was nearly $1 million (Rone 2004).

This estimate of $1 million in spending per successful pupil sounds "outside the ballpark," but shouldn't if it is properly understood. Of course, most of the budgets in Newark and Camden are spent on students who will not pass the state high school exams. But as a measure of productivity, this million-dollar figure is a valid statistical indicator. This is what it actually costs these districts to produce an academically successful student.

Does money matter (figure 4.6)? Based on Newark and the *Abbott* districts, the answer is clearly "not much, if at all."

Sausalito, California

The town of Sausalito is, in the words of two public policy analysts, a "small, wealthy, politically liberal" suburb of San Francisco (Kirp and Leff 1979). The neighboring unincorporated area of Marin City is African American and low-income, with "moderately low" welfare dependency (Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team 1997, 60). The Sausalito–Marin City K–8 district includes Sausalito and Marin City, and used to include nearby military bases until they closed in the early 1990s. The district itself in the 1960s called its policies and practices the embodiment of the "American Dream" (Freebairn-Smith 1968).

Black Power advocates took over the Sausalito schools in the

late 1960s, with the initial help of white liberals.[42] In response, many bourgeois parents, both black and white, pulled their children out of the public schools and sent them to parochial or private day schools (Kirp and Leff 1979). The Black Power era came to an end when the white, liberal board members who supported it were ousted in a 1970 recall election. In 1997–1998 a grass-roots community group organized another recall campaign, aimed at improving student performance (Bertram 1997; Johnston 1997; *Education Week* 1998; Fimrite 1998; *San Francisco Examiner* 1998). It succeeded in recalling and replacing school board members, and the district superintendent and a school principal resigned under pressure.

After the equalization of school funding in California in the 1970s, Sausalito remained one of the state's few districts largely funded (because of its affluence) by local property taxes, which in Sausalito's case are heavily supplemented by state and federal aid. During the 2004–2005 school year, 263 students were enrolled in the district's two regular schools and its charter school—each of which had, as might be expected, small numbers of pupils. Almost half the district's children now attend a K–8 charter school that emphasizes the project-based learning favored by Progressive educators (Trotter 2006). One hundred percent of the teachers in the regular schools are fully credentialed.

Spending in Sausalito has been growing and far exceeds the state average (see figure 4.7). The district has modern, attractive facilities and $24,388 in revenue per student per year (com-

42. Young children were guided in giving the clenched-fist salute and chanting "Free Huey," a reference to Huey Newton, the jailed Black Panther Party leader. A Black Panther–sponsored breakfast program was set up in a school. A principal was hired whose book on Afrocentric curriculum included a photograph in which he is depicted pointing a rifle in the air, with a knife on his hip. Black Panther supporters carried steel staves to a school board meeting (Kirp and Leff 1979).

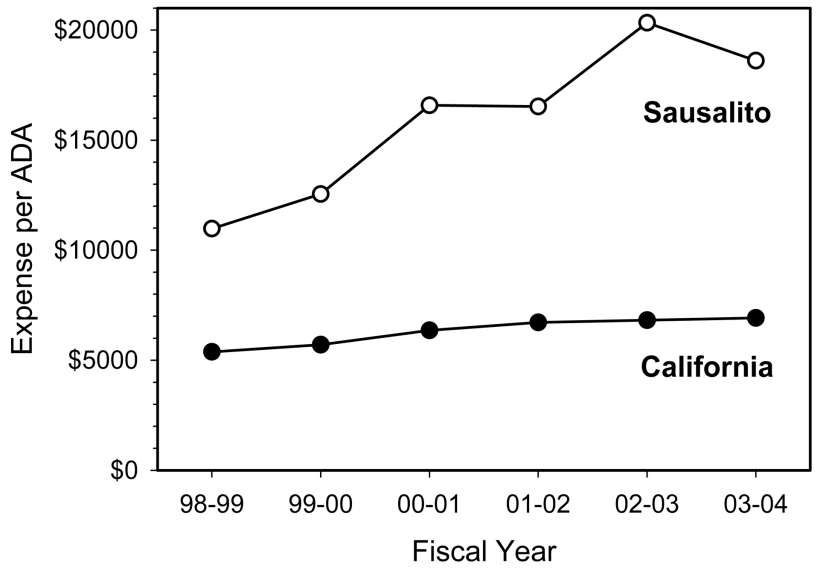

Figure 4.7 Per-Pupil Expenditures in Sausalito Compared with the State Average

Source: California Department of Education, Current Expense of Education—Financial, http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/fd/ec/.

pared with a statewide average revenue per student for elementary districts of $6,996). Thus, Sausalito receives per student 3.5 times the average for California elementary districts—or about $17,400 more than the per-student average for elementary districts (Bova 2005b). An official 1997 California state fiscal audit said that "any failure of the district" to attain high academic performance "cannot be attributed to lack of revenue" (Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team 1997, 6).

Class sizes are reasonably small, averaging twenty-four students per class in 2003–2004 (Education Data Partnership). As a 1997 curriculum (as opposed to fiscal) audit put it: "Class sizes are small; volunteers are plentiful; children receive personal and individual attention on an ongoing basis" (California Curriculum Management Audit Center 1997, 65). Teacher salaries are quite

high, on a per-pupil basis. In 1997 average teacher salaries and clerical and blue-collar salaries in Sausalito were, on a per-pupil basis, double the averages in comparable California districts.[43] A *Los Angeles Times* reporter said a district school looked "like a ski resort sans snow." "The paint is fresh. The lawn is manicured. The playground equipment looks new"[44] (LaGanga 1997a).

Yet the district's performance is low. The *Los Angeles Times* reporter asked: "Why aren't children performing better in a district that wants for nothing money can buy?" (LaGanga 1997a). Out of 1,025 districts in California, Sausalito is ranked 724th, which is at the 29.4th percentile (California Department of Education 2004). The academic performance index (API) in California is shown as a function of expenditures per average daily attendance in figure 4.8 for all elementary school districts in the county. Note that Sausalito stands out as being well funded without showing corresponding achievement. According to 2004–2005 California test scores, 25 percent of Sausalito sixth grade students are proficient or advanced in English and 13 percent are proficient or advanced in mathematics (California Department of Education 2005). A notable difference between Sausalito and demographically similar districts is that, as one researcher put it,

> [H]alf of the comparable districts with half of the revenues have all of their schools score in the 6 to 10 [out of 10] rankings in the [California State Academic Performance Index (API)], while with its much greater funding, none of Sausalito/Marin City's

43. Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (1997, 14). Employee benefits are also double what they are in comparable districts.

44. An article in *Education Week* described that same school as sitting on "a 13-acre wooded site in picturesque Sausalito." "Its computer lab hums with new equipment. The library resembles a two-story chalet" (Johnston 1997).

