

Neither Rest Nor Tranquility

Education and the American Dream in the 21st Century

by Sir Michael Barber

I would like to offer three distinct perspectives on public education in America. First, as an outsider, from the United Kingdom, with some knowledge of education systems worldwide, I want to comment on how the school system in the United States looks against international benchmarks. Think of this as speaking from the head.

Second, as a battle-hardened veteran of the [Tony] Blair government's controversial school reforms, I want to draw some lessons from that broadly successful but also messy, error-strewn experience, which took the United Kingdom from below average to above average — but not yet world-class. These are thoughts, as the great Theodore Roosevelt put it, “from the man in the arena whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood” rather than from one of those critics who stand on the sidelines, “cold timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.” Think of this as speaking from the gut.

Third, as a committed friend of this country who majored in American history at Oxford and who has been fascinated by trying to unravel its

mysteries ever since, I want to comment on the struggle, over more than two centuries, to close the gap between the “American Dream” and the American reality. One of the virtues of a good friend should surely be that he or she can say what otherwise might go unsaid. Think of this as speaking from the heart.

School reform in this country is at a critical juncture. In the next year or so it will be necessary to choose between two broad options: on the one hand, a retreat to the comfortable, introverted, input-focused, evidence-light approach that characterized education reform in the last three decades of the 20th century, during which time Americans tried and failed to live up to the towering ambitions of the Civil Rights

It will be necessary to choose between a retreat to the comfortable, introverted, input-focused, evidence-light approach and an advance to the demanding, outward-looking, results-focused, evidence-informed approach.

movement; on the other, an advance to the demanding, outward-looking, results-focused, evidence-informed approach toward which some progress has recently been made.

That choice will have to be made in governors' mansions, state capitols, city halls, and school boards across the country. However, symbolically and substantively, the upcoming reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) — the most important piece of education legislation for many years and the most equitable legislation of the new century so far — will be the moment of truth.

The decisive factors in the making of this choice will be the accumulating evidence of what works (and what doesn't) and the courage of those who lead public education and who shape opinion within the system and among businesses and communities. I salute the achievements of these courageous leaders — but they are only a beginning. In the words of the great poet, two roads are diverging in a wood and the choice this country makes will make all the difference.

As education leaders prepare to face that fateful choice, I want to do three things — glance back at the past, assess the present, and sketch the future of America's public schools.

The Past

In 1955, the year General Motors achieved a U.S. market share of 50 percent and two years before the launch of Sputnik undermined America's post-war confidence, the American high school reached its zenith — at least for white kids. A year earlier the U.S. Supreme Court had momentarily decided that the education those white kids received should ultimately be available to all. The Court's decision set the terms of debate for the ensuing decades.

Up to that time — and indeed beyond — the U.S. had a huge comparative advantage over all other countries in the provision of universal, general education as Claudia Goldin and Larry Katz have recently demonstrated, writing, "During the first three quarters of the [20th] century educational attainment rose rapidly."

This was largely due to the existence of universally available high school education and the growing availability of college. Because good schooling brings long-run benefits, America's educational leadership over the rest of the world brought substantial relative gains in economic growth right through to the end of the 20th century. Even now the United States leads the world in the college graduate share of those aged 55 to 64 years.

However, in the last quarter of the 20th century, educational attainment, high school and beyond, stagnated. Countries that, educationally speaking, had been trailing in America's wake for most of the 20th century began to catch up. As Goldin and Katz explain:

"The slowdown in the educational attainment of young Americans at the end of the twentieth century is especially striking when compared with the acceleration of schooling among many nations in Europe and parts of Asia, where educational change has been exceedingly rapid."

