



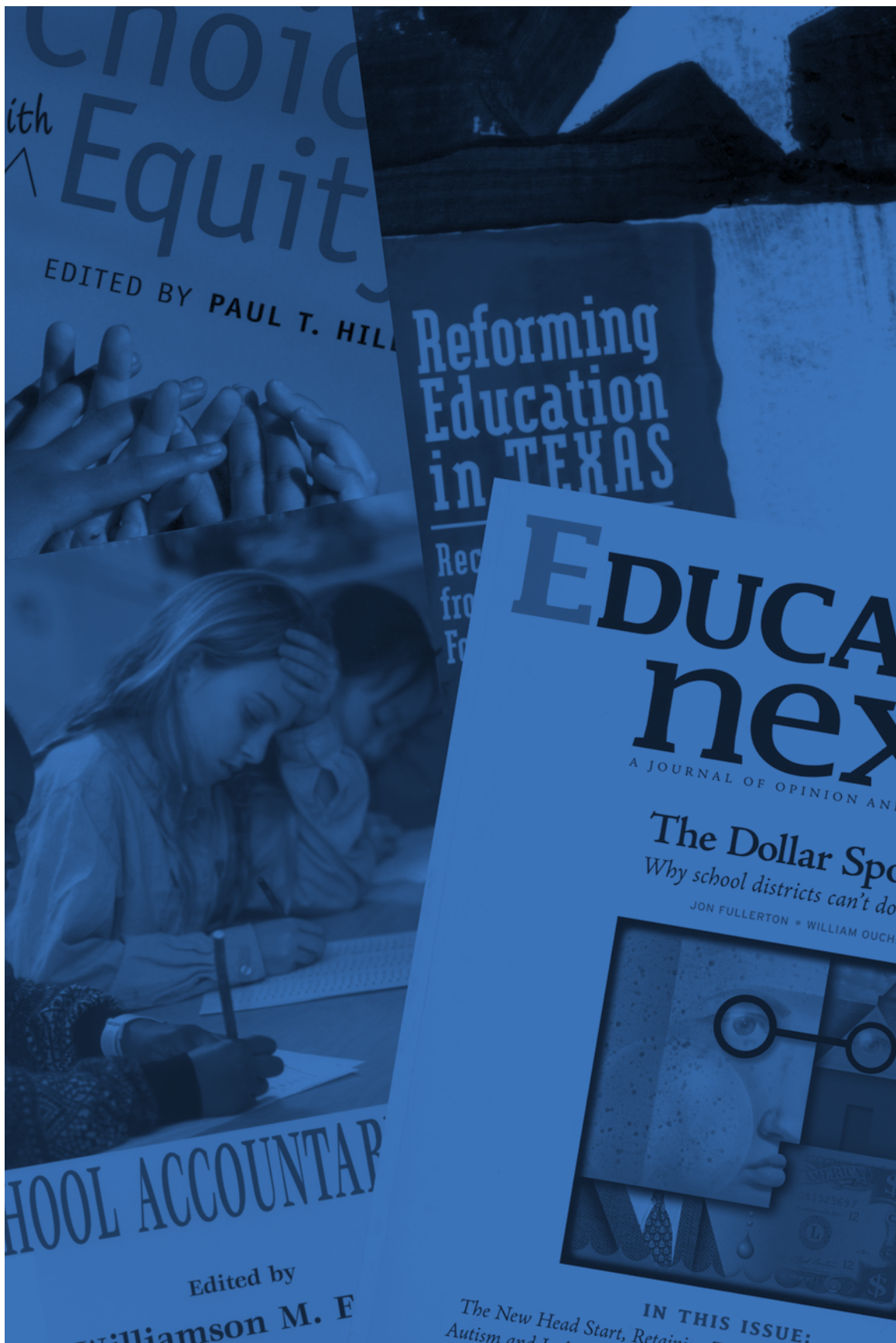
KORET

PERSPECTIVES

**Unpacking
the
Koret
Task**

**Force
Model**

WINTER 2008



FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Koret Foundation is committed to creating innovative approaches to solving entrenched problems. The inefficiencies and failures of the American education system are certainly both complex and long-standing; our partnership with the Hoover Institution at Stanford University has generated a targeted approach to untangling these multifaceted challenges.

Our 1999 partnership with Hoover envisioned a new model for academic engagement with current policy issues. By bringing together leading education scholars from around the country, we created a venue with Hoover in which these experts could converse, argue, and, most of all, learn from each other as they tackled the complex issues facing K–12 education. Over the past eight years, the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education has produced highly acclaimed, award-winning, influential work that has changed the landscape of the K–12 education arena.