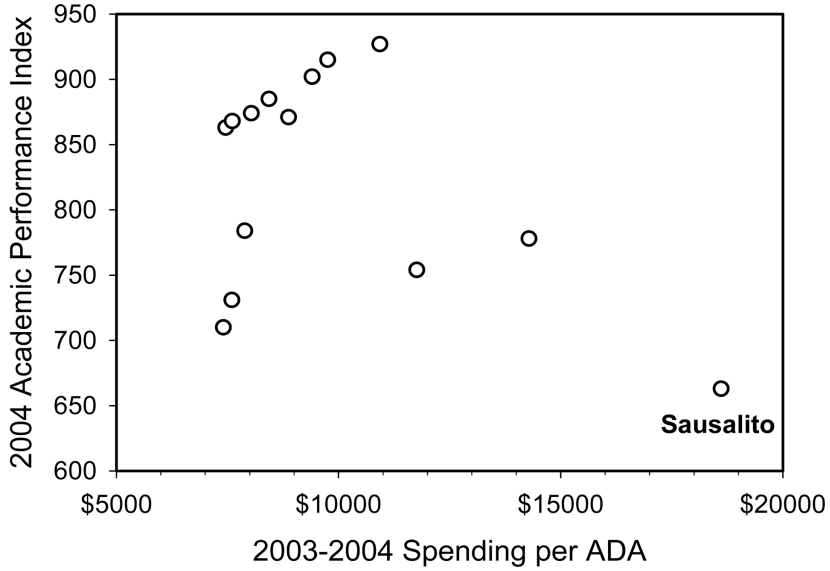

Figure 4.8 Per-Pupil Expenditures (Expense per ADA) versus Academic Performance Index Score for all Elementary Districts in Marin County, California, for 2003–2004

Sources: California Department of Education, Current Expense of Education—Financial, http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/fd/ec/. California Department of Education, Academic Performance Index (API)—Data Files, http://api.cde.ca.gov/datafiles.asp.

> schools are in the 6 to 10 rankings for the API. (Timar 2004, 15)

In the late 1990s, spending in Sausalito was running at $16,555 per pupil, well above the state average of $7,535 (Izumi and Coburn 2000). At that time, in 1999, Sausalito had substantial majorities reading and doing sums below the state average of performance for their grades.[45] Table 4.4 shows the achievement of the district against national norms. In the late 1990s the district's scores on California's Academic Performance Index

45. For Sausalito performance on the Cognitive Tests of Basic Skills, Fourth Edition, see California Curriculum Management Audit Center (1997, 104).

Table 4.4 Percent of Sausalito Students Scoring at or above the Fiftieth Percentile on the 1999 Stanford-9 Test

Stanford-9	*Grade 2*	*Grade 6*
Reading	30%	38%
Math	36%	33%

Source: California Department of Education, Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Web site, http://star.cde.ca.gov/star99/reports.

were in the 600s (the scale ranges from 200 to 1000; the state wants schools at 800, the federal government at 850).

In October 1996 the district was overclassifying students as learning disabled, placing 145 students out of 248 (58 percent) in special education programs for the learning disabled, whereas the average district in the state had 10 to 12 percent learning disabled.[46] One of the authors of this chapter interviewed a central figure in the 1998 recall campaign, a recall leader who had served in Sacramento as deputy state superintendent of schools, in San Francisco as director of the housing authority, and later became board president of the Sausalito school district. According to her, schools identified many African American students in preschool as speech-impaired or developmentally delayed based on "preconceived notions." These identifications became a self-fulfilling prophecy: the identifications were never revisited, and students were trapped in special education classes in which they didn't belong (Thornton 2005).

The 1998 recall campaign leader told one of the authors that Sausalito was paralyzed by a "lack of belief that these children could learn." She said that this mindset about the African American children of the Sausalito district "permeated" southern Marin County, not just Sausalito. As a result, she said, the African American parents in Marin City didn't believe in the Sausalito–

46. See California Curriculum Management Audit Center (1997, 76).

Marin City schools and didn't trust teachers and officials. These parents "saw no education going on" and were therefore alienated from the school system (Thornton 2005).

A top administrator in a neighboring school district says that, after decades of funding at the highest levels in California, Sausalito is perhaps "a quarter of the way" to solid academic achievement (Anonymous 2005a). Education professors at universities have been stumped by the Sausalito case and have offered no explanation. "It's a puzzle," said Michael Kirst, professor of education at Stanford University, who noted that Sausalito has been "high-spending for years" (LaGanga 1997a).

Nonetheless, it seems clear that years of curricular confusion, ineffective teaching practices, overemphasis on student self-esteem, low academic expectations, adult corruption, and violent student crime have trapped Sausalito in a high-dollar heaven that is at the same time a dysfunctional-district hell.

The curricular confusion was documented in a curriculum audit done by outsiders, which the school board commissioned in 1996–1997 (Johnston 1997). The audit found that

- the curriculum in any one classroom meshed neither with other classrooms in the same grade nor with curriculum in the next grade;[47]
- on-the-job training of teachers (professional development) was unconnected to curriculum and unevaluated for effectiveness;
- numerous and conflicting programs in support of curriculum were almost never evaluated for effectiveness, but the few

47. "[T]he lack of focus on articulation [from grade to grade] and coordination [within each grade] from the central office level creates a learning environment that is irrational and impedes the progress of students. . . . This breakdown in curriculum continuity is a serious obstacle to improving student performance. . . ." (California Curriculum Management Audit Center 1997, 87).

times when they were evaluated, ineffective programs were neither modified nor ended;

- teachers had low expectations and "doubt[ed] the learning capabilities of their students";[48] and
- testing of students was uncoordinated with curriculum, and test results were neither analyzed nor used to drive instruction[49] (California Curriculum Management Audit Cente 1997).

Students were assigned perhaps a half hour of homework a night, most of which they were encouraged to complete in the classroom.[50] In terms of scope and sequence, the curriculum was unstructured and uncoordinated: "Every teacher was doing his or her own thing." "Teachers were not looking at the transition from grade to grade." Students were working from "work sheets and Xerox pages," rather than from textbooks. What was deemed "acceptable work" from students was "embarrassing." They were dropping out, even though they were not yet of high school age (Thornton 2005).

Because the Sausalito school district did not properly prepare its students, those students who went on to high school could not prosper and could not compete. Students from Sausalito were joined in high school by students from high-performing neighboring districts like Tiburon and Mill Valley, but Sausalito students were not prepared to work at the same level.[51]

48. California Curriculum Management Audit Center (1997, 52).

49. The curriculum audit team found that the district's approach to testing was "chaotic" and that the testing process was "confused, unfocused, and irrational" (California Curriculum Management Audit Center 1997, 95).

50. Similarly, a parent told the curriculum audit team, "I took my child out of North Bay [School] because the curriculum was not challenging. My child could do a week's homework assignment in one afternoon" (California Curriculum Management Audit Center 1997, 19).

51. A staff member from the high school that receives the students from

An inspection of freshman grades in the fall of 1997 shows that 72 percent of Sausalito graduates were below a 2.0 grade point average, as compared with 18 percent for all freshmen at the public high school that serves Sausalito. That semester, no Sausalito freshman earned above a 3.0 (Johnston 1997).

At the same time that the district had "beautiful facilities" and was paying teachers high-end salaries compared with other districts in the state, the district was also beset with corruption. Although the district was flush with property taxes and extra state and federal money, an individual who was already a veteran teacher when he taught in the district in the 1980s told one of the authors that the district in those days was characterized by "blatant, despicable" misuse of public money. He described it as the "most unethical" conduct he had seen in a career of over thirty years in public education. "Deals were brokered and money pocketed." He said that top staff took rake-offs from contracts with the district. Top staff had new, fancy cars and took high-cost trips. Money was not getting to the classroom level, and the district had not put into effect needed remedial programs (Anonymous 2005b). The 1998 recall leader told one of the authors that the scene in the Sausalito district in the late 1990s was "poverty pimping at its worst," with "many people feeding at the trough" (Thornton 2005).[52]

The interviewee who had taught in Sausalito in the 1980s

Sausalito said in a newspaper interview: "[T]hose [Sausalito] children are a 'mixed bag' of considerable talent and unpreparedness. Overall their achievement lags far behind students from other districts." Quoted in California Curriculum Management Audit Center (1997, 58).