This relative slide in the educational performance of the United States has had, and will continue to have, economic consequences. Since "A greater level of education results in higher labour productivity [and] ... tends to foster a higher rate of aggregate growth," relative weakness in education puts at risk long-term growth rates. The recent work of Eric Hanushek and others reinforces the case by demonstrating the strong, positive correlation between the academic performance of countries in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and their rates of economic growth. Having looked at the international comparisons in science and math over the past 40 years, they conclude: "Higher levels of cognitive skill appear to play a major role in explaining differences in economic growth." They show that the United States has fallen relatively in these international comparisons and is now average — at best.

Some suggest, given strong economic growth in the U.S. over the last two decades, that this doesn't matter or, as Gerald Bracey has argued, "Our schools are better than the critics claim." This is a dangerously complacent line to take — the time lag in the relationship between schooling and economic growth is long.

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Take, for example, the data of Andreas Schleicher of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]-PISA. In the 1960s, the United States led the world in high school qualifications and Korea was 27th. Now Korea leads the world and the U.S. is 13th and falling. In 1995 the U.S. was second in the world on college-level graduation rates; just a decade later it has slipped to 14th, slightly below the OECD average.

This slippage is not the result of a lack of investment, which remains relatively high in the U.S. Rather it reflects — to use hard economic terms — a lack of productivity. The point is reinforced by the fact that in international comparisons of the achievement of younger children, the United States does relatively well, which, given its wealth, is what one would expect. The problem is that, as they get older, American children make less progress each year than children in the best performing countries. We're not just talking about poor kids in poor neighborhoods; we're talking about most kids in most neighborhoods.

Moreover, there is no comfort in the belief that future economic success depends not so much on the overall levels of cognitive skill in the U.S. population but rather on ensuring that at least a few brilliant rocket scientists come through. Hanushek et al. show convincingly that in the 21st century, having “a substantial cadre of high performers” and “near universal basic skills” are both essential.

Summarizing then, long-term, the future success of the American economy will depend on significantly improving the U.S. K–16 systems with all the urgency that can be mustered. Indeed, because of the inevitable time lag, even with the most rapid imaginable education

reform, it will be some years before the impact is felt on economic growth. No wonder business leaders often play a leading role in driving school reform in this country; they see the hard edge of these issues. It is one thing in the global economy to offshore unskilled jobs because labor is cheaper elsewhere. It is quite another to offshore highly skilled jobs simply because the qualified workforce can't be found — but, far too often, this has become the reality.

Equally importantly, though, school reform in this country has never been just a question of economics. From the beginning of the Republic, education was seen as fundamental to building democracy and extending freedom. Jefferson was giving expression to a universal belief when he said, “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.”

This idealism was one of the reasons why the U.S. made much earlier and more rapid progress toward universal public education than many countries in Europe. New York, for example, established universal public education in 1812, not matched even remotely in England until 1870. (In fact, in 1812 the British were more preoccupied with shelling the White House.) The roots of the comparative advantage Goldin and Katz identified in the 20th century lie deep in the previous century.

From the 1950s onwards, the realization of this ideal, an ideal which underpinned the American Dream, became central to the burgeoning Civil Rights movement, at first in the Deep South, where grotesque educational inequality was placed firmly on the agenda by the *1954 Brown versus the Board of Education* decision,

and, later, in the northern cities, as the hopes of the diaspora all too often turned to despair.

There were, of course, many strands to the Civil Rights movement, all wonderfully woven together in Taylor Branch's monumental trilogy, *America in the King Years*. Two things in his account are both striking and relevant today. One is that the movement in the 1960s, while symbolized by eloquent speeches and new legislation, was, in practice, the accumulation of numberless acts of often unrewarded, unnoticed heroism, which, like ripples on an ocean, combined to become an irresistible tide. You see equivalent inspiring acts of educational heroism in schools and communities across this country now. They, too, need to become an ocean tide.

The second is that the leaders of the Civil Rights movement believed firmly that once equal access to school had been achieved, equal success would follow. Listen to Martin Luther King speaking to African American students in Cleveland in 1964: "Doors of opportunity are opening now that were not opened to your mothers and fathers. The great challenge facing you is to be ready to enter those doors." If students are ready, he implies, access will be enough.