In this current issue of *Perspectives*, John Raisian, the Tad and Dianne Taube Director of the Hoover Institution, outlines the origins, activities, and future of the task force model, while Koret Task Force Chair Chester Finn Jr. provides an insider's perspective on the lively and often provocative atmosphere within a task force.

We congratulate the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education on its contributions to the national debate, and we look forward to the fresh perspectives emerging from the Koret-Taube Task Force on National Security, as well as Hoover's other new task forces.

— Tad Taube, President

Task Force Strategy—Academic Style



By John Raisian
Tad and Dianne Taube Director, Hoover Institution
Stanford University

An enterprise steeped in academic tradition, the Hoover Institution seeks to determine how, as an academic organization, it can proactively provide pertinent information as well as advice on policy decisions to our society. By recruiting extraordinary intellectual talent, the Hoover Institution has been able to convene scholars, resident and nonresident, and to induce them to combine their efforts within a task force—or “virtual faculty”—with specific objectives defined in advance by the institution and the task force membership. Such task force strategies represent a novel way to organize the institution’s academically oriented research.

The Task Force Model

In the task force model, Hoover fellows and other scholars split into teams that work together on commonly defined, fully integrated topics and projects, rather than working on complementary research agendas patched together according to individual interest. A scholarly chairperson, who is also a member of the group, and a managing director, who organizes the task force’s human and financial resources, lead the task force.

By using academic and administrative structures already in place at the institution, a task force leverages previously budgeted assets to create a disproportionate amount of focused, significant scholarly work on prevailing policy issues and empowers the team of scholars to participate strategically with the director in defining the group’s goals. A task force thus instills a collective approach that focuses on an institutional agenda while also allowing the greater involvement of others, including task force investors and the institution’s directors.



Courtesy of the Hoover Institution/John LeSchlofs, Stanford Visual Art Services

Top row, left to right: Herbert J. Walberg, Paul T. Hill, John E. Chubb, John Raisian, Terry M. Moe, Williamson M. Evers, Chester E. Finn Jr. Bottom Row, left to right: Paul E. Peterson, E. D. Hirsch Jr., Caroline M. Hoxby, Eric A. Hanushek, Diane Ravitch.

Establishing the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education

With the partnership and sponsorship of the Koret Foundation, the Hoover Institution formed the Task Force on K–12 Education in 1999. Hoover assembled education scholars, both resident and nonresident, to address specific issues prevailing in the education of our children. The Task Force membership, which includes some of the most highly regarded and well-known education scholars in the nation, produces original research, analyzes existing methodology, and offers recommendations to society. In a growing body of work on the most important issues in American education today, the group has achieved amazing accomplishments: scholarly writings, position papers, opinion essays, and advice to national and state governments in the form of testimony and written policy platforms.

The current Koret Task Force on K–12 Education comprises

- **Chester Finn**, chair of the Task Force, senior fellow at Hoover, and president and trustee of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation
- **John Chubb**, distinguished visiting fellow at Hoover, chief education officer, and one of the founders of Edison Schools
- **Eric Hanushek**, Hoover senior fellow and member of the board of directors of the National Board for Education Sciences
- **Paul Hill**, distinguished visiting fellow at Hoover and research professor and director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington
- **Caroline Hoxby**, Hoover senior fellow and professor of economics at Stanford
- **Terry Moe**, Hoover senior fellow and professor of political science at Stanford
- **Paul Peterson**, Hoover senior fellow and professor of government and director of the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University
- **Diane Ravitch**, Hoover senior fellow and research professor at New York University
- **Herbert Walberg**, distinguished visiting fellow at Hoover and research professor emeritus of education and psychology and university scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago

The managing director of the Task Force is Richard Sousa, Hoover's senior associate director. Earlier this year, Don Hirsch left the Task Force to pursue other projects, and Bill Evers took a temporary leave to serve in the Bush Administration as the assistant secretary of education; the Task Force is in the process of considering expansion of its membership in 2008 to include one or two new scholars whose skills and scholarship will complement and broaden the group's expertise.

The Work of the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education

The Koret Task Force on K–12 Education investigates critical issues, gathers and presents evidence on actions and outcomes, and offers



evidence-based recommendations to lawmakers, public officials, educators, and the public at large.

Today's situation is both exciting and troubling. Cities once thought unsalvageable are experimenting with major new reform programs: the parental choice program in Washington, D.C.; the charter school initiative underway in New Orleans; the new reform initiatives supported by Newark's mayor Cory Booker; the uncompromising and often controversial leadership of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg; and Indianapolis mayor Bart Peterson's innovative approach to authorizing charter schools.