52. There may have been ghost workers on the Sausalito payroll. The curriculum audit team asked the district for "a list of persons on its payroll" and also for "a list of all staff members assigned to positions in the school district as well as a list of persons who have left the district during the last five years." "The auditors found discrepancies between the two lists and were unable to account for all employees even after they identified persons who had left the district." (California Curriculum Management Audit Center 1997, 42).

said that the "least qualified teachers" he had seen in his life made up the teaching staff, and any able teachers left within a short time.[53] There was no focus on children's learning; all the focus was on the interests of the adults employed by the school system. No administrator and no one who stayed on the Sausalito teaching staff was offering "hope [to the schoolchildren] or a sense that they would stand by them [the schoolchildren]" in adversity (Anonymous 2005b).

In 1997 the Marin County civil grand jury said violence in Sausalito schools had gotten out of hand—despite the fact that this was a K–8 district with no high-school students. The grand jury said that police were called to the schools fifty times during the 1996–1997 school year and that teachers "actually fear turning their backs on students" (Fimrite 1997).

A *Los Angeles Times* article reports that a student injured a school principal by assaulting her, but the district neither suspended nor expelled the student.[54] The principal said Sausalito had severe classroom discipline problems, low expectations for student achievement, and no consistency in its curriculum.[55] That principal moved to another low-income district. The article quotes a Marin City mother as saying that many of these problems had their source in fellow Marin City parents who didn't care about discipline or academics. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted departing Sausalito teacher Josephine Pearson: "It's the

53. Kirp and Leff (1979) point out that in 1973 "approximately 10 teachers, a sizeable number in a district with only 37 teachers altogether, were extremely weak in the classroom." Kirp and Leff point out that because California teacher tenure law protects teachers' jobs, the Sausalito district administration could not fire these weak teachers, if and when it wanted to.

54. Many student misdeeds were punished. There were 166 suspensions for bad behavior in 1996–1997 (Johnston 1997). For more data on suspensions, see California Curriculum Management Audit Center (1997, 81–84).

55. In a follow-up article, the reporter said that the district had used a "mishmash" of programs to address district problems and described the academic curriculum as uncoordinated and inconsistent (LaGanga 1997b).

biggest mess I've ever seen. It's so sad. All that money, and nothing for those kids" (LaGanga 1997a).

The 1997 curriculum auditors said that the Sausalito teachers "view the students as victims" and "do not hold them responsible" for disruptive or injurious behavior. Those whom the teachers believe should be held responsible are the parents and the administration. On the other hand, "neither the parents nor the administration" are willing to assume responsibility. Therefore, "conditions continue to worsen" (California Curriculum Management Audit Center 1997, 53).

The *Los Angeles Times* said a local nonprofit group saw low student self-esteem as a major cause of low achievement and disruptive behavior, and a follow-up article in the *Times* quoted Sausalito's vice mayor as saying that the district's program concentrated more on improving students' self-esteem than on academics (LaGanga 1997a, 1997b).

Since 1999, district leaders have improved performance, as compared with performance in past years. Nonetheless, current performance remains low in absolute terms and compared with other districts in the state. District leaders have adopted certain practices that have boosted achievement, but other current practices are still holding the district back. Although the district has more than ample funds, district leaders do not have enough of an incentive to eliminate practices that are counterproductive.

After insurgent-led voters recalled board members and the district superintendent and a school principal resigned in 1998, the new board hired a new superintendent. When she arrived, the new superintendent could see that Sausalito's problems "were not about money."[56] She saw a district with "a lack of a systematic approach." Bits and pieces of reading programs, for

56. Similarly, a community member told the curriculum audit team, "Money is channeled to the district; it is not the problem . . ." (California Curriculum Management Audit Center 1997, 17).

example, were scattered in the classrooms of different teachers. But no complete reading program was everywhere. There was no training of teachers in reading instruction (Roberson 2005).

The new superintendent adopted Open Court, a reading program she describes as having a strong emphasis on vocabulary development, "demanding" for students and requiring a "disciplined" effort on the part of teachers. She also made considerable efforts to connect K–8 academics to what a student would be expected to need for success in high school (Roberson 2005). By 2003–2004, Sausalito's rating on the state's academic performance index was 663, still a long way from 800 or 850, but an improvement from the rating in the low 600s when she arrived.[57]

In an important sense, the district is not, in fact, helped by Marin County institutions and the surrounding political and cultural milieu in its efforts to improve; indeed it is held back. Marin County is correctly seen as an affluent repository of the counterculture and left-liberalism of the 1960s. In the late 1960s the Sausalito superintendent believed that traditional schooling "favored the middle-class child" and "stifled" the socioeconomically "deprived child." So the superintendent sought to build student self-esteem and foster creativity and "non-verbal communication" (Freebairn-Smith 1968).[58]

The district participated in a project on teaching mathematics that was developed in 1963 by William F. Johntz, a Berkeley,

57. The district school board fired this superintendent in August 2005. Neither the board nor the fired superintendent offered an explanation (Bova 2005a, 2005b).

58. One reform of the 1960s that was radical in form, which might well be considered traditionalist in substance and tendency was the use in Sausalito schools of Sir James Pittmans's initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.) (Freebairn-Smith 1968). Such a reform was radical form in that it resembled the invented-spelling movement of the 1990s. But it was traditional in substance because it was based on phonics. On the i.t.a., see Balmuth (1992).

California, high school math teacher. Math was supposed to be learned through student self-discovery. The teachers would teach almost entirely by asking "provocative questions" of the students. Lecturing was "practically eliminated." Marilyn Burns, a nationally famous proponent of the discovery method of teaching mathematics, formerly taught in the Sausalito schools. At report card time, Mrs. Burns would have her students grade the teacher (Freebairn-Smith 1968).

Countercultural and left-liberal attitudes among white Sausalito school administrators and community leaders at first encouraged the Black Power takeover in the school district in the 1960s, which led to a subsequent loss of culturally bourgeois school parents of both races. These attitudes fostered a breakaway Progressive Education school in the 1970s, which later was reabsorbed into the district.[59] The breakaway parents were, in fact, dismayed that the largely educationally traditionalist African American parents wanted an emphasis on educational basics (Kirp and Leff 1979). The district's "Vision Statement" emphasizes fostering students' "positive attitudes" and encouraging students to "accept themselves and others." As the 1997 curriculum audit team said, the Vision Statement "implicitly reinforces the social aspects of school life before the academic commitment" (California Curriculum Management Audit Center 1997, 52). School board policy explicitly required the district superintendent to lead in "developing *creative* curricular programs" but said nothing about leadership on curriculum effectiveness and student achievement (emphasis added, California Curriculum Management Audit Center 1997, 29).

In another guise, these countercultural attitudes are found today in the South Marin County Education Task Force, as well as in the Buck Trust and the Marin Community Foundation. Sau-

59. The current project-based charter school is to some extent a parallel.

salito and neighboring districts collaborate in the Education Task Force. As one of its functions, the task force produces tests used for diagnostic purposes, to guide instruction and to stimulate the creation of new teaching strategies.

The Buck Trust and the Marin Community Foundation are influential charities that pour money into the Sausalito schools. These influential charitable dollars often support Progressive Education. When these dollars arrive, they always bear with them the strictures of political correctness. As a result, according to a top administrator in a neighboring school district, the charities do not have the intestinal fortitude to require results from Sausalito. "They are giving money without requiring performance," because it might be deemed "racist" to hold Sausalito accountable (Anonymous 2005a).