Listen to President Johnson promising "every child a place to sit and a teacher to learn from" — he makes the same assumption that access would be enough. While some Civil Rights leaders expected it to take decades to make up the ground — Bob Moses estimated it would take "fifty years to work this through" — all expected that the ground would be made up in time. In relation to education, those expectations have not been realized.

Dig deeper than the headlines and the evidence is compelling. Not only does the U.S. perform somewhat below OECD averages in the recent PISA, it also suffers from a very high socio-economic impact on student performance. In other words, rather than overcoming the social differences children bring with them when they start school, the U.S. system — like ours in the United Kingdom — tends to reinforce them. As Goldin and Katz have argued, "The slowdown in the growth of educational attainment ... is the single most important

factor increasing wage differentials since 1980 and is a major contributor to increased family inequality."

Those who led the Civil Rights movement, whether in Congress, churches, or communities, must surely be devastated by the actual outcomes 40 or 50 years later. We know now that access to school is not enough. It is success in school that matters. We know that, at the heart of education reform, at the heart of success not just access, is the quality of what happens in classrooms. This includes the skills and knowledge, the expectations and ambitions, the consistency and dedication that teachers bring to the task of enabling students, whatever their background, to achieve the standards necessary for life, work, and citizenship in the 21st century.

Though no one believes it would be enough on its own, achieving the ambitions for 2014 set by NCLB would be a great start. This far-from-easy task has become, I would venture to suggest, the emerging frontier in the drive to realize civil rights in this country.

History suggests, therefore, that there is a great challenge facing America. Both future economic success and the wider aspirations at the heart of the very idea of America depend on vastly improving the outcomes of public education. The great threat to the country's future is that for a range of reasons it might fail to rise to this challenge. Then, for many, the American Dream will never be more than a dream. The great opportunity is that a combination of business and civil rights leaders, along with the cross-party consensus that passed NCLB, could become unstoppable. Right now, the issue hangs in the balance.

The Present

Allow me to assess the negative side of the ledger — my fears. One worry I have is the sheer difficulty of getting things done in this country compared to many other countries, including my own. Successful large-scale change is never easy, but in the Tony Blair era [Blair was Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1997–2007], when the government had a large majority in Parliament and significant popular support, rapid progress was possible — as, of course, were rapid blunders.

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Partly in conscious reaction to that very British constitution, the United States' Founding Fathers separated powers among three branches and two levels; a similar dispersion of power is usually found at the state level. Add to that a culture historically suspicious of the very concept of government — as if George III is lurking behind every filing cabinet — and the challenge becomes much greater than in most European or Asian countries.

Then recognize the power and organization of those who defend the status quo, face up to the legacy of failed attempts to bring about bold reform, and the result is a widespread sense of defeat before change has even begun. Across the country people sigh, along with the Russian Prime Minister in the 1990s who said, on leaving office, “We tried to do better but everything turned out as usual.”

Moreover, these organizational and cultural barriers within the education system are compounded by the worrying lack of anxiety among the American people about public education. It seems that the public is resigned to the state of its public schools rather than satisfied or delighted with them.

Education Next's Fall 2008 issue found that if parents could issue letter grades to the system, as schools do to students, just 20 percent would give an A or B. People are significantly more satisfied with their police forces and post offices. Even so, there is little recognition that unless public education significantly improves in the near future, there is a disaster in the making. Education systems don't fail with the suddenness of a natural disaster but the consequences can be just as devastating. In a moment of despair, James Baldwin

once observed that civilizations are destroyed not by wickedness but by spinelessness.

How many Americans see education as the top priority in facing up to the country's economic challenges? If public education really is the frontier of the Civil Rights movement, where are the modern equivalents of the Freedom Rides and the Freedom Summer? Where is the clamor? How is it that a leading elected official could say to me recently that if one youth was beaten by the police there were mass protests, but if thousands of youths were failed by the schools no one lifted a finger?