To improve education accountability systems, many states are in the process of building and implementing new educational data systems, following the example of leaders like Florida and Texas (two states that have drawn on the expertise of the Task Force in crafting education policy). Some districts are experimenting with pay initiatives for teachers; others are putting new alternative teaching programs into place. Areas with long-troubled schools are fighting for—and winning—mayoral control of school districts. After more than 20 years of stagnant academic achievement across the nation, many new education reforms, some grounded in research and others not, but all driven by strong ideas, are being put into action at the ground level in quick order across the nation—with both positive and negative consequences.

The work of the Task Force in these areas and others—school choice, incentive pay structures, proficiency and learning standards, curriculum reform, teacher certification, education finance, accountability, and academic achievement—has drawn the attention of federal and state officials, policymakers and policy thinkers, and education practitioners. The Task Force has advised congressional leaders and staff, governors and state legislators, and officials at the U.S. Department of Education and state education departments, among others. Task Force members have testified before state legislatures, courts, and education organizations on a variety of education policy issues.

Clearly, access to sound research and analysis to guide policy-making is more important than ever. Through their scholarly work, their widely published commentary and opinion pieces, and their role as the editorial board of and contributors to the quarterly journal *Education Next* (recently named the most influential journal in education by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center), the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education has made a dramatic impact on the public education landscape.

As the Task Force prepares its new projects, members aim not only to influence current debate but also to anticipate those issues that lie just beyond the horizon, including preschool education, the evolving school choice movement, legislative reforms, the continued development of professional teaching, and the potential of technology to reform educational practice and politics.

Assessing and Expanding the Task Force Model

When Hoover created the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education in 1999, everyone involved agreed that this pilot effort should cease to exist after five years unless all concerned—scholars, underwriters, the Koret Foundation, and the Hoover Institution—judged the project to be worthy of continuance. The five-year follow-up assessment in 2004 demonstrated everyone’s enthusiastic support for another five-year term.

Indeed, the assessment was so positive that the Hoover Institution began looking at ways to extend this task force strategy to nine other important policy issues, including a task force on national security and law sponsored by the Koret Foundation and Taube Philanthropies. Through systematic study of a constellation of issues—social, economic, ethical, and political—the Koret-Taube Task Force on National Security and Law will provide practical proposals for striking the optimal balance between individual freedom and the defense of the nation. This task force will draw on the talents of the best scholars in the nation and will consult with experts from other nations who have acquired expertise waging the battle against terrorism under law. The group members’ opinion pieces, policy studies, monographs, and legislative proposals will not only improve the quality of public debate but also present legislators and executive branch officials with recommendations for concrete policy change.

The confirmed membership for the Koret-Taube Task Force on National Security and Law is as follows:

- **Peter Berkowitz**, chairman of the Task Force and Tad and Dianne Taube Senior Fellow of the Hoover Institution
- **Ken Anderson**, professor of international law at American University
- **Philip Bobbitt**, professor of law and director of the Center for National Security at Columbia University and a senior fellow at the Strauss Center for Law and International Security at the University of Texas
- **Jack Goldsmith**, professor of law at Harvard University
- **Stephen Krasner**, senior fellow of the Hoover Institution, professor of international relations at Stanford University,

and senior fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute at Stanford University

- **Jessica Stern**, academic director of the Program on Terrorism and the Law at Harvard Law School and a lecturer on counterterrorism at Harvard University
- **Matthew Waxman**, associate professor of law at Columbia Law School
- **Ruth Wedgwood**, professor of international relations and diplomacy and director of the International Law and Organizational Program at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C.
- **Ben Wittes**, fellow and research director in public law at the Brookings Institution

David Brady, deputy director of the Hoover Institution, serves as the managing director of this task force. Richard Posner, judge in the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit and a senior lecturer at the University of Chicago Law School, serves as a regular advisor.

The other eight task forces will explore important policy topics including ideology and terror; the virtues of a free society; property rights and regulation; procedural reform of government; economic development, freedom, and prosperity; and domestic concerns related to taxes, the size of government, health-care reform, and energy policy. While these institutional goals are ambitious, the overwhelming success of the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education gives us confidence to move forward with programs that will raise awareness and create a lasting impact on our country and its policies.

Learning from the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education



By Chester E. Finn Jr.
Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution at Stanford University
President, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

Eight years ago, Hoover Institution Director John Raisian contacted me (and 10 others) with a tantalizing idea: assemble some of America's most interesting, productive, and heterodox K–12 education experts on a regular basis to explore mutual interests and joint projects, with the expectation that the whole would turn out to be greater than the sum of its parts.