According to the same administrator, the Educational Task Force "pooh-poohs" Sausalito's rigorous phonics-based Open Court reading program and fails to support Sausalito by training its teachers in Open Court. The task force also promotes and administers "superficial" tests that do not reflect Sausalito's curriculum (such as it is) or California standards (Anonymous 2005a).

Sausalito states that these tests are aligned with the California Academic Content Standards. However, after having looked at the publicly released test questions in reading and mathematics, the authors have found that the reading test questions neglect word-attack skills and word recognition.[60] The mathematics test questions are below grade level and poorly written.

To evaluate the task force tests further, the authors sought the views of a third party. An anonymous member of the California statewide testing system's mathematics Assessment Re-

60. On testing word-attack skills and accurate word recognition, see Chall and Popp (1996, chapter 7); Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (1996, chapter 7); Torgesen (1998).

view Panel reviewed the test questions for seventh grade mathematics. He found that the seventh grade math-test questions suffer from below-level expectations, sloppy and ill-posed problems, and incorrect grading and evaluation of the sample answers. Some questions are aimed at fourth grade math abilities, rather than seventh grade ones.[61] Many require assumptions that are not explicit in the problem statement. The suggested exemplary grading is subjective, incompetent, and likely to lead teachers to misapprehend students' actual achievement. Because of these limitations, such a test is likely to misguide classroom instruction and distract from focused attention on achieving the goals outlined in the California Standards (Anonymous 2005c).

How can a district spend so much money and have so little to show for it? Sausalito has or has had

- an ineffective and inconsistent curriculum,
- on-the-job training for teachers unconnected to curriculum,
- student lawlessness and absence of classroom discipline,
- adult theft and corruption,
- unproductive efforts to raise student self-esteem,
- parental alienation from the schools,
- parental indifference (perhaps related to the alienation) toward achievement,
- inadequate and misleading districtwide tests, and
- low expectations for students.

Yet Sausalito has three and a half times the revenue per student of the average California elementary school district. If

61. Grade levels are discussed here in terms of the grade-level expectations in California's Academic Content Standards.

money were all that matters or most of what matters, Sausalito (which had an abundance of money) should have been successful. But because the district did not impose classroom discipline, clean out corruption, raise academic expectations, hire and retain effective teachers, adopt good tests, adopt a research-based curriculum, and train teachers how to make the most of it, all that money didn't matter. The district didn't do these things—things that are challenging but not costly—or has only accomplished bits and pieces of them after decades. If the district had done what was needed, parents who cared would have been pleased with their children's accomplishments. Children would have earned a real improvement in self-esteem. Some parents who didn't care would have had a concrete reason to change their minds or might have been reached through adult education. Clearly, this is a case that raises questions about the extent to which money per se matters. The case of Sausalito shows that solid curriculum, productivity-oriented incentives, and a work-ethic culture are a requisite for schools to be effective and for spending to accomplish what it should.[62]

Comparative Analysis

Looking over these five high-spending, low-performing school districts (Kansas City; Washington, D.C.; Cambridge; Newark; and Sausalito), we find that they mishandled their large revenues in different ways, yet there are also many similarities. All of the districts were chosen for study because they have the essential characteristic called for by the educational establishment and by the proponents of adequate education: high spending per pupil. All of them mishandled the money in ways that were predictable, given what we know about organizational structure

62. On the power of a culture of achievement, see Mayer (1997).

and the politics of school districts. All had interest groups that blocked merit hires, merit pay, and adult accountability. All of the districts tried fashionable remedies prescribed by the education establishment and its affiliated experts.

Infrastructure and Class Size

Kansas City lavished its funds on infrastructure, in the apparent belief that beautiful buildings and fancy technology could substitute for good teaching and a culture of achievement. New Jersey's *Abbott* districts participated in an extensive building program. Sausalito with its beautiful school sites has made the same mistake on a smaller scale.[63] Kansas City and Sausalito also shared in experimenting with class size reduction, a reform that is so ubiquitous now that its curative powers should be manifest, yet they are not.

Neglect of Academic Content and School Effectiveness

We know that the most important components of academic success for students are high-quality teachers, effective teaching practices, a solid curriculum, and a culture of high academic expectations and accountability (Hanushek 2002; Walberg 2002). Yet Kansas City, Newark, and Sausalito neglected recruiting its teachers on merit, in favor of cronyism and racial preferences. Kansas City never formulated a core curriculum despite Judge Clark's several requests. Washington, D.C., and Cambridge had a different curriculum in every school, and Sausalito had a different curriculum in every classroom.

63. Picus et al. (2005) show that in Wyoming better facilities do not boost student achievement. They found "no relationship" between school facilities and student performance. This is significant in light of the 2001 adequacy case in Wyoming in which the court instructed the state to put more money into its construction budget.

Instead of using effective teaching practices and proven lesson plans, several of these districts indulged themselves in Progressive Education fads and fancies. For example, Cambridge created a school where students decided what they would study and turned other classrooms into laboratories for Howard Gardner's theory of different learning styles. Similarly, Sausalito, located in countercultural southern Marin County, has twice turned over a school to Progressive Education and remodeled its math program along Progressive lines. Sausalito has had a student discipline problem that probably is related to the permissiveness of Progressive Education and political correctness (Wenders 2005a). Low expectations for students were exemplified in light homework assignments. Critics described the Sausalito district as putting more energy into its self-esteem program than it did into its academics.

Dodging the Assessment Bullet

Several of these districts abandoned or never sought to foster a culture of setting high academic expectations and measuring outcomes. Cambridge schools have been crippled in part by an extramural culture in which the high academic expectations of a college town were in contradiction with the town's role as a center of opposition to testing—opposition that has been based on the doctrines of Progressive Education. Washington, D.C., and New Jersey evaded for years creating a testing system that could hold schools or students accountable. Some commentators have said that they expect that providing districts with great resources will directly and inexorably lead to accountability for the use of those resources. But the long-time evasion of accountability by Washington, D.C., and New Jersey calls such an expectation into question. Washington, D.C., turned its back on high-achieving Dunbar High School and went on to practice egregious

policies of social promotion of students who were not ready for the next grade.[64] By congratulating itself on the test results from a deliberately watered-down test, New Jersey has made itself into a fool's paradise.

Corruption

Corruption was a prominent feature in four of the districts studied (Kansas City, Newark, Sausalito, and Washington, D.C.) and certainly contributed to district failures. The corruption manifested itself in embezzlement, self-dealing, rake-offs, overcharging, and ghost workers. But some observers might say, corruption is a problem that is peculiar to those particular districts. Yet there is no basis for presupposing that if adequate funding were poured into every school district, there would be a negligible amount of corruption.

According to several measures of honest government, the United States has a shabby record compared with other constitutional democracies. For instance, the 2003 Transparency International ranking on honest government indicates that, of the twenty-five nations in the survey with per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) of at least fifteen thousand dollars the United States is in eighteenth place. Likewise, in a World Bank evaluation of anti-corruption efforts, the United States was in sixteenth place, among twenty-four wealthy countries. Thus, we should not be surprised that corruption was rife in several of the districts examined in our case studies, and no one should assume that corruption will not be endemic if adequacy campaigns are successful and low-performing districts are flush with funds (Osborne 2005).

64. Social promotion is a policy of advancing students with their age group and not holding them back when they are not academically prepared for the next grade.

While there is a need for systemic reform to discourage corruption, we should remember that Cambridge has had severe academic deficiencies with no corruption in sight, and we should also beware of corruption charges as a diversion. In New Jersey, as Wilbur Rich reports, the educational establishment used corruption complaints not only to put a focus on corrupt individuals (which is reasonable) but also to divert "the public's attention away from school performance issues" (which is changing the subject) (Rich 1996, 120).