John F. Kennedy first made his name in 1940 by publishing an essay about the appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s and called it *Why England Slept*. I hope in 10 years' time no one looking back on this country's attempt to grapple with education reform will feel the need to write *Why America Slept*.

Fortunately, these anxieties are balanced by very real grounds for hope. Wherever I go in America, I sense growing recognition among the country's leaders at the local, state, and national level that public education needs fixing. Furthermore, many of these leaders are ready to look abroad as well as at home for solutions. Moreover, not the least consequence of NCLB is much greater clarity in the data about the extent of the problem. The diagnosis is becoming clearer and, while this doesn't automatically lead to the cure, it is a major step forward.

In addition — again assisted by the data — we are increasingly well-informed about, to use Tony Blair's favorite phrase, what works. We have chains of schools such as KIPP, Aspire, and Green Dot that demonstrably

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succeed where many in the past have failed. We have whole systems such as Boston, Chicago, and New York City that are driving bold reform and delivering results. We have organizations such as Teach for America, the New Teacher Project, and New Leaders for New Schools showing how apparently insurmountable human capital challenges can in fact be surmounted.

We have not-for-profit organizations such as Education Trust and Achieve with deep expertise in crucial areas. We have foundations — Gates, Broad, and Dell, for example — willing to take risks and invest substantially in bold alternatives to the inadequacies of the present. At the state and local level, organizations and foundations are acting with a similar sense of purpose.

Never before has there been so much insight into how to bring about successful change, nor such substantial capacity to deliver it. The question now is whether political and educational leaders can seize that insight and capacity and bring irreversible progress.

The very international comparisons that make such depressing reading for the U.S. (and challenge the U.K., too), also indicate a way forward. They demonstrate what can be done — with evident progress in less than a decade — with a combination of the right strategy and courageous, sustained leadership. Singapore's story over 40 years is truly inspirational. So, in an entirely different culture, is Finland's over 30 years. Poland made remarkable progress in the last decade. The reforms in Alberta and Ontario are working, too. It can be done.

Which leads to my final ground for hope — the No Child Left Behind Act itself. This was legislation that reached across political divides and set ambitious

goals. It put no ceiling on educational performance but for the first time it fixed in legislation a high floor. It has put the achievement gap on the agenda from sea to shining sea. To set a date for delivery as soon as 2014 was aspirational certainly; some critics say it is unrealistic and the due date should be postponed, perhaps indefinitely.

Others say, provide the preschool and the capacity first and we'll come to the accountability later. Even if the American people would accept a "pay first and ask questions later" approach, this argument fails to recognize the degree of urgency. Moreover, the fact that there are schools right now achieving those goals surely suggests significant delay would be a mistake. In any case, from the perspective of the Freedom Summer of 1964, far from looking too soon, 2014 looks a half century too late. As the then Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson said, rejecting pleas for patience, on the 100th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address, "It is empty to plead that the solution to the dilemmas of the present rests on the hands of a clock. The solution is in our hands."

Across the country there are promising, albeit early, signs that — prompted by NCLB — progress is being made. Performance is improving — not enough but at least heading in the right direction. Achievement gaps are narrowing — not yet transformatively, but increments are better than nothing.

So for me NCLB is a source of hope. The question is not "Should it be reversed or abandoned?" but "How can it be refined and followed through?"

The Future

For all its good qualities, NCLB does need refinement. It is rare for any law to pass any legislature in the world without blemish and rarer still not to find ways of improving it once implementation begins. A number of refinements in particular stand out from an international perspective.

Ensuring the Quality of Assessments

The power of NCLB depends crucially on the quality of the assessments being used. Where poor tests are used, the information they provide will be misleading with potentially dire consequences for the students themselves when they leave school and enter the real world. One option for solving this problem was advocated recently by the *New York Times*, and would involve asking the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to create a rigorous test to be given free to states — with those that choose not to use it being publicly identified and therefore asked to explain themselves. Whether this is the best solution, I'm not sure, but the direction is certainly right.