Hoover already had several highly regarded education analysts on its full-time staff, but it was clear to me and to John and to others he consulted that doing this right meant reaching well beyond Palo Alto, creating a sort of virtual faculty of reform-minded education thinkers and policy wonks whose homes and "day jobs" were spread from the Pacific to the Atlantic (and, from time to time, overseas).

The first challenge, of course, was determining whom to invite and how to attract them, especially since (as in the old Groucho Marx joke) those most worth recruiting were those least likely to have time to participate.

Nobody had a formula for this. It was a novel, 21st-century project for a major think tank. There was a bit of hit-or-miss. In retrospect, though, three elements proved indispensable:

- The group would be diverse, but not ridiculously so. The diversity arises because Task Force members hail from multiple disciplines and bring differing emphases to the table, thus assuring lively, probing conversations and refreshing team opportu-

nities while still sharing the same basic education values. (Interesting factoid: only one of us had a primary day job within a school of education.) This wasn't Noah's Ark-style diversity, the sort that produces endless, fruitless debates—picture your typical faculty meeting—among people who cannot agree on first principles, sometimes even on the nature of the problem they are trying to solve, and who may not actually like being in the same room. Rather, it was the creative tension that arises when economists and political scientists engage each other, when curriculum experts and psychologists tackle the same issue from distinct angles, all within a loose framework of shared values and cordial fellowship.



- The group was a manageable size: 11. That's a prime number but not a magic number, and we aren't superstitious. Still, it's just about the right number of individuals—especially when they're all strong-willed, articulate, and outspoken—to get around a table in a format that feels right, gives everyone a chance to participate in full, yet allows for the aforementioned diversity of perspective.
- The cost-benefit ratio was right. Thanks in large measure to the perceptive generosity of the Koret Foundation, Hoover was able

to offer what felt to Task Force members like fair compensation for their time and effort. In addition, the Task Force demands were not excessive: two regular meetings per year, generally two days each, plus in-between work (at our own convenience) on writing assignments and other projects, plus the occasional special meeting or conference call. The astute John Raisian structured the compensation such that the more one did for Hoover and the Task Force, the more one might earn.

More important than money, however, we swiftly discovered how much we enjoyed each other's company. For many Task Force members, these get-togethers have turned into both the most stimulating and the most affable of our professional relationships: lively, provocative exchanges among people who in this environment can let down their hair, joke a little, prod one another, constructively criticize each other's work, agree and disagree but—again—within the framework of shared fundamental values about what needs to change in American primary-secondary education.

We realized early that, no matter where we came from by way of institutional base, discipline, or locale, we shared the conviction that U.S. schools need more accountability, transparency, and choice—the triple lens through which we have examined a host of specific problems and policy issues. Sure, we may attach different emphases to that trinity and define them in slightly different terms. To some of us, for example, “accountability” is mostly about sound academic standards and curricular content, while others push harder on the incentives and interventions tied to the results of tests aligned with those standards. But that's part of what's healthy about the task force structure and fruitful about its diversity, making for imaginative, multifaceted solutions to problems and for subtle, multipart policies rather than simplistic or formulaic responses.

What's more, we've been busy and prolific. Lively and enjoyable as our meetings are, the Koret Task Force is no mere discussion group. By late 2007, it could point to seven books addressing education issues of national significance; serious state-level policy reviews invited by the governors of Texas, Arkansas, and Florida; innumerable articles, scholarly papers, and op-eds as well as multiple media

appearances; and an influential quarterly journal of its own, *Education Next* (captained by Task Force member and Harvard political scientist Paul Peterson), for which the Task Force serves as editorial board.

A proud track record, I believe. Which is not to say the sailing is always perfectly smooth. We argue a lot. Once or twice, there have even been raised voices. We often have disparate views as to what issue needs tackling next. Reaching group consensus on specific policy recommendations has occasionally revealed cracks in our wall. And we've chafed under the inherent limits of the "collection of separately authored essays" format that has been our most common published product. Indeed, that concern has led to a midcourse correction: our next half-dozen or so publications will be shorter monographs, each by one or two Task Force members. We expect these works to prove more accessible, perhaps more coherent, and maybe harder-hitting as well.

There's no dearth of topics in need of attention. It's been said that education reform is lifetime employment. From teacher pay to No Child Left Behind, from reading instruction to school leadership, from curriculum content to workable charter-school and voucher policies, from school-finance puzzles to the opportunities afforded by cutting-edge technology, from preschool to community college—there's plenty on our plate and plenty needing to be done. Task Force members will continue, as before, to do much of this via their "day jobs." But the Koret Task Force has, and will continue to have, both a powerful stimulus effect on its members in their individual work and a "more than the sum of its parts" effect on the national debate about education and how to make it meet the needs and challenges of 21st-century America.

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