The Politics of School Districts

The seemingly simple suggestion of spending more money to get more output from public schools turns out to be not so simple. These schools are public agencies with all the efficiency and productivity problems inherent in public agencies.[65] Public agencies are governed by politics, and education agencies are not fundamentally different from other public agencies. School politics is a variant of regular politics.

The political context of public schooling will largely determine whether pouring more money into school districts will be enough to successfully educate low-performing students. The four elements of that context that are most important for the productivity of American school politics are

1. The "one best system" of organization that political scientists say has been captured by its bureaucratic denizens,[66]

65. For classic studies of bureaucracy, see Mises (1944), Tullock (1965), Downs (1967), Niskanan (1994), and Moe (1997). Martin (1962, 99) writes: "Through the two principal devices of isolating the public schools and maximizing professional influence, the educational bureaucracy has achieved notable success in driving the public school structure toward a monolith under oligarchic control. It is to be doubted, indeed, whether the bureaucracy plays so important a role in the governance of any other public undertaking in America."

66. On the "one best system" of the Municipal Reform–type administrative Progressives, see Tyack (1974).

2. The strength of the education interest groups who resist measures promoting effectiveness and accountability,
3. The dominant teaching practices whose adherents ideologically oppose focusing on academic content, and
4. The operational doctrine of school districts that discourages a long-term loyal opposition and that protects officials when they are ineffective or even corrupt.

Before we discuss interest groups, teaching practices, and district operations, it is important to get a sense of that "one best system," the organizational structure within which educational politics takes place.

Organizational Structure: Bureaucratic Capture

Public schools in this country are largely controlled at the local level. They are managed by a district superintendent, the superintendent answers to a locally elected board, and this board is elected by local voters, a small minority of whom usually turn out for school board and school finance elections (Ostrom 1961; Rich 1996; Nappi 1999).[67] A board member's power base rests, then, at the local level. But America's fifteen thousand school districts also exist within a federal system in which mandates and funds (but little day-to-day management) flow downward from the state and the national level. Add to that the fact that school districts receive most of their funding simply for having students in attendance, that their customers (parents) don't pay the full costs of operation, and the owners (citizen-taxpayers) cannot exercise ownership rights, and it is little wonder that economists and political scientists have said that—before the current accountability efforts—district decision makers faced

67. Political scientists have found that the educational establishment often deliberately encourages a low and selective turnout (Wirt and Kirst 1972).

few consequences (positive or negative) whether or not they succeeded in the job of educating their students (Alchian 1977; Chubb and Moe 1990).

Because school districts get their revenue from taxes determined by the political process, their costs tend to rise to meet the funds available. Before current accountability efforts, districts measured their gains by the resources they had been able to attract, rather than by productivity or effectiveness in securing student academic success. While spending had been going up, student performance had been flat or even dropping (Wenders 2005a).

Another feature of political life is that politicians and administrative officials know that the future is uncertain and that their successors may seek to undo what today's officials have done. Therefore, they seek to lock in programs through laws, rules, and bureaucratic procedures. They hope to leave a legacy of programs firmly in place, with a constituency to support it (Chubb and Moe 1990). But certain programs that sometimes are mandated and subsidized, like the antiphonics "whole language" way of teaching reading, can be ineffective and counterproductive (National Reading Pane 2000).

We must also remember that educating students has not been the sole focus of school districts. Like any public bureaucracy, local school districts want not only to hang onto their current budget and set of activities but to increase them as well.[68] Hence, districts are furnishing sports and recreation and dealing with various public health problems, the battle of the sexes, race relations, and adult illiteracy—as well as teaching academic subject matter to children (Homfeld 1959; Kirst 1984). School districts see nonacademic activities as categories for which they can

68. On the "functional imperialism" of public agencies, see Downs (1967, 12, 94, 109, 242, 246); Aranson (1981, 456–457).

seek funding and as alternative areas of accomplishment when academics are weak; but nonacademic endeavors are, in the end, a diversion from the school districts' academic mission.

This, then, is the organizational structure that will be called on to deliver if adequacy funding is put into place. School districts as presently constituted are somewhat ineffectual institutions with important inherent weaknesses. Yet they are the institutions that will use adequacy funds to deliver schooling to the nation's low-performing students.

Interest Groups: Resistance to Accountability

Having the internal dynamics described above, the school district is itself a political arena and also a part of state and national arenas.[69] In the arena of school politics, the political establishment consists of school district officials, principals, school clerical and physical-plant workers, PTAs, and teachers' unions.[70] This establishment, especially the teachers' unions, is one of the best-organized and most influential forces in American politics (Moe 2006). Also in the school-politics arena are those school reformers who stress academic achievement. They include parent organizations, business groups, think tanks, and proreform legislators and governors and are a more diffuse group than the education establishment.

The power of the educational establishment is an example of a common political phenomenon: small groups who can be readily organized and whose interests are concentrated have more leverage than the general public or larger groups with a

69. Iannaccone and Lutz (1967, 161) write: "The politics of education have been characteristically the politics of interest groups, as contrasted to those of party."

70. Iannaccone (1977, 281) contended that Parent-Teacher Associations are not independent but rather are "managed" by the district central office. On bureaucratic influence in PTAs, see Martin (1962, 99).

multiplicity of interests. Economist E. G. West points out that it is an established truth that "the suppliers of education" (his examples are local district officials, administrators, and unionized teachers) have a "disproportionate influence" as compared with that of the consumers of education. The customers, West says, have interests that are diffuse and "spread over many goods and services." The suppliers, who depend for their livelihood on the provision of education, can see the profit in assuming "the costs of pressure group politics" (West 1968, 31, 72).[71]

The most important instrument for encouraging student achievement has in recent years been state-level academic standards and accountability systems based on student test results. The powerful education establishment, of course, has little interest in being looked at or evaluated in this way (Murphy and Cohen 1974; Wildavsky 1979). The critics of standards and accountability come both from the education establishment and from advocates of Progressive Education, some (but not all) of whom are an influential part of the establishment. Some critics, for example, argue that statewide testing should be used only for diagnostic purposes, never for accountability (Association of California School Administrators 1997; Borja 1999; Gehring 2002). Other critics argue that it is wrong, in principle, to hold teachers accountable—claiming that once teachers are credentialed, they should not have to worry about being scrutinized as to their effectiveness (Ohanian 1999).

Of course, if arguments fail, one can always fall back on sheer political strength, which education interest groups have done in opposing any principal-accountability or teacher-accountability measures that have teeth. The states now have student-learning standards, testing of students, and rewards and sanctions for students based on test results. But by and large,

71. For further discussion of this topic, see Peltzman (1993).

they do not have systematic rewards and sanctions for district leaders, principals, or teachers.