Integrating Growth Models

The introduction of growth models has brought welcome refinement to the accountability requirements and it makes sense to build on this development. Growth models, which allow for a reporting on the achievement of children from year to year, are helpful as a measure of progress and explanation of the scale of the challenge. But they are dangerous when they become a justification for poor performance or lower expectations. Our experience in England suggests growth or value-added models should be combined with a continuing focus on the absolute outcomes, which are all that matter to students when they leave school. They need to be part of a refined, modern, student-based data system that puts the evidence at the fingertips of every professional at every level.

Developing the Capacity to Drive School Improvement

Districts and states need to develop the capacity to act decisively in response to the data. They need to be able to recognize and reward those who succeed, especially those who succeed in challenging circumstances; they also need to intervene effectively where progress is not what it needs to be. In England, not without difficulty and controversy, we did develop this latter capacity. Under pressure from the central government, our equivalent of school districts did learn how to intervene effectively in failing schools. They did not apply pre-packaged interventions in mechanical sequence; instead they diagnosed the problem in each school and tailored the solution accordingly, answering the only question that matters in these circumstances: “What do we need to do to get these kids a good education as fast as possible?”

Sometimes it meant closure of the school and dispersal of the students to other schools; sometimes it required the introduction of new providers, and sometimes the replacement of a principal. Our “districts” varied in their technical capacity to do this; they also varied in the degree of political will they brought to it. It is always tempting in these difficult circumstances to give the benefit of the doubt — but doing so, in my experience, is almost always a mistake. After all, it raises the question, “How come you were so doubtful?” Meanwhile, at the central government level, we intervened in districts that lacked the capacity to drive school improvement. We did so successfully in about 12 out of 150 districts. By doing so, we set a higher bar for acceptable performance.

Ensuring Policy Is Implemented Consistently and Effectively

Successful education reform is as much about means as it is about ends. Policy design is difficult to be sure; but it is relatively easy compared to policy implementation, which is consistent and effective so that the benefits are felt in every classroom. Policy failure is as often a failure of implementation as it is of concept. Systems need to develop both the technical capacity and the necessary mindset to deliver results. This is what, in the Blair

administration, we self-mockingly called “deliverology.” And when we applied it systematically, it worked. An American equivalent is needed across the country to ensure the ambitions of NCLB are realized rather than eroded. As one of our more hapless kings — Charles I — once observed (shortly before he was beheaded), “There is more to the doing than bidding it be done.”

Ensuring Highly Effective Teachers and Principals

There is much more to do to ensure there is a highly effective (more important than highly qualified) teacher in every classroom and a highly effective principal in every school. It is especially important to ensure that the schools facing the toughest challenges have access as soon as possible to the most talented teachers and leaders. Doing so requires root-and-branch reform of inherited, traditional, bureaucratic systems of recruiting and training teachers and leaders, of paying and rewarding them, and of shaping their incentives, both short-term and long-term, including pension arrangements. There needs to be a constant focus on developing talent and building capacity among teachers. Throughout the United States, I see fine examples of what is required — Teach for America, the National Institute for School Leadership, KIPP’s leadership development programs, and New York City’s Leadership Academy — but at the moment these remain exceptions to the rule, not the rule itself.

In relation to human capital there is a more profound, underlying question. As McKinsey’s report, *How the World’s Best Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*, makes clear, the world’s best education systems are recruiting teachers who have both the right personal qualities and come from the top third of the college graduate distribution. In the United States, most teachers are from the bottom third. Without improving their underlying capacity to attract talented people, education systems will struggle to compete in the future.