Teaching Practices: Counterproductive Ideology

Researchers have good scientific evidence that certain teaching methods are more likely to boost student achievement and keep it at a high level. At the same time, other popular practices, often promoted by Progressive educators on ideological grounds, have little evidentiary basis or lack any such basis whatsoever. Progressive educators, who trace their roots to ideas propounded by John Dewey and others during the Progressive Era, are nonetheless highly influential from the district headquarters to the classroom. They also dominate other establishment institutions: the faculties of the schools of education at American universities, the early childhood groups, and the professional associations of subject matter specialists.[72]

Progressives believe in *discovery learning*. They contend that students truly learn only when they have "discovered" and applied knowledge and skills to solve problems.[73] Hence, Progressives often advocate project-based and "real world" learning, and, if there is to be testing, "authentic" or "performance-based" (project-based) testing. Progressives also believe in the doctrine of *developmental appropriateness*, which holds that each child goes at his or her own natural pace through a set of discrete learning stages that are biologically hard-wired into children.[74] Most Progressives take a child-centered approach to discovery learning, meaning that teachers should help their students, but the students' interests should guide the content and

72. For example, on Progressive Education and the mathematics subject matter group, see Loveless (2001).

73. Compare Tucker and Codding (1998, 78).

74. See Evers (1998, 15–17; Stone (1996); Hirsch (1996, 79–91).

direction of schoolwork.[75] Child-centered Progressives do not believe there is a culturally established body of knowledge that students need to learn (Hofstader 1963; Evers 1998; Ravitch 2000; Zoch 2004).[76]

Yet schooling itself presumes that there is a culturally established body of knowledge that students should learn. That body of knowledge needs to be in the curriculum, or students are unlikely to learn it (Hirsch 1996). Progressives favor a pure discovery approach to student learning, yet there is no evidence proving that reliance on pure discovery boosts students' achievement.[77] Indeed, the research evidence supports the efficacy of teacher-led instruction—whether explicit, expository instruction or guided discovery.[78] When teachers do use discovery methods, teacher-guided discovery (rather than pure discovery) is best. Teachers should focus lessons on clearly specified subject matter and encourage students to think about that subject matter (Mayer 2004).[79]

Progressives favor the whole-language approach for teaching

75. Throughout the history of Progressive Education, the child-centered Progressives have been more numerous than the intellectualist Progressives. The intellectualist minority calls for discovery learning but also believes that there is a culturally established body of knowledge that students need to learn. See Ravitch (2000, 16, 190, 463).

76. Clark University President Stanley Hall, a leading pioneer of child-centered Progressive Education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, said: "Alas for the teacher who does not learn more from his children than he can ever hope to teach them!" (Zoch 2004, 84) Hall also suggested that whatever learning went on should be through "play and games alone" and believed that "very few" children have a "taste or ability" for learning (Zoch 2004, 90, 95). On Hall, see also Ravitch (2000, 69–75).

77. Anderson et al. (1998, 240); Mayer (2004).

78. See Chall (2000); Hirsch (1996). An effective presentation by a teacher (expository teaching or reception-learning) is meaningful and much less time-consuming than discovery learning. See Ausubel (1961, 1964).

79. See, on mathematics: Geary (1994, 74, 125, 269); Anderson et al. (1998, 241, 249–50; Wu (1999); on science: Klahr and Nigam (2004); on written composition: Stotsky (1995); Graham and Harris (2000); Graham (2006).

reading. But researchers have found that systematic, explicit phonics is best for reading instruction (National Reading Panel 2000; Neuman and Dickinson 2001). Progressives want schools to directly foster children's self-esteem. But researchers have found that self-esteem does not encourage striving for academic success. Rather researchers have also found that greater empowerment comes indirectly, from self-esteem acquired through achievement and overcoming challenges (Lerner 1985; Damon 1995; Baumeister et al. 2005).

Progressives like the idea that students have different learning styles. But researchers have found that rather than tuning into the supposedly different learning styles of students, teachers should be tuning lesson plans to the form of presentation that is best suited to the subject matter (Traub 1998; Eberstadt 2001; Willingham 2005). Progressives want to teach generalized, abstract, mental training skills ("higher-order critical-thinking" skills or strategies for discovery) instead of, and detached from, academic content. But cognitive psychologists concur that such skills do not exist in the abstract and thus do not transfer from one subject matter domain to another.[80] Progressives do not like memorization, drills, and practice, but researchers have found that these are effective learning tools (Peladeau et al. 2003; Willingham 2004). Moreover, the Progressive doctrine of developmental appropriateness does not stand up under scrutiny. Psychological research shows that learning develops along a continuum over the years of a student's life, not in discrete stages.[81]

80. Hirsch (1985); Hirsch (1996, 135–43). David Ausubel (1964, 298) writes: "This principle has been confirmed by countless studies and is illustrated by the laughable errors of logic and judgment committed by distinguished scientists and scholars who wander outside their own disciplines."

81. See Brainerd, (1978); Siegler (1998, 5–7, 55–58); Anderson et al. (1998, 235, 251).

Educational research has accumulated a substantial body of evidence pointing us toward improved classroom teaching practices that could help millions of children, especially children from educationally weak households. Yet Progressive Education remains a roadblock that often prevents the adoption of these helpful practices.

Why has Progressive Education—despite its unscientific character—endured and remained politically attractive?[82] The answers are different for different groups.

For many teachers and administrators as individuals or as members of child development or subject matter groups, Progressive doctrines provide a ready excuse for ignoring evidence of students' academic failure and a ready rationale for evading or opposing holding teachers and district officials accountable (Evers 2001). To an extent, many Progressives seek to create a new kind of human being (or new society) through Progressive Education, and because the standards-and-accountability effort has more mundane academic goals, these Progressives are alienated from it (Wildavsky 1970; Zoch 2004; Osborne 2005). Because Progressives believe in the unfolding in natural stages of each person's capacity for learning, they oppose or are uncomfortable with standards and high-stakes testing organized on a grade-by-grade basis. Because child-centered Progressives oppose schooling that is oriented toward a set of content-based standards (rather than being oriented toward interests expressed by children), these Progressives oppose standards, testing, and accountability per se.

For professional development gurus, old Progressive ideas of discovery learning and child-centered classrooms can be endlessly recycled under different names as innovative reforms—

82. For a discussion of why public agency officials develop or adopt ideologies, see Downs (1967, chapter 19).

reforms that are innocuous from the point of view of the education establishment.[83] For education-school professors, Progressive doctrine makes them the secular high priests of a clerisy. Their best acolytes become the star superintendents, state bureaucrats and future professors. Education schools have, as a result, shaped a school system that has given short shrift to academic content.[84] The jargon of Progressivism has become the insider language and ideological glue that holds together much of the educational establishment.

Interestingly enough, the interests of teachers' unions are so clear that they do not need the ideological prop of Progressive doctrine, and the National Education Association pays comparatively little attention to it, while the American Federation of Teachers, at the national level, is hostile to Progressivism and supports evidence-based teaching practices. For federal and state court judges, school board members, and even many superintendents, Progressive doctrine also plays much less of a role. They are more influenced by Progressive doctrine's cousin, the doctrine of Municipal Reform, which offers them better guidance and a more suitable rationale for action.[85]

83. See Hirsch (1996, 2, 49, 132, 217); Finn (1997, 229); Ravitch (2000, 441).

84. Hirsch (1996, 50); Hirsch (2004).

85. Judges find the Municipal Reform doctrine useful because it provides a plausible rationale for delegating implementation of remedies (in cases like desegregation and adequate spending) to local district officials. Thus, a judge can in good conscience issue an order to desegregate or to spend more money, without feeling he or she should have to manage the operations of a school district, as Judge Arthur Garrity tried to do in Boston. See Ciotti (2001, 317); compare Hanushek (1996, 44).

District and School Board Operations: Municipal Reform Doctrine as Protective Shield

Today, education researchers have considerable knowledge of what makes for an effective school as well as an effective classroom. We know, for example, that effective schools need academic leadership from the principal, internalized goals of academic excellence, faculty teamwork, and focused classrooms. Chubb and Moe (1990) contend that the current governance structure of school systems (called by its original proponents the "one best system") discourages effective schools, and, therefore, Chubb and Moe, as well as other reformers, call for radical structural changes.

The governance of the fifteen thousand local school districts across America is almost uniformly the same. It is a product of the Municipal Reform movement during the Progressive Era, from 1890 to the First World War, the era that also gave birth to Progressive Education.[86] Not only is district organization the product of the Municipal Reform movement, but school board elections and board deliberations and policymaking are still strongly influenced by the ideology of that long-ago movement. Laurence Iannoccone, a specialist on the politics of education, has observed that the doctrines of Municipal Reform have become the "political myth" of education, "the ideology underlying fundamental policy assumptions in education" (Iannoccone 1977, 277).

Iannoccone said that Municipal Reform ideology combined "in a single package" a political and an administrative program. Its organizational model was "hierarchically structured to produce highly centralized policy making and control." Program-

86. On the Municipal Reform Movement, see Banfield and Wilson (1963) and Hays (1964). On the relation between Municipal Reform and local school systems, see Callahan (1975), Tyack (1974), and Tyack and Hansot (1982).

matically, the reformers called for "the concentration of power and professionalization of public services," with the provision of services "walled off from grass-root client and political influence." These centralized services were to be managed by professionals, who used the language and, they claimed, the methods of the social and behavioral sciences. These professionals were to be formally "accountable to small lay [boards], . . . elected by the short ballot, preferably in at-large nonpartisan elections." The timing of school board elections was to be distinct from that of other local elections, and boundary lines of school districts were intentionally "not coterminous with [those of] other local governments whenever possible." The reformers deliberately designed the school board so that it would not be a place for public debate of educational issues (Iannocconne 1982, 298, 300–301).[87] In particular, they sought to discourage school board debate and decision making on curriculum (Eliot 1959; Ostrom 1961).

The slogan of the Municipal Reformers when it came to schools was to "take education out of politics." But this is, in truth, impossible so long as there is a public school system. Since the schools are public, they cannot be above or outside politics. School districts are governed by people who are elected, spend money obtained through compulsory taxation, and rely on truancy laws to fill their classrooms with children (Peterson and Williams 1972; Peltzman 1993). School districts cannot and do not avoid politics, although politics in school districts is often, particularly in suburbia, conducted more quietly and less visibly and overtly than is usual in America. Nonpartisanship then and now inhibits the growth of a loyal opposition with an alternative platform for school improvement (Iannaccone and Lutz 1967;

87. See also Ostrom (1961), Martin (1962), Callahan (1975), and Evers and Clopton (2003).

Martin 1962; Iannaccone 1982). Off-year, nonpartisan elections hold down turnout, lessen competition, and protect incumbents (Zeigler et al. 1974).

The reality is that "taking education out of politics" in practice usually meant during the Progressive Era, as Michael W. Kirst puts it, taking school districts "away from decentralized control by certain lay people."[88] Political issues were rhetorically transformed by the Municipal Reformers into nonpolitical ones that were to be handled by professional administrators wielding wide discretionary power (Kirst 2004, 20). This reduced the district's accountability to its clients: the parents and taxpayers (Ostrom, 1961; Iannoccone 1977, 1982). Vincent Ostrom speaks of the isolation of school board members from "public scrutiny and debate" (Ostrom 1961, 34). The Municipal Reform doctrine of the Progressive Era assigned most district decision making to the professional administrators because of their purported expertise. Since the advent of the "one best system," various interest groups (including teachers' unions, early childhood education groups, and subject matter groups) have operated within the system's ideological framework. They have pointed to their own supposed expertise and endeavored to shoehorn themselves into the command posts of the school system, in the hope of sharing power with, or overshadowing, the professional administrators (Iannaccone 1977).

The Municipal Reform doctrine as applied to the school districts has created a rigid system of red tape and bureaucratic overspecificity, policed by top-down controls (called compliance

88. Ellwood P. Cubberley, later the dean of the Stanford School of Education, wrote disparagingly of Progressive Era immigrants: "Illiterate, docile, often lacking in initiative, and almost wholly without Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, liberty, law, order, public decency, and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock, and to corrupt our civic life." Quoted in Ravitch (2000, 96).

accountability). The natural response of people who want to get things done is to work around these procedural rules. Employees adopt the practice: You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours. They look for a helpful friend in high places. But an educational culture that must of necessity permit such rule-bending is not far from a culture that permits theft and other self-serving corruption. Although the Progressive Era proponents of city government reform and related school reform crusaded against corruption, the machine bosses of the twentieth century had no difficulty working within Municipal Reform–type city governments and school boards.[89] Likewise, present-day corrupt school district officials have taken advantage of habitual rule-bending and the protections offered them by deference to professionals, consensus seeking, and taking education out of politics (Segal 2004).

Bureaucratic structures, interest group pressures, Progressive pedagogic ideology, and the absence of a loyal opposition have all proven useful tools in avoiding accountability for poor performance and low productivity. No doubt, it has been easier to avoid accountability than to produce substantial gains in achievement. Here are some of the ways districts have endeavored to avoid accountability:

- Failing to establish clear, measurable objectives—if objectives are undefined or if they are vaporous and cannot be measured, then the school system cannot be held accountable for failing to meet the objectives.
- Elevating values unrelated to measurable academic achieve-

89. On the use of reformed city-governance structures by Mayor Hague (Jersey City) and Boss Pendergast (Kansas City), see Banfield and Wilson (1963, 149). On the use of reformed school boards by Mayor James Curley (Boston) and Mayor Richard J. Daley (Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s), see Tyack (1974, 168); and Peterson (1976).

ment—if nonacademic goals, such as building self-esteem, are valued above academic achievement, then the school system may not be held accountable for low academic achievement.

- Rejecting objective measures as antithetical to "critical thinking" or "higher-order learning"—if standardized testing can be shunned, then there will be no objectively measured results that can be used to hold a school system accountable.
- Failing to align between tests and what is taught—if tests can be shown to be unrelated to the instructional curriculum, then it can be argued that the school system should not be held accountable for test results.
- Adopting student-performance measures based on judgments of the district personnel being held accountable—if achievement is not evaluated by third parties and if in-house measures can be established as valid outcome indicators, then school personnel may well be tempted to evaluate the outcomes as successful.
- Establishing performance criteria that are too low—if low achievement is simply defined as high achievement, then school systems may claim credit for success that isn't real.

School districts may opt for the path of least resistance when faced with accountability pressures. Rather than undertake the difficult task of boosting student achievement, districts may take one or more of the many paths of avoiding accountability.

There have been modifications in the school system and in the relative strength of various participants in the years since the Progressive Era. Increasingly after 1960, the year of the New York City teachers' strike, teachers' unions have become a formidable force in American politics (Peltzman 1993; Moe 2006). Also, today, the schools receive tax money from new funding

streams, and the proportions of funds from state and federal taxes have increased since the mid-1960s (Kirst 1984).[90] The teachers' unions now overshadow the district administration, especially in urban districts. In big cities school board campaigns occasionally get rambunctious. There has been some complexity added by the state and federal governments and their efforts to promote racial integration, by the Sputnik-era push for science and math, and by current accountability efforts. But the operating code of school districts and their boards remains largely that of the Municipal Reform movement: the district administration proposes policy initiatives, and boards offer advice and consent (Eliot 1959; Martin 1962; Zeigler et al. 1974: Lutz 1975; Tyack 1969; Tyack and Hansot 1982; Tyack 1993; California School Boards Association 2005).

School district bureaucracies as presently constituted and in the existing political context might well be poor prospects to successfully use huge amounts of additional resources to educate low-performing students. The existing institution is hemmed in by interest groups that shun accountability. The institution is hobbled by hundred-year-old ideologies that discourage research-based practices and provide excuses for nonperformance and buck-passing.