In England, to address the massive teacher shortage we faced a decade or more ago, we completely overhauled our teacher training — making it more classroom-based, more accessible to people in mid-career who wanted to switch into teaching, better

aligned with the school reform agenda, and much better quality assured. We offered students incentives to go into teacher education programs and varied those incentives according to the degree of shortage in particular subjects. Inspired by David Puttnam, the film producer, we introduced the National Teacher Awards, covered annually on prime-time television.

Once the product had improved, we promoted it vigorously through advertising with the slogan, *Those Who Can, Teach*. The result has been several years of sustained improvement in the numbers and quality of recruits into teaching, assisted by our own version of TFA, called Teach First. We increased teachers’ pay, too, but evidence from around the world shows that increasing pay on its own brings poor returns.

For the United States, the question of where in the long run it will find sufficient teachers of real quality, especially in science and mathematics, remains unanswered. I came across a medium-sized state with great universities — I won’t name it — that produced just one new physics teacher last year. Just one. Increasing the supply of talent into teaching will require, in addition to major changes in policy, a change in the way teachers are perceived. Teach for America and similar programs are beginning to bring that about — but only beginning.

Changing a culture also requires leadership from those in government, business, and the not-for-profit sectors. The chances of success would be greatly enhanced if teacher leaders, too, became advocates of reform. In the early 1990s when I worked for a teacher union in England, I suggested turning the traditional case for investment in teachers on its head. Instead of continuing to argue that if the government increased our pay we might consider improving the system, I suggested we should embrace accountability, improve the system, and then tell the public, “Look, now you can see a system worth investing in.”

Accepting this case at the time required too great a leap of faith. However, history is instructive. In spite of teacher opposition, accountability was imposed, schools did improve and, as a result, the biggest ever increases in investment in education, including in teachers’ pay and professional development, did follow. Prime Minister

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Blair called it “Investment for Reform.” While teachers did not always enjoy the journey, they arrived at a much better, if more challenging, destination. Given the wide range of opportunities available, talented people won't flock into a profession with lockstep conditions and a beleaguered image. Nor will skeptical citizens continue to invest precious tax dollars in a system that doesn't work. Citizens the world over, like good businesses, prefer to invest in success.

Improving the Distribution of Public School Funding

International benchmarks suggest that America's overall expenditure on schools is above the average but, compared to other countries, two issues of distribution stand out. The first is that, even after funding equity suits, often more money per student is spent in wealthier areas than poorer ones. It is easy to see how this came about, but, to an outside observer in the early 21st century, this disparity makes no sense. If all young people are to reach high standards, as NCLB envisages, then the system has to provide greater support to those with furthest to go.

A child age four of “professional” parents will have heard 45 million words; a child age four of “welfare” parents just 13 million words. Overcoming such a massive language deficit is possible — but not if the school system merely reinforces the advantages of the already advantaged. The inescapable practical implication is that, over time, states will have to play a larger role in raising and distributing funds for public education.

U.S. funding distribution is also skewed in another way. As OECD-PISA reports have shown, a much lower

proportion of it actually reaches the classroom than in the best performing systems; much more of it is tied up in administration. Of course, good administration matters, but every dollar spent on unnecessary administration is a dollar that could have helped that welfare child reach for the stars.

In England we required by law our “districts” to devolve the vast bulk of the funding for schools to the schools themselves. Each school now has a three-year delegated budget, based on a published formula. This direction was set by the [Margaret] Thatcher government and continued by all its successors. In effect, the burden of proof was reversed — a pound (or dollar) should be spent at the level of the school unless there is a convincing case for spending it elsewhere. Any government in England that sought to return to the old opaque system would have a riot on its hands.

Along with the money, schools need to be responsible for how it is spent. The PISA evidence shows that increased management autonomy at the school level is associated with better results, but this lesson remains to be learned in many parts of this country. Recently in a northern U.S. city, I came across a good school principal setting out to turn around a failing school. She had all the right ideas but had no control over which teachers were employed at her school. She even needed permission from a teacher to visit a classroom. What chance did she have? The contrast with the nearby charter school, in similar social circumstances, was dramatic. Accountability and autonomy need to go together. The question for the U.S. is not just how many charter schools it wants but how soon all schools can have charter-like autonomy.