90. For a discussion of why spending on and regulation of schools has moved increasingly from the local to the state level, see Toma (1981, 1983, 1986) and Peltzman (1993). Toma contends that "the real reason the school system has lost its incentive and ability to produce a quality product is that localities and families have lost control over educational decision-making" (Toma 1980, 203).

Conclusion

Heroic Accomplishment

The politics and organization of school districts are potentially so counterproductive that it is astonishing when, in low-performing districts, some teachers succeed in teaching and some children succeed in learning. We contend that everyone should pay tribute to the heroic efforts of school boards, superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, and students themselves, when these students in low-performing districts triumph over adversity or when such schools and districts turn themselves around. We call these efforts heroic because these teachers and students and others who work with them have succeeded in the midst of poorly designed institutions, perverse incentives, political obfuscation, and the dominance of unscientific teaching practices.[91]

Social scientists have often commented on the perverse incentives, which include pay unrelated to productivity. Nobel Laureate economist James M. Buchanan once wrote that since teachers' pay is "not related in any way to the final output that they produce," which, he says, "should be measurable in student achievement," teachers have "no personal incentive" to teach effectively. "They are not so much bad teachers, as they are teachers who have no reason to be good" (Buchanan 1977, 16).

91. James Gordon Ward (1990, 244–245) uses a circulation-of-elites analysis to explain the persistence of these perverse incentives following the school finance reform movement of the 1960s and 1970s: "The Ford Foundation, the university scholars, the national organizations, and the lawyers involved were all representatives of the economic and political elite of the society, and as well intentioned as they may have been, they ended up enhancing their own power, not that of their stated clientele [the least educationally favored]. . . . [The school finance reform movement] did not attempt to alter . . . institutional structures to improve the school performance of those who were disadvantaged and not performing up to desired standards."

We have not concentrated our efforts in this chapter in discussing how good teachers and other schoolhouse heroes have succeeded in the face of such odds. Clearly, this success stems from solid curriculum, effective teaching practices, and creating a culture that does the extra functional work that normal incentives and healthy institutions ought to be doing to foster academic success (Rutter et al. 1979; Coleman and Hoffer 1982; Lee 1997; Sowell 2005; Walberg 2002 and this volume, chapter 3). These heroes with their makeshift cultural life vests have to swim against the tide in school politics, administration, or the classroom. Others have written about such success, though more work needs to be done on this topic (Education Trust 1999; Carter 2000; Izumi et al. 2002; Walberg, this volume, chapter 3).

The Role of the Courts

Only some of the five high-spending districts that we have looked at came by their revenues by way of the courts. Two (the *Abbott* districts and Cambridge) received funds from adequacy suits. One (Kansas City) got its money from a desegregation suit. (Sausalito and Washington, D.C., receive their high revenues because of political rather than judicial decisions.) Looking at all the problems of these districts, one might perhaps think that the problems could have been solved by more specific judicial decrees. But making demands from the bench did not work in these districts. The court in Kansas City demanded a curriculum, and the court in New Jersey demanded a testing and accountability system. The judges did not get what they asked for. The courts, in the specificity of their decrees, almost transformed themselves into school boards in these cases. The problems (corruption, poor incentives, weak teaching staff, no culture of achievement) are deep seated. There is no reason to believe that judges would be successful if in adequacy suits they took the next

step and transformed themselves into superintendents running school districts on a day-to-day basis.

Missed Opportunity

The five districts that we have scrutinized in our case studies had a better chance of success, in one important sense, than the districts that may in the future receive large boosts in funds for adequacy, because these five districts had considerable extra money when other districts did not. Therefore, if the five districts chose to, they were in a position to bid away from other districts (and from elsewhere) high-quality teachers, principals, and administrators. The five districts neglected this opportunity, and some are still neglecting it, because they had little incentive to take advantage of the opportunity. But it is an opportunity that low-performing districts will not have if funding for adequacy arrives, because then all districts will be awash in money, and these five weak districts will have missed a unique chance.

Adequate Spending, Incentives, and Wise Use

The opponents of vastly increased spending often focus on wise use of current spending or a better incentive structure to accompany current spending or any increased spending. Those on the other side, the advocates of adequate spending, likewise acknowledge the need for wise use.[92] But usually the adequacy advocates neither locate an incentive for wise use in the current

92. Schrag (2005, 240–241) acknowledges the need for flexibility in assignment of teachers and differential teacher pay, but then retreats by saying that "when powerful interests are threatened," such change will be politically impossible. Thus, Schrag thinks that interest groups will not allow putting effectiveness measures in first, before putting in large amounts of additional money. But he is "certain" that if large amounts of money are added, effectiveness measures will follow. Compare Murnane and Levy (1996).

governance of schools nor propose new incentives for school officials and teachers. Adequacy advocates neglect to scrutinize the likely effects of increased budgets on bureaucratic behavior.[93]

Economist John T. Wenders goes too far when he writes:

> Public school expenditure is . . . driven by the ability of the public education industry to extract revenues from the taxpayers. . . . Expenditures are built from the top down, not the bottom up. Public school expenditures now average about $9,500 per student. If the various public treasures were to give this industry $12,000 per student, it would spend $12,000 per student. . . . And since *there is no connection* between public school spending and student achievement, . . . student achievement [would not] change. (Wenders 2005a, 221; emphasis added)

In fact, Wenders exaggerates when he says "there is no connection." In reality, truly massive additional amounts of money would probably lead to slight improvements. But the increase in funds required is quite steep for only a small improvement in student achievement.[94] In the particular hypothetical case that Wenders proposes, an increase to twelve thousand dollars per pupil would, by itself, be unlikely to cause a noticeable improvement in achievement. With current spending or the increases envisioned in adequacy efforts, there are simply not enough incentives in place to encourage steady and sustained academic improvement in low-performing districts. As Eric Hanushek has said, "how the money is spent is much more important than how much or adding more" (Schrag 2005, 211).

Yet proponents of adequacy are not focused on incentives that will encourage effective teaching and successful learning.

93. Compare Toma (1979, 675).

94. See Picus (1997, 30); Schrag (2005, 210); Hanushek (this volume, chapter 7).

When adequacy proponents speak of "effectiveness and efficiency," they are speaking not of productivity in learning but of the "effectiveness and efficiency" of "school funding delivery mechanisms," that is, administrative formulas for sending money to schools and districts (Perry 2006).

Nor are adequacy proponents concentrating directly on the most important output of schools: student achievement. As Paul Minorini and Stephen Sugarman point out, attaining adequacy, according to its supporters, "does not appear to be ultimately judged" by such achievement. Compliance with adequacy requirements is in the final analysis, "a matter of inputs" (Minorini and Sugarman 1999, 189).

Shortly after the 1970 California court decision in *Serrano v. Priest* on equity in school spending, policy analyst Aaron Wildavsky astutely observed that, when student achievement comes to public attention, politicians and officials respond by changing the subject: "Just define the input as the output, and by definition objectives are met" (Wildavsky 1979, 316). He was speaking in the context of the 1970s, but his observations are just as true today.

Wildavsky thought that as public attention came to focus on student achievement, it was "not purely fortuitous" that politicians wanted to shift that focus and to substitute measures of inputs (like spending) for measures of outputs (like achievement). Wildavsky (1979, 316–317) wittily recognized that such a shift was the consummate fulfillment of an old bureaucratic folk saying: "Now that we have lost sight of our objectives, we must redouble our efforts."

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