For those committed to a vibrant, successful America, there can surely be, in Martin Luther King's phrase of old, "neither rest, nor tranquility."

Implementing National Standards

The PISA evidence indicates strongly that there are benefits in holding schools accountable through standards-based external assessments. In the global economy the question of national standards inescapably arises. The emerging bipartisan alliance in favor of common or national — as distinct from federal — standards suggests growing recognition that the U.S. needs them to be fewer, clearer, and higher. Moreover, *Education Next's* recent poll showed almost 70 percent support in the population for national standards — and over half of all public school teachers agreed.

Across the world, standards in mathematics, science, and English will inevitably be set by global benchmarks in a globalized economy. Quite simply, to succeed, countries will need world-class standards; algebra and geometry don't change at the Rio Grande or the 49th Parallel.

From this perspective the question of national standards is straightforward; they will arrive anyway eventually. The only questions are whether they do so by accident or design; haphazardly or systematically; sooner or later. As they used to say in the Civil Rights decade, "If not now, when?"

Conclusion

The choice facing the United States is a stark one. Will it rise to the challenge of educational transformation or not? This choice, as I have argued, will shape America's capacity to succeed over the decades ahead in the profoundly challenging global economy. It will

shape, too, whether the American Dream in a stunningly diverse America, is genuinely open to every citizen. This is why progressive business leaders and civil rights leaders stand together. They know that the aspirations unlocked in the dawn of the Civil Rights movement have only partially been fulfilled.

The public school system has improved in many ways since that time, but surely no American can be satisfied by the outcomes. There is no ceiling on what individual Americans can achieve but, though enshrined in legislation, the high floor, on which economic success and social justice depend, has yet to be built. For those committed to a vibrant, successful America where the American Dream and the American reality more closely coincide, there can surely be, in Martin Luther King's phrase of old, "neither rest, nor tranquility." It will be a long, hard road.

Counting on America's success in this endeavor are not just children and families across this great country, not just the future of the American economy, not just the idea of the American Dream, but all of us around the world. In the 20th century a strong, generous, outward-looking America was a decisive factor in enabling humanity to rise and meet the challenges it faced. As Goldin and Katz have demonstrated, public education was central to making that possible. How much more important for everyone then is U.S. education in the 21st century — when the world is so much more complicated and the clock is ticking?

At the bottom of the staircase in No. 10 Downing Street, just outside the Prime Minister's office, there is an exceptional photograph of Winston Churchill. Facing the camera, he glowers with such defiance that, even at

About the Author



Sir Michael Barber leads McKinsey and Company's Global Education Practice. As expert partner, he works on major transformations of public services, especially education, in the United States, United Kingdom, and other countries.

Prior to joining McKinsey in 2005, Barber served as Chief Adviser on Delivery to the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. Barber oversaw the implementation of the Prime Minister's priority programs in health, education, transport, policing, the criminal justice system, and asylum/immigration.

His recent publications include *How the World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out On Top*, *Instruction to Deliver: Fighting to Transform Britain's Public Services*, and *The Virtue of Accountability*. Barber's advice on public policy, especially education, has been sought by governments in countries worldwide including Australia, the United States, Russia, Estonia, and Hong Kong and by major international organizations including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, The World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Barber can be reached at Michael_Barber@mckinsey.com.

that uncertain hour, wartime defeat must have seemed inconceivable to the onlooker. In fact, I'm told the real cause of his mighty frown is that the photographer had forced him to put down his cigar. Be that as it may, the time has surely come to heed Churchill's famous words: "America always does the right thing but only after it has exhausted all the alternatives."

In education reform those alternatives have indeed been exhausted. It is time for America to do the right thing.

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